

**THE CHANGING FACE OF MORAL VISION IN THE  
AMHARIC NOVEL**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In this study were examined eleven Amharic novels by six authors for their moral vision. A combination of moral and sociological approaches of literary criticism was put to use for the study. The novels were selected on their representational merits as they belong to three historical periods: before 1974, 1974-1991 and after 1991.*

*The specific purpose of the study being to explore and describe the changing face of moral vision in the novels selected, the study also made use of a combination of the structuralist and the new-historical or cultural critical methods. Discussed in six major chapters in three parts, the study reveals that there is a continuum of moral vision between and among the novels, on the one hand, and between the novels and the discourses of the periods that gave rise to the novels, on the other. Haddis's and Dagnachew's novels discussed in chapters 3 and 4 respectively reveal that the state of morality in feudal Ethiopia was characterized by moral provincialism with respect to the feudal lords, the then dominant class.*

*Through the gestures of their characters striving for self-assertion and justice Haddis's novels in particular strongly suggest the need for change of the scenario that subjected the people to plight-full life. But then, the change so envisioned, of necessity, had to come through social upheavals, and these are depicted in Bealu's and Tesfaye's novels. As discussed in chapters 5 and 6, respectively, the novels by these two authors tend to circumscribe morality around the underdog masses, though the depictions are constrained by elements of egoism and vengeance. In the last two major chapters (i.e. 7 and 8), Fiqremarqos Desta's and Sisay Nigusu's novels are examined as showing a moral vision that transcends the notion of moral provincialism altogether. Fiqremarqos's novels uphold the virtue of respect for others, both individuals and social groups, while Sisay's novel challenges us to heed our conscience; for conscience is infallible.*

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

A close perusal of the Amharic novel, ever since its inception, reveals that its authors write with a strong sense of mission to promote social welfare. That is to say, the novelists characteristically feel obliged to envision a society free from social evils such as corruption, injustice, oppression, crime, subjugation and exploitation. So examining the novels for their moral vision merits a special consideration.

Tentatively defined, “moral vision”<sup>1</sup> in a work of art can be construed as the concept of what the artist wants to achieve in terms of morality: the ultimate achievement towards which he moves through his creative endeavor. Such an achievement is organically connected to what Grace (1972: 8) calls “the inner integrity” of the work in which the artist makes an honest effort to follow the truth of experience. Clearly, an achievement of this sort cannot be attained through an obvious moralization, for that would only make the work inartistic. It should, rather, be through moralization which is “fused with a mimesis of life constituting the work of art” (P. 190).

In this study, a modest attempt is made to examine the moral vision of Amharic novels by six authors. The mimesis of life constituting the novels ranging over three socio-political systems, the study focuses on the changing face of moral vision in the texts selected. The dissertation has nine chapters with this one inclusive. An interdisciplinary study involving ethics and aesthetics as it is, there is a felt-need for a separate chapter on review of related literature and this follows from this introductory chapter. In its first section, the present chapter sets out to give a brief account of the fact that morality has always been an integral part of Ethiopian literature. Also in this chapter are included accounts pertaining to the objectives, methods and design of the study, along with short descriptions of the Amharic novels selected for the study.

## **1.1. A Short Survey of Morality in Ethiopian Literature**

Ethiopia is one of the countries in the world that pride themselves on their heritage of antique civilization. Its written literatures, first in Geez and then in Amharic, are among the most prominent aspects of its heritage.

### **1.1.1. Morality in Geez Literature**

According to Sumner (1972), Geez literature which is more of a secular nature ranged over twelve centuries and comprises five works in two categories. The first category falls under translations, and this consists of *The Physiologue*, *The Book of Philosophers*, and *The Life and Maxims of Eskendes*. The other category comprises the originals which include *The Treatise of Zera Yacob* and *The Treatise of Wolda Heywot*.

Sumner is apparently taken by surprise to find out that Ethiopia is in possession of such remarkable wealth of antique literature and philosophy. He talks about his observation of the profile of images (of man) used in the sapiental and philosophical works of Ethiopia and describes his reaction in the following terms:

*I saw a kind of architecture of images building itself before my very eyes, a real pyramid whose basis is nature and whose apex is man himself... Man penetrates the pyramid itself like a line joining the summit to the center of the base (p. 427).*

The works mentioned above are in their chronological order and as such have evolved from wisdom to rationalism. Again in Sumner's words:

*The link with Christianity evolves from the entirely Christian symbolism of **The Physiologue** to the anthropocentrism, considered however in its theological orientation, of **The Book of Philosophers**, to the theistic pantheism of the first series of maxims in **Skendes**, and to the anti-Christ, although deeply mystical, radicalism of Zera Yacob and his disciple. (p. 436).*

Of particular interest to this study is that the literature, among other things, is predominantly anthropocentric and the fact that it emphatically depicts man as a moral being. Sumner gives us a vivid picture of the Semitic man in the contrast he draws between the Semitic world and the Western world. Whereas the Western world has a tendency to consider things as they are in their impersonal objectivity, the Ethiopian Semitic world is clearly anthropocentric. The Semitic Ethiopian is part of the world in which he lives. His starting point is within himself, his own personal experience. Instead of trying to express what is in his mind, he tries to evoke it. The western, on the other hand, takes as his starting point the world of external reality, which is distinct and measurable (pp. 427-428).

Furthermore, ethics has a central position in the literature in which man cannot be conceived apart from his moral bent. Morality is particularly a central element of *The Book of the Philosophers*. The human heart is not simply a physiological organ but an image, a symbol and above all the center of a moral habit. In his study of the literature Sumner has identified various aspects (thought, man, rhythm, society, etc) all of which converge toward moral action as a single significant reality.

With reference to the *Treatises* of Zera Yacob and Wolda Heywot, Sumner asserts that nearly all the principles of ethics have been included ranging from the more abstract principles to their concrete application to life and there again from the relations of man to his Lord, to himself, to his family, his neighbor and State. Both Zera Yacob and Wolde Heywot agree on the prevalence of concern for moral question. And moral prevalence, writes Sumner, with reference to *Physiologue* and to *The Life and Maxims of Eskendes*, characterizes all expressions of Ethiopian thought.

### **1.1.2. Morality in Early Amharic Literature**

As can be perused from existing accounts of the origin and development of Amharic literature, morality continues to be the central concern of the Ethiopian writer. This is attested by many scholars who researched into the early stages of the literature, chief among whom are S.Wright (1963), A. Gerard (1968, 1971), T.L.Kane (1975), and R.K.Molvaer (1980).

In his book, *Ethiopian Literature in Amharic*, Kane offers a survey of the literature ranging over six decades (1908-1968). According to Kane the Ethiopian author has always felt obliged to conform to the tradition of the “pietistic literature designed to save the erring soul by praising the Good and censuring the Bad” (p. 29). Kane characterizes the body of the literature in question as Moralistic-Didactic or “Vehicular”-literature serving as a tool for moral betterment of the reader (ibid; also see p. 27). Having studied the literature of the period, 1923 - 1974, Molvaer also points out that “a preoccupation with moral issues... is prominent in much of Amharic literature.” (p.3).

It is worth noting that the pioneers, namely Afeworq Gebreyesus and Heruy Woldeselasse, who introduced the art of writing the novel into the literature, dedicated their works to the purposes of upholding and teaching morality. According to Gerard, author of *Four African Literatures* (1971), Afeworq was the first ever to have written a novel in Amharic and even in African vernacular languages. Genard considers this remarkable work, namely *Lōbb Wällād Tarik* (1908) later known as *Tobiya*, as illustrating what was best in the native Christian tradition that had existed since the fourth century (p. 284). The all important moralizing intent of this work is described by Gerand in the following terms:

*By writing this uninhibitedly edifying novel, where the virtues of family love, hospitality, and charity are extolled, where righteousness is always rewarded, where the true faith triumphs over heathenism by the meek force of virtuous examples, Afäwäraq transferred the moralizing intent of the traditional folktale to modern creative writing of Ethiopia. (ibid).*

*Tobiya* is a book of remarkable moral vision in its own right on account of which it can also be regarded as epoch-making. In his thorough analysis of the book in his Ph.D. dissertation, *Narrating Ethiopia*, Yonas Amasu (1995) considers it to be an allegorical portrayal of “The Ideal Ethiopian State” where “The Marriage of Ethics and Politics” takes place. (p. 127). The State in question being Ethiopia under the reign of Menelik II, “just emerging from the ravages of internal conflicts and internecine wars between Christians and “infidels,” the problem is believed to be ethical. The way it ends, however, the book envisions a ‘permanent’ reconciliation between the two communities in which the ethical imperative is reinstated as part of the political State “projected or narratively decreed” (p. 129).

Most prominent among the literary pioneers was also Heruy Woldeselasse. According to Kane (1975), Heruy had been deeply influenced by Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, translated into Amharic in 1884 (p.5), as had been his followers such as Endalkachew Mekonnen, Kebede Michael and Haddis Alemayehu (Kane p. 29, Molvaer p. 10). Kane states further that Heruy continues the spirit of traditional Ethiopian literature for his books are no more than the books of “reproof and advice” (pp. 5-9). As is the case with his first fictional work *Wädaḡe Lābbe* (My Heart is My Friend) (1915 E.C), his other works and those by the writers after him, were characteristically allegorical giving accounts of the hero’s journey in the world by means of which the author criticizes vices and praises virtues (Kane p. 33). It is to be noted that “journey of the fictitious character is the frame in which the incidents are

strung ... without developing from one incident to the next or involving the development of characters linking them together” (ibid.).

Another pioneering literary figure deserving mention here is Girmachew Teklehawariat, who is credited with founding the third literary school, style-wise that is, after Afeworq and Heruy (Molvaer, p.10). His major work is *Araaya*, which is also an allegorical novel of moralistic-didactic nature.

Crude didacticism was, however, an aesthetic problem of contemporary Amharic literature. Indeed this was a legacy about which zealous and abler artists and scholars that came onto the literary scene were to vehemently attack. One of such artists and scholars, Mengistu Lemma, in his article “Modern Amharic Literature: The Task Ahead”, had the following to say:

*The vice that bedevils contemporary Amharic literature is not its preoccupation with typical subject matter and theme, but the flood of crude didacticism that overwhelms it. In such a state of affairs replete with all sorts of bogus profundities, every peddler of moral platitudes assumes the role of the prophet and moral philosopher. [In **Voice of Ethiopia** May 19, 1965 p. 4]*

This concern articulated by Mengistu Lemma has been directly or indirectly addressed by various critical researches on the literature chief among which can be mentioned PhD dissertations by Fiqre Totosa, (1982) and Taye assefa (1986). Fiqre, in his *Realism in the Amharic Novel*, asserts that the Amharic literature has been predominantly moralistic-didactic in the religious sense and that the Amharic novel in particular has not practiced enough of realism in its seventy years (1908-1981) of existence (p. 6). Fiqre ascribes this to the idealist background of the majority of Ethiopian writers which has mainly contributed to their inability to represent contemporary reality realistically (p. 290). Taye’s *Form in the Amharic Novel* aims to fill in the gap of the felt need for technical analysis of the Amharic novel (p. 11). In doing so, Taye attempts to break the

tradition of criticism that favors content over form which is, in a way, an extension of the moralities-didactic literary tradition. Unlike Figre, however, Taye sees in the Amharic novel a marked progress towards realism in terms of literary technique.

## **1.2. Goals and Objectives of the Study**

Moral visions as imaginary ideas having to do with principles of right and wrong and as acts and processes of making moral meanings have always provided a lustrous attraction to a work of art such as the novel. So it is not uncommon to see novelists concern themselves with certain moral visions. As is pointed out by Cook (1960: 179), they commit their visions to the characters they create in their fictional world.

The Ethiopian novelists are not an exception to the rule. In fact a perusal of the development of Ethiopian literature, a glimpse of which is given in the above survey, shows that morality is an integral part of its literary tradition. The Amharic novel in particular suitably lends itself for an investigation of this aspect of the literary tradition which has evolved from stern didacticism to realism along with the socio-political changes the country has undergone over the decades.

One major objective of this study is, therefore, to identify and examine the moral visions portrayed in Amharic novels of the last five decades and to investigate how these visions are artistically illustrated through characterization, plot structuring and other literary techniques. An attempt will also be made to redefine the social, cultural, political and religious milieus providing the contexts for the visions so portrayed in the novels to be identified.

Another major objective is to look into the state of morality as reflected in the novels and in light of sensibilities and ideals manifested in contemporary

generations and historical periods. In this connection, attempt will be made to find out what aspects of life and morality the novels are concerned with. Furthermore, it will be seen if they grasp the mood of contemporary life, depict evil and good forces of the period and suggest solutions to problems of evil. This will hopefully show if and to what degree the novelist are in touch with the moral and spiritual realities of his time and community. Being in touch with moral and spiritual realities means much more than mere awareness or recognition of these realities. It may mean, for instance, bringing out values questioned, depicting prevalent moral dilemmas, and portraying new values in the making.

To that effect, the study endeavours to establish the nature and pattern of certain moral categories such as freedom and responsibility as reflected in the selected works. On the basis of what is so established about these categories attempt is also made to look into the implications that these have for the contemporary societies and/or generations.

### **1.3. Methods, Study Design and Works to be Investigated**

Coming to the methodology of the study, firstly I want to point out that my approach is a combination of two of the commonest approaches to literary criticism, namely, the moral and sociological (Scott, 1979: 11). In so far as the works selected are highly sensitive to the social realities they correspond to, it necessarily follows that the sociological approach be pursued. But then, since investigation of moral vision is the central concern of the study, moral approach lends itself to be an undisputed priority as an approach. Nevertheless, 'approach' here does not signify much more than the subject category of the study.

Concerning methods proper, I have employed again a combination of two methods of literary criticism: the structuralist and the new-historicism or

cultural criticism. Pursuant to the structuralist<sup>2</sup> method, each novel selected for this study is approached as a system of meaning governing the relationship between its component parts. The system envisaged being that of moral meaning, among others, the novels are viewed as having thematic unities structured on the binary opposition of good and evil or vice and virtue in various forms. As cited in Tyson (1999: 223-24), Culler identifies three procedures for his rule of thematic unity, which I have found helpful in organizing my thesis. These are: 1. Theme as a binary opposition (good and evil), 2. Theme as a resolution of binary opposition (good conquers evil) and 3. Theme as a displacement of binary opposition by a third term (good vs evil is absorbed by an all embracing nature<sup>3</sup>).

In the system of moral meaning envisaged, focus is placed on the component parts such as the moral gestures of the characters, on the one hand, and the forces that operate in the moral milieu of the society in which the characters move, on the other. Because characters in narratives are committed to the text's moral vision, characterization features as one of the salient aspects of the study. That is to say, a sustained effort is made in the study to explore the moral visions of the works as crystallized in the motives, behaviors, conducts, actions, and interactions of the characters (protagonists and antagonists). If narrative incidents are extensively traced in the study, it must be noted that characters and incidents constitute an integral part of the system in question. And this recalls what Henry James is said to have remarked: "What is character but the determination of incidents? What is incident but the illustration of character?" (as cited by Martin, 1986: 116). In this connection, attempt is also made to establish the underlying moral principles determining characters' actions, decisions and choices. This is found to be particularly indispensable in view of the fact that the novels selected represent different socio-political situations corresponding which there are moral milieus functioning on specific moral principles.

Mutually constitutive with the structuralist method is, therefore, the critical method of new historicism in the light of whose premises<sup>4</sup> this study is also undertaken. For new-historical or cultural critics, writes Tyson (1999: 292), the literary text is a representation of human experiences at a given time and place and is hence an interpretation of history. “As such”, Tyson goes on to state, “the literary text maps the discourses circulating at the time it was written and is, itself, one of those discourses” (Ibid). Mapping the discourses of their time is indeed what the novels selected for this study do. In their function as such, these novels can be regarded as the discourses of the moral visions of the historical periods they represent. It is, therefore, only appropriate to examine these works in the light of some major premises of new-historicism or cultural criticism (pp. 297f; also see p. 295). In as much as this study is about the changing face of moral vision in the Amharic novel, those premises are found to be particularly helpful in showing the ramifications of the thematic unity structured by the binary opposition of good and evil. For example, what sort of ideologies the texts promote and what they suggest about the experiences of the groups of people they depict are sifted through the concept of moral provincialism in terms of which the entire thesis is designed as shown below.

It is true that virtues and vices have individual bases. Nevertheless, in the highly class-conscious feudal society of Ethiopia, there was a tendency to associate virtues to the nobility and vices to lowly people or classes. This is what moral philosophers call “moral provincialism,” an aspect of limited morality that defines the scope of morality by a certain social group (Mothershead, 1962: 44). Such a tendency having set the precedence and also accounting for the major socio-political problems affecting generations, many a writer has sought consciously or subconsciously, to address it as quite an issue. For they seem to have discerned that most of the conflicts and wars in the recent history of this nation have their root causes in the paradoxes intertwined with this tendency to circumscribe morality to social groups of some sort (class, ethnicity, religion, nationality, etc).

If moral provincialism has recurred in Amharic literature, particularly in the novel, then it is because it is a fact of life having to do with moral problems of social significance. While writers like Afeworq reflect it in their works to live up to their allegiance or loyalty to the ruling class that trained and groomed them to serve its interests, (Gerard, 1971: 280) many others, particularly in the later periods of the literature, address the issue for various reasons. Some sought to show it up as a moral problem affecting both the individual and the society at large. Others opted to replace one form of moral provincialism with another form because they believed the previous one was corrupted or unjust.

In this study, therefore, an attempt is made to investigate the moral vision in Amharic novels by paying close attention to how ethnical provincialism is treated in some selected representative works. As such the study follows the trends in the social development reflected in the literature, especially in the Amharic novel. As can be noted from the Ethiopian history of the last few decades, this nation has undergone a series of socio-political changes. In each system established following the changes we have some specific corresponding moral phenomena in the light and logic of which authors have tried to express their own moral viewpoints. This being a typical case of literary response to emerging social realities, it is works by such writers that have been selected as representing the discourse of the moral vision of the age to which they correspond.

Accordingly, the study is designed to undertake the investigation of moral vision in the Amharic novel in three parts roughly corresponding to three historical periods: before 1974, between 1974 and 1991 and after 1991. The works selected for each part are given below along with some pertinent notes.

1. Haddis Alemayehu has three novels to his name all set in the period spanning the reign of Emperor Hailesele I, which came to an end in 1974. These are *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* (1958 E.C), *Wongelegnaw Dagna* (1974 E.C) and *Yelmizat* (1981 E.C). The first one in particular has won him reputations

as a realist novelist and as a social critic. In this study all three of his works are examined for the moral visions enshrined in them. These works together with Dagnachew Worqu's *Adefris* (1962 E.C), depict the moral life of the society under feudalism. The fact that these works address the type of moral provincialism that prevailed in feudal Ethiopia justifies their treatment in the first part of this study. It is also important to note that these works by these two authors are characterized by a structural feature where thematic unity is attained through the binary opposition of evil versus good as in the case of Haddis, and through that of the old versus new as in the case of Dagnachew.

2. In the second part of the study, Bealu Girma's two socialist oriented works namely *Derasew* (1971 E.C) and *Yegey Kokeb Tiri* (1973 E.C) and Tesfaye Gebreab's *Yeburqa Zimita* (1992 E.C) have been dealt with. Bealu's works envisage entirely new and opposite moral views and values and advocate a different moral provincialism that circumscribes morality around the working class and its associates. Tesfaye's novel is set in the period immediately before and after 1991. But because its approach stands in antithesis to the works examined in part one, as it raises moral issues involving ethnicity thus probing into injustices previously committed along the lines of moral provincialism, this is also treated in part two.

Here again we have the same structural feature of evil versus good or old versus new, of course, with a marked emphasis on the difficulties involved in the process of ensuring that evil is conquered by good.

3. The third part examines three novels, namely *Achame* (1992 E.C) and *Evangadi*<sup>5</sup> (1993 E.C) by Fiqremarqos Desta and *Reqiq Ashara* (1995 E.C) by Sisay Nigussu. These works tend to transcend and rise above the notion of moral provincialism. As opposed to the novels in the preceding parts, these works seem to function on the structural feature of theme as a displacement of binary opposition. As such these works defy being seen as dealing with time bound notions.

Having said that, I would like to point out my rationale for dealing with the novel in the vernacular. Briefly this is because the novel, being what it is, allows for a fuller and more elaborate treatment of the subject under investigation, than any other genre. As its history of development world-wide shows (Martin, 1986: 18), the novel is uniquely capable of responding to life and society. In the context of Amharic Literature, this is shown to be true particularly with respect to the novel offering itself as a literary form that depicts the changing face of moral vision conceived and delivered by authors. Given the series of the socio-political changes Ethiopia has undergone in its recent history, and given the fact that such changes are wrought by human actions of moral significance, it is only natural that we have works that creatively respond to such developments. But then, let me once again stress that the novels I am dealing with in this study are selected on their representational merits.

## NOTES

1. For more elaboration of the concept of “moral vision” see chap. 2.1.
2. The structuralist method is indispensable for the study in that the entire project has to do with interpretation of narrative texts so as to produce meanings relevant to the research question. Structuralism in general views literature as a social and cultural activity analyzed in semiological terms (Jefferson in Davis (ed) 1986: 94; also see Culler, 1975: 4-5). And this involves discovering the nature of the component signs of a text and how the system governing their use and combination operates. Criticism for structuralists such as Barthes, consists in actively constructing a meaning for a text, for there can be no single unitary meaning in any literary work (Davis, p. 98). That is why the critics job is no longer to retrieve the meaning of a text but rather to produce an interpretation which realizes just one of the possibilities contained in the text (Ibid., 98, 107).
3. In the context of this study “all embracing view of life and society” sounds better.
4. One such premise asserts that the literary text functions as part of the continuum with other historical or cultural texts. The other is that the text promotes ideologies that support or undermine the prevailing power structure of the time or place in which the text is produced. The third premise considers what the analysis of the text’s rhetoric or style yields by way of adding to our understanding of the way life is perceived or depicted. The last but not least premise considers what the text suggests about the experience of groups of people who have been ignored, underrepresented or misrepresented by traditional history.
5. *Ivangadi* is examined along with its English version *Land of the Yellow Bull* (2003).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

A study of moral vision in literary works is to a certain extent an interdisciplinary study: Interdisciplinary because it deals with ethics and aesthetics or at least with an intersection of these two broad branches of philosophy. Out of realization that some theoretical and conceptual framework need be provided before proceeding on to the actual study, I intend to devote this chapter for this purpose. The chapter consists of three sections, the first dealing with the concept of ethics and its elements, the second with the link between ethics and aesthetics and the third with the topic proper (i.e. moral vision in literature) from two perspectives: the writer's and the reader's.

#### **2.1. Ethics and Morality Defined**

Ethics and morality are two words more often than not regarded as synonyms in the literature on moral philosophy. They have virtually identical etymologies in that "ethics" is derived from the Greek "ethos" which means "custom, habit" while "morality" is from the Latin "mores" which means "manners, customs" (Louden, 1992: 167, No.20).

According to Bittle (1953: 6), "Ethics is the philosophical science of human conduct in so far as conduct is viewed as good and bad, right and wrong". Bittle gives this definition after considering a range of definitions by many ethicists such as James Seth, Ella L. Cabot, S. Alexander, John Dewey, H. Tufts and D. Card Mercier. All of these agree that ethics is a science. It is a science by virtue of the fact that it is a department of philosophy, which in its own right is defined as "the science of beings in their ultimate reasons, causes and principles acquired by the aid of human reason alone" (p.5).

Properly called "moral philosophy," ethics is concerned with the study of human conduct asking questions about the meaning and nature of moral good

and evil, what they are, what kind of beings they are, how they originate precisely, where they exist and what they finally amount to (Ward, 1965: 4). In another connection, Ward goes on to state that “A just way to describe ethics itself is to say that it is the study of what men ought to do by reason of what they are; that is, by reason of the bare fact that they are men” (p. 17). As can be inferred from the statements above, there exists a clear distinction between the terms “ethics” and “morality”. That is, the former refers to, as Mothershead (1967: 21) puts it, “a name of a study” while the latter refers to “the name of the subject matter studied”.

It is worth noting that “morality” in the above statements designates concepts such as “what men ought to do by reason of what they are” and “human conduct in so far as conduct is viewed as good and bad, right and wrong”. Underscored in such concepts is the fact that only men are capable of morality and that their conducts are subject to moral judgments. Defined as deliberate human action (p. 27), conduct is related to other categories of ethics such as freedom of action and freedom of decision together with the concept of moral responsibility that these entail (pp. 28, 49-50). According to Mothershead, moral judgments are analogous to budgeting of human conduct, which has reference not only to the moral agent and his time but also to others and the future (pp.27-28). Also indispensable in this connection is the fact that what we call moral values are the priority ratings established by such budgeting (p.28). Illustrating this point, Mothershead writes: “When we assert that kindness is always and everywhere good, we intend a form of cosmic budgeting”(p.27).

### ***2.1.1. The will, the Good and the Evil***

Man always makes judgments of good and evil, right and wrong. If this is an “inevitable and inescapable” fact of life (Ward, p.74), no less is it true of literature which is generally regarded as a reflection of the former. Now, what is “good” and what is “evil”?

Good and evil being objects of the will, any attempt to define those basic terms would be incomplete without primarily considering what the will is. The term “will” designates what Bittle calls “man’s rational appetency” (p. 19). “Appetency” is a derivative of the Latin word “appetites” meaning “to strive for”, “to seek for” and “to tend toward” something. Appetency being of two types, namely sensuous and rational, the one under consideration is the one related to the latter. The will is hence that aspect of human faculty which tends toward something (good or evil). Again if man always strives and seeks for something, it is because of that faculty, of course aided by intellect, which “labors in the service” of the former (p.6).

Bittle states that man is distinctly “human” and to this he ascribes the joint function of rational intellect and will (p. 24-26). He goes on to state that the will cannot exercise its power of causality unless previously enlightened by the intellect. Accordingly, a truly human act is necessarily an end product of “both the advertence of” the intellect and the free decision of the will. In Frederick E. Ellrod’s (1992: 126) words, “The will is simply that in us which allows us to choose freely”.

As has been discussed, human act is made possible by the free decision of the will. It is to be noted that an act, be it moral or immoral, presupposes freedom which in turn presupposes knowledge (Ward, p. 59). Once it is performed, the act is then subjected to moral judgment of good or evil, right or wrong. “Good” represents the positive verdict of approval of the moral agent or critic. So what is meant by “good”? Aristotle defines good as “that at which all things aim” (Ward, p. 75). Similarly, St. Thomas states that “the good is that which all things seek” (p. 75). As can be seen in the following extract, Bittle expounds the definition of good also in the same vein:

*Whatever the type of appetency, whether sensuous or rational that which moves it to action and is the object of its striving is the good. Something is said to be “good” for a being when it is suitable in some manner for it. A being strives for an object because it satisfies some need, some demand, some exigency, some rational aptitude; such an object helps the striving being in some way or completes it in some fashion or gives it pleasure in some form or actualizes some potentiality of its nature or has the capacity to realize some end and purposes in it...The ‘well-being’ of the striving subject itself is the all-embracing goal of its appetitive activities because nothing is so basically good and suitable for an individual as its own nature (p. 21-20)*

“Evil”, on the other hand, “is the lack of a proper good,” to use Ward’s words (p.80). According to Bittle, “evil is the unsuitability for a natural tendency or appetency. It is the privation of a required good” (p. 22-24). Assuming infinitely many forms, “evil is always close to man’s door,” again in Ward’s words. Such are ill-health, disability, poverty, ignorance, injustice, war, corruption, needless to complete the catalogue. Evil, not a being itself but a defect of being, accounts for why a bad man is as such: lacking in “something that a man should possess such as moral virtue and character” (Ward, p. 81).

Having thus surveyed the concepts of the “good” and “evil”, it will be apt to quote Bittle’s definition of the “will” which he renders in the light of these concepts: “Hence, the will is defined as a rational appetency for an intellectually perceived good and to shun an intellectually perceived evil” (p. 21-22).

### **2.1.2. The End and Purpose of Human Life**

It is in the order of nature, particularly of living things to strive for existence. As concrete evidences in the sciences indicate, the tendency among living things to survive and grow is a universal phenomenon. In this connection, one can discern the role of the good which is as essential to a being as to accomplish some fulfillment, some end or purpose. As Ward puts it “All life is oriented

determinately toward an end and fulfillment, and hence man's life must have an end and "Purpose" (p. 99). We can also recall Bittle's claim: "The well being of the striving subject is the all embracing goal of its appetitive activities...". Ward deliberates further on the implications of purpose and fulfillment of man's life:

*--- Our highest human good, accordingly, is our total human being, ---. Nevertheless, "fullness" of being means just what it says. For the individual, it means fullness of mental and bodily health, the fullness of his freedom and virtues—a cripple, a blind man, a slave, a vicious or an ignorant man is so for he is lacking in being and in the achievement of the end. For the social body, "fullness of being" means justice given and received; it means and includes freedom and enlightenment, peace and security, and economic development is also perfectly in line with the great goods being achieved or sought by modern man in his struggles for social, economic, political and racial freedom, and with his hope for a universal education (p. 101).*

What is more, philosophers claim that man's persistent striving for more than he reaches is an indication that he is made for something greater and fuller than time allows him to achieve (p.101). This may partly explain why man's purpose of life is not limited to the temporal life. Theologians take this view further as they claim that "Man comes to his fulfilled being in the immediate possession of God by knowledge and love." (p. 104).

According to Kantian philosophy, as cited in Guyer (1993: 45) "freedom of the will as governed by practical reason is the only possible ultimate end for the extrinsic purposiveness of nature. Kant (1987: 323) as well states that man is the only kind of being "with a causality that is teleological, i.e. directed to purposes."

*His (man's) existence itself has the highest purpose within it, and to this purpose he can subject all of nature as far as he is able, or at least he must not consider himself subject to any influence of nature in opposition to that purpose. Now if things in the world, which are dependent beings with regard to their existence, require a supreme cause that acts in terms of purposes, then man is the final purpose of creation. For without man the chain of mutually subordinated purposes would not have a complete basis. Only in man, and even in him only as moral subject, do we find unconditional legislation regarding purposes. It is this legislation, therefore, which alone enables man to be a final purpose to which all of nature is teleologically subordinated.*

If man is a being with such a lofty purpose of life, then how should man regard his fellow men? Caputo (1992) offers a deeply philosophical answer. In his article "A phenomenology of moral sensibility" he discusses that every other person is "a primordial disclosure of value" (p. 202, ff). Every other person for him is a bodily disclosure "worthy of respect, an end in himself, as a being not to be reduced to the sphere of objects available for my use." And of the world shared by fellow men he writes that it is a primarily given inter-personal world and that in this world every thing centers on the bodily presence of the incarnate other. "The incarnate other", he states further, "is value incarnate, the concretely given embodiment of worth and value." (p. 204).

### **2.1.3. How are Moral Judgments Made?**

Ethics is numbered among the normative sciences in that it treats of "norms of action". That is, it investigates human conduct from the standpoint of "rightness" and "wrongness" and searches for the rules and norms that must regulate this conduct, so that man may know how to lead a life which is good and right (Bittle, p. 6).

According to Garner (1967), the purpose of normative ethics is to find which moral maxims are best and to discover which things have value (p. 18).

Accordingly, normative ethics has two parts: one part concerned with judgments of obligations and dealing with the moral assessment of actions, and the other concerned with the judgment of value (p. 21)

Depending on principles of moral judgment they adopt, normative ethical theories are of various sorts. Teleological theories of obligation (p. 24-25) are one such sort variously known as utilitarianism or consequentialism (May et.al., 1994: 6-7; Garner, 24-25). Such theories maintain that the moral rightness or wrongness of an action is a function of the good that is produced in the world, i.e., maximization of pleasure for the agent. The other sort being deontological theory, this is also variously called as Kantianism or rights theory (Garner, pp. 24-25; May et.al., p.6). This theory holds the view that we should perform those acts that conform to duties and rights, quite independently of the consequences (May et.al, p.7). Virtue theory is still another one which maintains the view that judgments about what is morally right should be natural ends. Unlike the other theories, virtue theory focuses on the person's character rather than his behaviors (May et.al., p. 8).

#### ***2.1.4. Views on Morality and Ethical Theory***

The first two theories, i.e. teleological and deontological, are basically action guiding whereas virtues theory is character-guiding. According to Loudon (1992: 136-137), contemporary normative moral theories have been exclusively action-guiding rather than character-guiding. This is now beginning to change he goes on, as “moral theorists of all normative persuasions are now paying much more attention to issues of character formation.” Loudon argues that this is so because the normative advice that comes out of a character-guiding theory is apt to be better anchored in existing moral practices and attitudes than is that of a strictly action-guiding theory. In any case, character-guiding theory tends to have precedence over the other as “knowing what to do in any serious sense requires good character.”

At this juncture, it would be worthwhile to point out that the established views about morality and moral theory are increasingly being questioned. As Loudon puts it, "Contemporary philosophers have grown increasingly skeptical toward both morality and moral theory" (p.3). The skepticism concerning morality stems from arguments that moral considerations are not always the most important considerations and that it is not always better to be morally better.

And I would add such skepticism can be traced back to the close of 16<sup>th</sup> century when thinkers such as Donne and Montaigne lived. By way of throwing light on the influence that these thinkers exerted on the moral visions of Jacobean tragedians - W. Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, G. Chapman and many others - Ornstein (1960) shows that these were among the "moral empirical observers of human nature announcing that passion, appetite and desire are as natural to man as reason and moral prohibition" (p. 37). Not interested in making the world of fact confirm to a priori metaphysical postulate, they rather sought to understand the cultural and psychological forces which create the diversity of moral codes (39). Moral codes, accordingly, are the product of custom obeyed: because they are customary not because they are natural. Montaigne is in particular shown to be highly critical of adherents of moral imperatives as dogmatists who speak of reason but do not use it. For they escape from the problem of judgment by applying formulas. They do this by studying authorities rather than studying life and recognizing that circumstances condition acts and give them their nature. Their approach to ethical problem is, hence, legalistic and not humane.

This brings us to the concept of applied ethics which is gaining momentum among philosophers of ethical questions. According to Rosenthal et.al., (1988), in recent years ethical philosophers have been dramatically interested in ethical questions about pressing everyday matters calling for decisions that often have far-reaching consequences. (p. ix). Unlike traditional ethical theories, seemingly removed from the immediacy of everyday life, applied ethics focuses on pressing

issues of the day such as problems of euthanasia, abortion, genetic research, nuclear armament, etc (p. ix). Issues in applied ethics such as the examples given, often stem from a concern to bring morality to bear on social policy (p. X).

“Ethical questions about pressing everyday matters” are of equal importance to the creative writer. For it is ultimately such questions that he deals with as he, through his creative understanding of moral values, vices and virtues, tries to render his own visions to be shared with his intended audience.

## **2.2. On the Link Between Ethics and Aesthetics**

As an approach to the concept of moral vision proper, I would like to devote a few paragraphs to the link between ethics and aesthetics. The fact that art has always been an integral part of human life in the sense that it plays a utilitarian role is as old as man himself. As Carrol (1996: 135) rightly puts it “Historically, art seems hardly divorced from other social activities”. Philosophers and thinkers of all ages wrote and spoke to that effect. Just to mention a couple of figures ever looming large for the depth and breadth of their views on the subject, Aristotle wrote of the purgative value of tragedy and Immanuel Kant asserted that aesthetics cultivated moral feeling.

As was shown in the preceding section, Kant’s moral view of man is that “man is the final purpose of creation” (Kant, p. 323). A moral being as he is, man has a duty to fulfill thereof. According to Guyer, all man’s activities must make some contribution to the advancement of morality and will inevitably be judged from that point of view (p. 38). This includes aesthetics or the beautiful which is the symbol of morality (pp. 39-40). Elucidating the role of aesthetics in Kant’s moral philosophy, Guyer also states that the experience of beauty serves the purpose of morality most directly by improving our propensity for moral feeling (p. 34).

Kant clearly saw how closely aesthetics and ethics are associated. Again in Guyer's words,

*But the very fact that either the disposition to moral feeling or the disposition to aesthetic response can be regarded as the propaedeutic to the other shows how intimately connected the two dispositions are and how the perfection of each goes hand in hand with that of the other (p. 351).*

In Kant's philosophy of man aesthetics and morality merge together. For he writes: "it is man alone among all objects in the world, who admits of an ideal of beauty, just as the humanity in his person...is the only thing in the world that admits of the ideal of perfection" (Kant, p. 81). Kant stresses that the ideal of the beautiful must be expected solely in the human figure (p. 83).

### **2.3. The Concept of Moral Vision**

The term moral vision stands for what lies in the very heart of the link between ethics and aesthetics. The point Guyer makes about the experience of beauty serving the purpose of morality by improving our propensity for moral feeling can be crystallized through the concept of moral vision. As it were, a writer's concern with morality presupposes the fact that the reader will somehow be affected by the moral intent and content of what he reads. It is this mutual relationship between writer and reader that we will consider as we turn to the concept of moral vision. Hence, this section sets out firstly to look at the concept from the writer's perspective and then to some methodological concepts from the reader's perspective.

#### **2.3.1. The Concept from the Writer's Perspective**

It is common knowledge that literature is a reflection of life of which morality is an integral part. Morality has a unique function of ensuring, promoting and enhancing respect for the human person who, according to Caputo (1992), is regarded as a primordial disclosure of value in this shared world (p. 202). If literature, particularly a narrative art work, is about human relations, then

what essentially constitutes its bulk is morality. In other words, narrative artworks are solidly based on the assumption that human persons have to see each other as beings worthy of respect (p. 200). As a matter of fact, it is this kind of concern with morality that makes literature one of the humanities.

That said, we shall now consider moral vision which is a vast concept ranging from individual moral virtues to perceived moral values that the writer renders in concrete but fictional situations. Like any intricate concept, it is hard to find a standard definition for the term. However, considering the nature of its renderings in narrative artworks, it can be grossly defined as the writer's imaginary ideas and purposes having to do with principles of right and wrong. As Cook, author of the *Meaning of Fiction* (1960), puts it, the term refers to the writer's attempts to make moral meaning out of the moral gestures he observes and analyses through his works (p. 179). Accordingly, fiction is essentially concerned with the commitments of its characters to moral ideas. Asserting that the great tradition of any fiction is moral tradition, Cook goes on to state: "Each original novelist has a distinct kind of moral observation by virtue of the unique world he creates" (ibid).

The concept of moral vision can also be expressed in terms of what Irving Babbitt writes in his "Genius and Taste" published in Wilbur Scott's *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism* (1979, p. 37f). Accordingly, the writer should control his genius to some human end. To determine this end, Babbitt states further, the author must look to standards, which he must create with the aid of the ethical imagination. These "ethical standards", as Babbitt calls them, must rest on an immediate perception of what is normal and human. Moreover, controlling one's genius to the human end enables one to have the imaginative perception of the universal (p. 33). To that end Babbitt cites Homer and Shakespeare for whom human nature is the centerpiece of their works. Writing of Shakespeare in particular, Babbitt states that his imagination is disciplined to reality and that he is at his best ethical in the Greek sense of the term.

Perhaps of special appeal and relevance to our understanding of the concept of moral vision is what Babbitt states concerning the Greek sense of what it is to be ethical: “To be ethical in the Greek sense is not to preach or to agitate problems but to see life with imaginative wholeness” (p. 33f.).

The claims by Cook and Babbitt can perhaps be best illustrated by an analysis made of the moral vision in Margaret Laurence’s novel *The Stone Angel* (1979). According to Margaret Gail Osachoff, the moral vision of the novel is as wide ranging and complex as the subtlety of its artistry. Her analysis centers about the motives, actions and reactions of the major characters, Hagar and Lottie. Hagar’s reaction to Lottie’s killing of the chicks at Manawaka’s dump, for example, is subjected to a scrutiny of far-reaching consequence in terms of revealing her moral character. As she reflects on Lottie’s act 80 years before, Hagar is convinced that Lottie had done the right thing since the choice was either to leave the chicks to die a slow death or mercifully hasten that death. The issue at stake is why Hagar failed, when asked, to do something about the newly hatched chicks. Her reply at the moment was that she wouldn’t touch them with a ten-foot pole. Hagar characteristically avoids suffering and death and this is just one example of that weakness of hers shown up by Lottie’s brave act.

Osachoff discerns these accounts of Hagar’s weakness as part of the author’s narrative technique depicting her as a snob who is obsessed with appearance: “all her (Hagar’s) motives and actions are always hampered by her possessiveness with appearance” (p.10). She can neither help anyone die nor can she help anyone live as she cannot bend enough to show her concern to other creatures weaker than herself or those needing help (p. 9). She cannot even spare her son John as she, out of snobbery as well as jealousy, causes his and his lover’s death. Finally, though, Hagar is redeemed as she comes to realize that there are no absolutes except love and concern for others, that the

truth of a situation has many aspects and that there is a good meddling and a bad one.

Some important insights about the scope and nature of moral vision in narrative artworks can also be drawn from what Ornstein (1960: 222-227) writes in his *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* about Shakespeare and his works. For all the fact that four centuries have elapsed between now and when Shakespeare lived, he is still being studied. The reason for this could be put down to his rare genius that made possible moral visions of all time appeal. As Ornstein claims, Shakespeare escapes the tyranny of scholarly exegesis because he always grasped the permanent significance of contemporary problems, and because his vision of life was so comprehensive that his art has never lost its relevance to the human situation. This aspect of Shakespeare's art is in stark contrast with other Jacobeans, who abide our scholarly questions because they were absorbed in topical and peripheral issues, and because they use the stage for extra-literary purposes-to confute the politician or the naturalist.

Another important point of insight is that Shakespeare "sees the world feelingly". Ornstein maintains that Shakespeare performs the immemorial service of the artist to society as he humanizes the categorical imperatives which the stern didacticist offers as the sum of ethical truth. This point is illustrated by *Antony and Cleopatra*, which romanticizes adulterous love. The issue is that there is a place in Shakespeare's sympathy for Antony and Cleopatra. What is more, he did not preach though he lived in an age which frequently confused the moral and the moralistic in art.

In Shakespeare again appear the truth and beauty of moral ideals as the bedrock reality of human experience. He could see, for example, the compassionate ironies of *Measure for Measure*. This was beyond the scope of other Jacobeans, who could only see the mockery of man's fumbling attempts

at justice. Also a point in case is that Shakespeare could see in *King Lear* the sublime nature of Cordelia's charity that redeems Lear's suffering.

Shakespeare's vision of life is so vast that he could encompass the whole that includes and exceeds the sum of the other Jacobean dramatists' partial perception. In fact, Ornstein claims that there is hardly a tragic theme or mood of the first decade of his artistic undertakings which does not find expression in his plays. In *Lear*, writes Ornstein, we have an "all embracing spiritual and moral drama." This is the play large enough to confront and resolve challenges which evil presents to man's belief in himself and his universe. Of both *Lear* and *The Tempest*, Ornstein maintains that, while having different moods and modes, they express the ineffable goodness of life and the transcendent experience of love in a world where brothers turn on brother and age suffers painfully and long.

A writer could get absorbed in different aspects of life. According to Ornstein's account, for example, Shakespeare was absorbed in gaiety and innocence of youthful courtship or in the animality of sexual vice, in the intrinsic decorum's of political authority or in the anarchic ambition that destroys social order. Shakespeare's imagination, continues Ornstein, dwelt upon the brutality of the evil that in all ages challenges man's ideals, particularly at a time when traditional values were being questioned.

Still another point of insight worthy of consideration is Shakespeare's bent on defining, through *Hamlet* and *Lear*, the problem of moral decision and belief in an evil world. In these works, Shakespeare dramatizes the tragic need of the idealizing mind to discover, accept and relate itself to the realities of the universe. In one way or another, asserts Ornstein, all of Shakespeare's great tragedies are discoveries of moral and spiritual reality.

From what can be seen in the illustrations of Marguerite Laurence's and Shakespeare's ethical viewpoints, it is clear that a writer's "moral vision" as a concept is what Cook maintains it is: "a distinct kind of moral observation by virtue of the unique world he creates." (p. 179). Of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Cook writes that "it builds its panoramic universe of moral meaning out of a sequence of observed and analyzed moral gestures" (p. 180). Quite naturally, the level of abstraction by writers in creating their unique world may vary from individual to individual. But one thing surely applies to all writers worthy of the name: that they create their fictional worlds populated by fictional beings whose moral gestures are always subjected to moral scrutiny. In a nutshell, it is these gestures observed and analyzed in the works that constitute the notion or the essence of the term "moral vision".

### ***2.3.2. Experiencing the Narrative: The Concept of Moral Vision from the Reader's Perspective***

The writer in his art does not give us a bare account of moral imperatives, for this is by no means his primary concern. His bent is first and foremost aesthetics, but not for its own sake. In short what he does is "instruct while giving pleasure" and this has always been part of the humanist tradition. That is why one may take the liberty to assume the narrative as a legitimate art form where the intersection between ethics and aesthetics is manifestly demonstrated.

Experiencing the narrative with the view to learning from it puts the reader in such a unique position to not only grasp the writer's moral viewpoint but also to respond to it in a manner that morally affects him. And the success of a narrative to that effect will very much depend on its artistic merit. This way of looking at the issue from the reader's perspective will add a new dimension to the concept of moral vision in the sense discussed and illustrated above. Understanding the concept in this line would require some familiarity with

some contemporary theoretical conceptions dealing with the intersection between ethics and aesthetics. Three of such conceptions are related in Carroll's, Currie's and Gaut's articles, all edited in Jerrold's *Aesthetics and Ethics* (1996).

Carroll's article "Art, Narrative and Moral Understanding" (pp. 142-154) deals with what he calls the "clarificationist" view. Alternatively known as "transactionist" view, this concept accounts for the transaction that exists between moral understanding and the narrative artwork. No claim is made here of functions of narrative artworks in a form of acquisition of interesting and new propositional knowledge. What such artworks do is rather to enable us to deepen our moral understanding by encouraging us to apply our moral knowledge and emotions to specific cases (p. 142).

It is, therefore, important to highlight in this section the salient features of "transactionist" view. As has just been indicated, the function of an artwork is mainly to deepen moral understanding. The artwork does this by drawing on existing moral knowledge and emotions which the reader, in the case of fiction, is encouraged to apply. For narratives naturally make us think about and discuss them in terms of ethics because they awaken, stir up and engage our moral power and judgment (p. 141). It is also worth-noting here that narratives necessarily depend upon activating our moral beliefs, concepts and feelings. As we read them, hence, we tend "to compare with other readers our reactions to the characters, situations and overall texts that authors present with a clear intention of eliciting moral responses" (p. 141).

It is to be noted that what is understood is that which is there. Both the writer and the reader, being part of the same human culture, have a lot to share in terms of moral values, concepts and principles. But these aspects of morality by and large exist in isolation and as abstract entities. What actually happens as the individual experiences the narrative is hence the understanding of those

moral aspects as it provides an occasion for the reader to see the aspects in the new light of the paradigm instance. As is evidenced in the play *A Raisin in the Sun*, characters and situations in a narrative present to the intended audience an occasion to reorganize and to reshuffle moral beliefs at the latter's disposal (P.143). In all this "we are given an opportunity to deepen our grasp and our understanding of what we already know in a way that also counts as learning." The issue of grasping the significance of the connections between antecedently possessed knowledge is rightly compared by Carrol to appreciating a chess move (p.158, N16).

Moreover, narrative artworks enhance the understanding by supplying vivid examples of how to apply abstractions to particulars. Carrol refers to *King Lear* as giving a clear example with which to understand the general proposition that "a house divided shall not stand", to Brecht's *Three Penny Opera* as illustrating the principle that the quality of moral life is coarsened by poverty, and to *Measure for Measure* as showing how power corrupts.

The other feature of the transactionist view is that it regards narratives as involving audiences in the process of moral reasoning and deliberations. The value of this feature is in that it enriches moral understanding by stretching its reflective resources (p, 147-148).

Carroll also writes about grounding moral assessment of narrative artworks in the quality of our moral engagement with the experience of the narrative object (p. 151). Accordingly, this engagement can be positive or negative. Where our moral understanding and emotions are deepened and clarified it is positive, and negative where they are misled, confused, perverted and so on (also see p. 149). A good example for artworks of the latter sort would be Leni Riefenstahl's documentary of the 1934 Nuremberg rally of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, *Triumph of the Will*. This is said to be perhaps the most controversial film ever made since it is at once masterful and morally

repugnant. It is a Nazi film, which idealizes Hitler as “a great historical figure who has the will and power to actualize the true will of the German people” (P. 131).

Currie, in his article “Realism of character and the values of fiction” (pp. 161-178), holds that imagination can lead to knowledge particularly of how to act so as to achieve outcomes that are morally better than those one would without imaginative exercise. In this theory commonly called “Response-dependent-realism”, he argues that imagination is a process of role taking or empathetic enactment (p. 161) and that it is as such capable of being enhanced by works of fiction. That is, works of literary fiction (with their fictional characters and their activities) are capable of calling forth from us imaginative responses similar to those called forth by our encounter with real people (p. 163). Such responses are possible if fiction reading consists of what Currie states as imaginatively projecting oneself into the position of one who is reading a text and gaining knowledge of the events (p. 168).

Three activities or functions are identified as constituting imaginative projection: understanding others’ mind, planning, and engagement with fiction (p. 169). Understanding of others’ mind refers to the reader’s experiencing of the narrative as he tries to empathize and respond to the situation in which a character, particularly the protagonist, finds himself. If one knows how to respond, one is starting to plan: that is, to have a view about which actions have desirable outcomes and which do not. Empathizing with others induces one to share their mental states and this in turn will reinforce one’s tendency to take their interests into account. Engagement with fiction has a function of a higher order in that it aims to give us, unlike the other two activities, a bigger picture of the character we are trying to understand: his background personality, habits and his former experience that may have helped to constitute the person as he currently is (p. 170).

Currie has a notion of fictional realism which he also calls “realism of character”. Accordingly, if a work enables us to engage in the same kind of empathetic understanding with its characters, then it is because the work possesses realism of character. Responding to fictional characters that way is likened to responding to life itself. Conversely, if there are fictional works whose characters resist our imaginative projections, such works are then unrealistic (pp. 173-174).

Berys Gaut, author of the article “The ethical criticism of art” (1996), has advanced a philosophical thesis called Ethicism. The ethicist principle holds that a work is aesthetically meritorious (or defective) in so far as it manifests ethically admirable (or reprehensible) attitudes (p. 182). Accordingly, the attitude a work, particularly a narrative fiction, contains should prescribe to the reader a response that is ethical to the extent to which the work can be merited. If unmerited, we have reason not to respond in the way prescribed in the case of which the work can be regarded as an aesthetic failure (p. 195).

It is obvious that works prescribe imagining certain events which in turn lead to responses such as fear, amusement or admiration. It is in such responses that attitudes of works are manifested, which can be approbatory or disapprobatory. At times, however, prescriptions of attitudes may not be obvious. Gaut gives an example of higher order prescriptions taking lower-order ones as their objects (p. 193). In a novel that prescribes its readers to be amused at a character’s underserved suffering, it may be that the novel does so in order to show up the ease with which the reader can be seduced into callous responses. Here, although a response of amusement is prescribed, a very different attitude (disappointment of the ease with which we can be morally seduced) is manifested by the work. This shows that the application of the ethicist principle requires a grasp of interpretive subtleties and contextual factors (p. 193). Thus, the notion of moral response is to be broadly understood

as it covers a wide range of states directed at represented events and characters, and such states are characteristically affective.

Finally, it is to be noted that all the three theoretical conceptions surveyed above uphold the view that art, particularly narrative fiction, has a utilitarian function. Taking for granted the fact that a narrative expresses some kind of moral vision, the authors of these articles proceed to analyze and theorize as to how the reader can best benefit from whatever moral vision is available to him. This is variously shown in the articles' concern with responding to the moral content of the narrative. Equally worth noting is that authors are all conscientious in pointing out that such narratives should not advance and promote morality at the expense of aesthetic merits. For example, the clarifications theory of art holds that narrative art should by no means be reduced to an instrumentality of moral education (Carrol, p. 154). Although this theory claims to be a learning model, it argues that the learning that may take place "need not be the aim of the narrative artwork, but rather a concomitant, one of which the writer may take no self-conscious notice" (ibid). This can also be related to what Grace (1972: 8) calls "the inner integrity" of the work in which the artist makes an honest effort to follow the truth of experience. Because obvious moralization would only make the work inartistic, it should be, again to use Grace's words "fused with the mimesis of life constituting the work of art" (p. 190).

## **PART ONE**

### **MORAL VISION AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF AUTHORITARIANISM AND MORAL PROVINCIALISM IN THE NOVELS OF HADDIS AND DAGNACHEW**

*Works by Haddis Alemayehu and Dagnachew Worqu are significant for this study in that they portray the social reality (of the now defunct feudalism) where moral issues loom large thus constituting the basic concerns of the sorts that were to call for revolutionary changes later in the history of the country. Moral provincialism in the context of their works represents the phenomenon of limited scope of morality fostered and enhanced by the authoritarian nature of the feudal socio-cultural system. That is to say, sheer authoritarianism being an integral part of the system, the latter favors the strong over the weak, adults over children, males over females and the nobility over the lower classes.*

*Such social conditions accounting for the root causes of moral problems in the society they depict, the novels by these two authors demonstrate the great dimensions of the problems extant. And hence, the characters they portray take it to be their duty to respond to the moral realities in which they find themselves.*

*In Haddis's novels there are moral visions on a continuum with at least three distinct items: self assertion, quest for justice, and triumph over the evil. These three items roughly correspond to **Fiqir Eske Meqabir** (1958 E.C), **Wonjelegnaw Dagna** (1974 E.C) and **Yelm Izyat** (1981 E.C.) respectively, of course with the first two items also shading into the other novels. At this point it may be worthwhile to refer to Molvaer's claim, in his book **Black Lions: The Creative Lives of Modern Ethiopia's Literary Giants and Pioneers**, that these three novels form a trilogy in time (1997: 150). To this I may add that they also form a trilogy in terms of those items on the continuum of moral vision.*

Dagnachew's **Adefris**, on the other hand, makes an attempt at hermeneutics as a method of examining the moral implications of the conflict between the old and the new values. As such, it demonstrates the traditionalists' concern over the threat that modernity holds to their "stable and secure" mode of life. The way modernity is generally viewed is depicted in terms of a problematic hero in whose bearings society detects moral inadequacy with the result that the latter take to looking to the traditional values in order to define the good, including the ideal citizenship and national identity.

On the whole, works by these two authors give insight into the human condition in the feudal system of Ethiopia. The ideology they depict is basically that of feudalism, which is by its nature discriminatory, oppressive and marginalizing. While Haddis tries to attain a thematic unity structured by the binary opposition of evil and good, Dagnachew does so by dwelling on the dichotomy of the old and the new. Moreover, while the works by these authors co-function as part of the continuum with other literary or non-literary works of their time, they represent a marked divergence in matters of what they have to tell about the experience of the people and in the nature or quality of the discourses they represent. In examining the moral visions of these works, then, endeavor is made to show these points of convergence and divergence as well as their implications for the new-historical critical method.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AUTHORITARIANISM AND QUESTS FOR SELF-ASSERTION AND JUSTICE IN HADDIS'S NOVELS

As William J. Grace writes in his book *Response to Literature* (1965: 46), it is a distinct mark of a great artist to transcend the values and errors of his time so as to come up with the universal and the generic. This may as well be said of Haddis Alemayehu, who capitalizes on the working of evil forces in order to demonstrate the glaring contrasts of virtue. Elements of the evil, which are by and large manifestations of the authoritarian disposition of feudalism, are preponderant in the life he depicts. Such elements exerting mighty forces, in his art, there is always a head-on collision between them and virtuous elements. And it is in such collisions that one can discern the nature of his moral vision.

Haddis's novels namely *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* (Love unto the Grave, 1958 E.C), *Wonjelegnaw Dagna* (The Criminal Judge, 1974 E.C) and, *Yelm Izyat* (Plenty in a Dream, 1981 E.C), are a trilogy of virtuous couples in whose moral gestures is illustrated the fact of human striving making a difference in a world where evil is so preponderant . That is to say, each novel depicts a virtuous couple pitted against the odds in their respective worlds. The moral visions of these novels are enshrined in the visions of their positive characters: in their callings, ideals and in their quests for justice, self-fulfillment or self-actualization. Haddis's positive characters are, therefore, at once visionaries, missionaries and revolutionaries. They are visionaries because, contrary to what Tsegaye Hailu (1987: 57) writes<sup>1</sup>, they have a vision for themselves and for the society at large. They are missionaries because they have a strong sense of their calling. They are revolutionaries because they are committed to changing the scenario they believe is perilous for themselves and for their society.

What are such characters pitted against and what do they try to achieve? A modest analysis of the novels would be required to come up with workable answers to such crucial questions. Therefore, this chapter sets out to examine the novels in two major sections: the panoramic view of life in the novels and the moral visions as depicted in them.

### **3.1. Panoramic View of Life in Haddis**

The term "panoramic view" refers to a narrative's omniscient point of view. But in this section I want to extend the meaning of the term to cover the wider view of life depicted in the novels. Haddis is well reputed for his realism<sup>2</sup> (Fique Tolosa, 1982) and social criticism<sup>3</sup> (Tsegaye Hailu, 1987) and this is principally on account of his narratives' extensive treatment of life and reality. The narrators of his novels are characteristically out there to take the reader on what is akin to tours of sightseeing as in their descriptions of the serene beauty of nature, as in their seizing upon the moment to take us back in history thus making us witness fierce battles, and as in their seemingly leisurely accounts of cultural aspects and religious practices of the society they portray. They always attempt to embalm our soul aggrieved by some scenic tension through their verses and insights into "aesthetics of life".

In all these, however, we are not allowed to lose sight of the moral meaning of the gestures the narrators observe. Their purpose is to give the reader pictures of the social context in which visions are made, missions are carried out, and revolutionary ideas and actions are projected. Vast as the narratives are, I will not attempt to dwell on all aspects of their panoramic pictures. The aim of this section is, hence, to give highlights of only such aspects as are necessary to manifest, intensify and/or augment the moral visions of the novels under consideration. In this connection, attempt is also made to show what implications the aspects dealt with have for the cultural or new-historical critical approach.

One such aspect is the religious practices and beliefs. The religious milieu of the society depicted is essentially that of Orthodox Christianity. Perhaps more than any other Ethiopian writer in the literature, Haddis is uniquely cognizant of the fact that religion has permeated every aspect of the Ethiopian social life. The extent to which this is true is demonstrated in *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* where he deftly weaves religious materials into its plot construction and characterization. Among other things, it is with respect to his highly critical attitude to the state of the church, as reflected in this work, that Haddis is seen at his best as a social critic. Apart from his satire at the expense of the ignorant, inept and corrupt clergymen, he uses the “intellectual physiognomy”<sup>4</sup> of Kassa Damte to give us a penetrating insight particularly into the degenerate state of the church. A highly learned cleric, Kassa despairs at such a state. Apparently having made futile attempts to reform it, he has distanced himself from the church and the following observation by him highlights his specific reasons to that end:

*So you see! The house of God has become a shelter for such bandits and robbers. Look! The great majority of our priests and apostles starting from the highest authorities (in the order of the priesthood) way down to the monks and deacons are like that: One claims to perform magic while the other claims to divine its antidote; one professes to enchant demons while the other exorcises; one causes plagues while the other claims to supplicate for mercy. They conceal their falsehood in their religious cloaks (in their turbans, caps and outfits) and make a plaything of the flock they have been entrusted with to lead and teach. Hence, isn't it blasphemous to have a fellowship with such people and call upon God's name? So you see! This is what has estranged me from my beloved church (Trans. mine, p. 428).*

In the interest of their carnal desire, often taking forms of debauchery and gluttony, the clergy are further shown as abusing their priestly office by scrambling to conform to the exploitative whims of their benefactors, usually members of the ruling class. The fact that there is traditional political alliance between the church and the feudal lords is typified by Aba Mogesse, Fitawrari

Meshesha's father-confessor, readily quoting verses from the scriptures to supplement the latter's expressed will and whim aimed at subjugation and exploitation of the peasantry (pp. 218, 273). For example, Aba Mogesse's utterances like "Do not stand empty handed before the anointed " (p 274), in the contexts concerned, virtually express his acknowledgement to that end. What is more, such expressions also conform to the long-standing position of the church that class distinctions are more of a matter of fate than choice.

The picture we have of the church and religion is that of one characterized by ignorance, at times difficult to tell between its practices and superstitious beliefs. At this juncture it would be worth noting that both ignorance and superstition are social evils and thus, in the context of the novel, perpetuating themselves as they play havoc over the minds and hearts of the people. The cumulative effect is that they constitute fatalism as a universal world outlook of the members of the community in question. This is what the narrator of *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* reveals in his omniscience as he dwells on such details as Wudinesh Betamu (the protagonist's mother- to -be) considering herself ominous to a fourth husband having already survived three (p.14), and as Seble's parents ascribing her falling in love with Bezabih to a purported divination of some charm (p.410f).

Of particular significance to our purpose is the protagonist's consecration by his parents at his early ages to the saints and the angels. Of course, this may be taken as a mere form of prayer in which pledges are made. However, it calls for a close perusal of the narrative to see that parents' fatalistic view of life is involved in their willful gesture of determining their children's fate. That is in fact the moral gesture that the protagonist subjects to a moral scrutiny as he racks his brain trying to figure out the moral dilemma in which he eventually finds himself as a result of his parents' inadvertent act.

Although purely from secular perspectives, the influence of this view of life is also evident in Seblewongel's case. A daughter of an aristocratic family, she falls in love with Bezabih. Nevertheless, this turn of events proves unpalatable to her parents, for whom Bezabih is only a scabby man of "no origin". In their deep-seated conviction, their daughter is destined to a marriage to a man fitting her social stature. The implications of the view in question are again subjected to moral scrutiny when it comes to the will of the subject, a point we should as well reserve for a later discussion. Meanwhile, it would be interesting to note that Haddis in his art intertwines the destinies of the two protagonists sharing the same backgrounds of parents with fatalistic view of life, each in their own way.

While considering the moral significance of parents' role in determining their children's destiny, it would as well be apt to refer to Demeqech of *Yelm Izyat*. As a protagonist of this novel, Demeqech starts out as a young girl of nine, whose hand is given in marriage to a certain Tamirat, an elderly man of fortune. As in the case of Bezebih and Seble, this girl's will is totally disregarded. In fact, she is too young and too naive for such affairs, let alone to contemplate about her expressed will. But the narrative seems to underline that society is induced to partake in the gross abuse of even such small children. While ignorance and fatalism are largely responsible for the situation in question, the severity of the problem is shown through the involvement of callous parents.

Another significant aspect of the panoramic picture extensively treated in *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* is the life of the people. This ranges from those in the bond of slavery to the Emperor. Habtish, the slave woman attending on Seble, tersely and forcefully expresses the plight of her likes when she says, "A slave woman and a cow are the same. Their offsprings are known by their mothers... Properties of their owners as they are, they have no will of their own whatsoever" (p. 311). The plights of the peasantry are no less appalling since they are generally regarded as subhuman. Such an attitude toward the

peasantry is reflected in Fitawrari Meshesha's contemptuous remarks about them. At one point he says "a peasant and an unruly bull will not behave themselves unless they are heavily yoked" (p. 217). Meshesha is at his extreme notoriety as a representative of the ruling class whenever he refers to peasants in such humiliating terms.

The image of the Emperor rendered in a description of the scene of the feast that he throws at his palace in Addis (pp.443-447) represents an appallingly dehumanizing picture of subjugation of people to him. Irrespective of their ranks and social standing, guests receive beatings and floggings by guards and ushers. If anyone shows the slightest sign of complaint, they are told that coming to royal banquets is an expression of the honor and glory people give him and that such treatments are only part of it. In this gesture, much more is implied about the relationship between the Emperor and his subjects and, by extension, between the rulers and the ruled.

The picture of the society we have in Haddis's works is that of feudalism and it is as such as hierarchical and oppressive as it is in reality. Parents are oppressive and so are rulers. In his keen observation of the social reality not only does he ascribe this state of affairs to the universal outlook of life but also focuses on the tendencies of the *status quo* to perpetuate themselves.

This is what is illustrated in Meshesha's sense of pre-ordination about the immutability of his destiny to rule over the people of his tenancy. He regards himself as a progeny of the "true and pureblooded noblemen", the kings of Gondar, Shewa and Tigre (p. 83). It is to be noted that such a claim is in keeping with the spirit of *Kibre Negast*, the one single book of myth and legends that dominated Ethiopian history for centuries through its legitimization of the so called Solomonic Dynasty<sup>5</sup>.

To people like Meshesha the claims they make about ancestral links seem to give them a sense of immunity to all wrongs they commit, particularly the wrongs that affect the life of the society at large. It is as if they have the permit to despise and brutally subjugate others while keeping honor and respect only for themselves. An aspect of moral provincialism, this tendency is concretely manifested in Meshesha's chauvinistic attitudes, in his arrogance, vanity, vainglory, callousness, etc.

Attaining a title with the view to leading a parasitic life was the order of the periods covered in Haddis's novels. In fact, this is another face of the *status quo* perpetuating itself. The striving to that effect by people not belonging to the mainstream ruling class is one of the issues that have received extensive treatment in all three novels. In *Wonjelegnaw Dagna*, for example, Dagnachew Frisa, governor of Yeki district, attains a title and subsequently gets promotion to a higher rank and all this on the strength of his fortune, which he squanders on bribing higher officials. In *Yelm Izyat*, we have Tekeste, a very promising young man of considerable learning, claiming to be a son of a certain Dejazmach<sup>6</sup>. Upon being challenged that there is no man of the stated title in the locale he says he has come from, Tekeste falters and subsequently ends up disowning his own mother. Tekeste here epitomizes a generation lost in a moral dilemma not knowing how to respond to the quest of identity. In reality, though, Tekeste is a son of a man of fortune who, desirous of a title for his offspring if not for himself, gets married to a young girl of noble origin.

As he so deftly works the issue of the so-called "noble descent" or ancestral link, as well as the parasitic tendency it perpetuates, into the narrative structure, Haddis clearly addresses the wrong-headedness surrounding it. Writing in his preface to *Yelm Izyat*, Haddis implies that such wrong-headedness is the one common vice that has bedeviled the cross-section of the contemporary society. He perceives the social system as a thoroughly corrupted

and deeply hierarchic one where a few brutally impose their will on the underdog masses. If he refers to those who do not belong to the mainstream nobility striving to climb up the social ladder, as shown above, he only means to illustrate that society is being pressurized to value what is otherwise a disvalue. In a nutshell, what we have here is the disapprobatory attitude of the author towards the fact that the power structure circulating in the culture depicted romanticizes men of title by idealizing their title as something to be envied.

What we are shown in all this is the nature of the moral milieu functioning on authoritarianism as a moral principle. It must be noted that authoritarianism according to moral philosophers, is a distinct moral principle that justifies human conduct by appealing to a variety of forms of authority: humans, customs, conventions, and religious entities (Mothershead, pp. 79-80, 95). As a matter of fact, it is the functions of such forms of authority combined that are illustrated in the aspects of the panoramic view discussed above. Accordingly, the nobility are human authorities soliciting the support of the customs and social conventions as well as that of the church. Notably we have seen cases where the church upholds the view that class distinctions are more of a matter of fate than choice. This kind of belief together with the universal prevalence of ignorance and superstition constitute the overall fatalistic outlook of life. On the whole, the moral milieu depicted in Haddis's novels is characterized by moral provincialism, an integral part of which is the moral principle of authoritarianism. Hence, as can be seen from the illustrations above, Haddis's panoramic view of life gives us a prism through which the moral life of the society is depicted.

Precisely, it is in this connection that we find the author applying his talent to a human end. Applying talent to a human end with Haddis, as with any genius

worth the name, is a process comprising two mutually inclusive tasks: understanding the human situation and creating an ethical standard on the basis of which antihuman situations can be challenged. His perception of the human situation is that of trampled humanity; for this is what can be discerned from the entire system he depicts as characterized by sheer authoritarianism and injustice. In his ethical imagination, Haddis is uniquely capable of seeing that the system deservedly lies in wait for disintegration or abolition. To this effect he has the following prophetic words put in one of his favorite characters' mouth:

*The structure of our social system, including its traditions, customs and laws, is by no means a living system. It is rather made up to function like a pile of stones with those on the top heavily weighing down upon the ones beneath, and the latter supporting the former. In due course of time the ones beneath will inevitably give way thus inducing the whole bastion or edifice cascading. Lest this should happen, it is necessary to establish a living system becoming of man (Fiqir Eske Meabir, p. 122).*

But this is not all. Haddis has a clearly defined ethical standard demonstrated in the actions and reactions of his characters. His protagonists representing the oppressed and the marginalized sections of their societies constitute the essence of their creator's perception of what is human and normal in view of their situation. Providing their reactions to their antagonists' authoritarian positions, which are in fact types of their counterparts in reality, the protagonists are seen by and large acting on the principle of determinism. That is to say, determinism, which is a moral principle with appeal to causal factors (Mothershead, pp. 77-79, 93), accounts for the justification of the protagonists' moral gestures. Ultimately then, it is such gestures that the author uses as the basis of the moral visions of his works. And this is what the following section attempts to examine.

Before I conclude this section, however, I wish to add a few more points concerning the author's artifact in expressing his empathy for his heroes and

heroines against the backdrop of the moral milieu, which is rather hostile to them.

Haddis, in a manner that recalls Tolstoy's technique<sup>7</sup>, has a distinct way of rendering his characters, particularly his protagonists, as being at one with themselves, nature and the world. This is specifically true of Seblewongel of *Fiqir Eske Meqabir*, Tilahun and Sofi of *Wonjelegnaw Dagna*, as well as Demeqech of *Yelm Izyat*. Sebelewongel, for example, on one occasion gets into a pensive mood as she reflects on her coming of age before getting married. By way of revealing the narrator's heightened empathy for her, Seble's predicaments are picturesquely described through juxtapositions and contrasts with the free and blissful natural world around her (p.92). Sitting in the vast compound of her parents, she watches the natural world about her: plants of varied sorts thriving, blooming and bearing fruits; butterflies darting from flower to flower; and even Habtish, her slave attendant, flirting about with Gebre. Everything she sees evokes a blissful sense of oneness with this free natural world. Yet on considering her own predicaments of being denied the joy of love and marriage, which is the making of her snobbish parents, she becomes deeply saddened. She is saddened because she realizes that she is denied the very things in the natural order of life.

Being at one with oneself, nature and the world in Haddis's novels can also be observed in his delineation of love and friendship. In all his novels we see him extensively dwelling on hospitality and on the genuine concern and care of true friends. His major characters, in particular, enjoy ample solicitude from friends and associates, and that has two important purposes in the whole scheme of the narratives. One is to provide a source of solace for those in some sort of conflict involving moral gestures. The other is to prescribe positive responses to the authorial approbatory attitudes toward the characters' gestures.

Furthermore, Haddis positively refers to history by way of drawing a contrast between heroes and villains. In *Wonjelegnaw Dagna* and *Yelm Izyat* we have lengthy descriptions of battles between Ethiopia and Italy where mean motives of villains are juxtaposed with those of heroes. In the former novel, for example, a whole chapter entitled "Satan is unfailingly present in holy places" (p.135ff.), renders an analogy by depicting the protagonist's "foe of a friend" ambushing him at the very spot where one of those fierce battles had been fought. The point driven home is that the hero is stalked while he is out on a mission of redeeming victims of injustice.

Finally, one very significant aspect of Haddis's artifact, which is also an aspect of his panoramic view, is his aesthetics. Perhaps in no other works in the literature is this aspect more significant. In a manner that reminds one of Kant's views of aesthetics<sup>8</sup>, we see Haddis's novels interspersed with aesthetic aspects of life. It is that Kantian principle of art being subservient to life that we see illustrated in all three novels. More often than not, the narrator of each work makes us witness scenes where games are played, poems are recited and music of some sort performed. This is particularly the case where a certain scenic tension occurs. For instance, Seblewongel, who has been in a pensive mood as she reflects on her coming of age before getting married, on her inability to enjoy life for which she even envies her slave attendant, is extricated from that crushing mood by the beautiful melody she hears from Gebre's flute. The function of aesthetics in the novels is thus two-fold: to embalm wounded souls and to break tyranny of tension.

The panoramic view highlighted in this section can be summed up in two ways. One is that Haddis in his portrayal of society at large shows the interdependence of outlook of life and the hierarchical-cum-oppressive nature of the social, cultural and political system as a whole. The other is manifestations or expressions of responses or reactions to some form of oppression, be it at individual, family or communal level. Now that I have given

a modest description of the panoramic pictures in Haddis's novels, in the following section I will proceed to the moral visions treated in them.

### **3.2. Moral Vision in Haddis's Novels**

As can be seen from the preceding section, the mimesis of life constituting Haddis's novels is unquestionably vast. So is true with the moral visions of the works. In perfect keeping with the new-historical critics' assertion about literary texts (see chap. 1.3), Haddis's novels are indeed the very discourses of the moral vision of the periods in which they were written.

The dichotomies of evil and good are clearly defined in the novels. Evil relates to the deprivations that humanity is subjected to due to the social evils characteristic of feudal social system. Good, on the other hand, is that towards which humanity strives to attaining fulfillment in terms of freedom, equality and justice. The human agents who try to make such fulfillments a reality are regarded as part and parcel of the good so much sought after. It is in this sense that Haddis's novels are said to be a trilogy of virtuous couples, in whose moral gestures is illustrated the fact of human striving making a difference in a world where evil forces are preponderant. As such, the novels depict moral visions on a continuum. The distinct visions being self-assertion, quest for justice and triumph of the good over the evil, these roughly correspond to *Fiqir Eske Meqabir*, *Yelm Izyat* and *Wonjelegnaw Dagna*, respectively.

#### **3.2.1. Quest for Self-Assertion and Fulfillment in Fiqir Eske Meqabir**

As has been pointed out above, *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* depicts a moral universe where evil is preponderant. The socio-political system in this world is such that its conventions, values and norms promote and perpetuate the social evils inherent in it. The one comprehensive moral vision of the novel may hence be

expressed as a search for self-assertion, love, truth, and fulfillment in life in a world replete with hate, falsehood, despotism and ignorance.

There is a clear-cut dichotomy between this world and its antithesis represented by the positive characters of the novel: Kassa Damte, Bezabih, Seblewongel and the peasants represented by Abeje Belew form the core group of the positive characters who are in a head-on collision with the system. It is in terms of this major conflict that we shall examine the moral vision of the work.

The socio-political system, with all its manifestations, is embodied by Fitawrari Meshesha. According to Kassa, the most enlightened character among the positive characters, Meshesha is the devil incarnate. Kassa makes no secret of the authorial disapprobatory attitude toward Meshesha when he describes the latter as a living image of the evil spirit that has for centuries subjected many to untold sufferings (pp.116-117, 275).

Our interpreter refers to Meshesha in those scathing terms on a number of occasions, two of which are most prominent. One is when he holds the latter accountable for Seblewongel, his cousin, to have remained unmarried. To Meshesha's unwitting query as to whether there was not a spell on his daughter (Seble) that inhibited her marriage, Kassa emphatically remarks that it indeed has been Meshesha himself, his wife (Tiruaynet) and their father confessor (Aba Mogesse), who together have proven to be as good as a spell on her (p.118). This is aimed at their snobbish pursuit of what they call "noble blood" whenever they try to figure out a fitting man for their daughter. Kassa reiterates that Seble's parents live in a world of not their own but that which belonged to those who had lived centuries before them. And as such he likens them to dogs "that snuff at blood and bones"(p. 119). Kassa's assessment of Meshesha and his entourage is obviously that they are incurably old-fashioned snobs for whom genealogy or family tree is virtually an obsession. And this is

very well illustrated in the following famous conversation between Meshesha and his wife:

*"Surprizing! Isn't it that the ear wouldn't refuse to hear?" would say Fitawarari Meshesha whenever he comes home.*  
*"What else have you heard today, my lord?" would ask his wife Tiruaynet.*  
*"Qegnazmach so and so asked me for Seble's hand for his son."*  
*"Qegnazmach so and so? Whose son is he?"*  
*"Let alone myself even he doesn't know his own father."*  
*"What a huge dishonor!" would say Tiruaynet.*  
*"Girazmach so and so has asked me for Seble's hand, Tiru."*  
*"Whose son is he, my lord?"*  
*"His father is not a human being. He is a peasant."*  
*"How I'd rather have died before hearing this!"*  
*"Fitawarari so and so asked for Seble's hand for his son."*  
*"Whose son is he?"*  
*"His father was a merchant..."*  
*"I wish she had not been born and spared us such insults."*  
*"Balambaras so and so has sent elders to ask for Sebles hand... Ha! Ha! Ha! What a time!"*  
*"Whose son is he?"*  
*"His unworthy father used to have many cows. When the father died he inherited all those cows. Now that his belly has grown big after all the milk he's drunk, he thinks he's become equal with men. So he's come to ask for our daughter's hand..." (Trans-mine, p. 85-86).*

The extent to which Fitawarari's and his associates' snobbish attitude is ludicrous is clearly expressed in the following query that Kassa puts to them:

*If only a sane person (unlike myself, "a lunatic") were to ask you, in what way is your blood different from that of others? Won't your blood stop flowing when you die? Won't it run dry? .... Doesn't your flesh decompose? Doesn't it rot, get infested with worms, or stink? Doesn't your bone get worm -eaten? Doesn't it break or mix with earth?  
(p.119)*

The other key place where Meshesha is referred to as an embodiment of evil spirits(P.275)is in the tensest scene of the novel where he is confronted with what can be regarded as the deadliest challenge to the system he so zealously upholds. The scene involves a threat of rebellion from the peasants, his tenants, if he fails to meet their demands: They want him to lift his impositions

of extra taxes, and of presents and gifts for holidays. As ever, Meshesha is unflinching in his arrogance and callousness. As ever, he is contemptuous toward the tenants and chooses not to heed their threats of rebellion. So he reiterates his disdainful conviction: "A peasant is like an unruly bull. He cannot behave himself unless he is heavily yoked" (p.217). In a nutshell, Meshesha in this and the subsequent scenes is portrayed in his extremely egoistic state pursuing only his own benefits at the expense of his subjects pleading for mercy and compassion, though they later on resort to threat and rebellion.

Those two scenes serve a pivotal function in that they contain the narrative's distinct theses around which the major conflicts and actions converge and unfold thus demonstrating the characteristic traits of Meshesha as a type of the autocratic class he represents. According to Ornstein, all immoralists have a terrifying unspoken logic of their own (p. 262). This is as well true of all villains in Haddis' novels. But with Fitawrari Meshesha the logic gets more outspoken, as he is blatantly braggart about his selfish drives and follies. In his follies, Meshesha is satirized as a hypocrite who goes to war for a matter as good as a slight, and as an arrogant who pays dearly in the hands of the tenants he despises. In the latter case, he goes on a willful rampage hoping that he can thus put down the threatened rebellion. Those very peasants he has likened to "rats that would trot away to their safety when the cat appears"(p.259) capture him naked, a consequence masterfully wrought by Abeje Belew, their ring leader(p.298), following which they take him to court where he is convicted. In the former case, likewise, Meshesha wages war on a Fitawrari Assege for proposing to marry his daughter in a manner fitting a divorcee. If it were not for the church that intervened with its Tabots (Ark of Covenant), a case that considerably serves his vainglorious attitude, the toll it could take would be far-reaching.

As I have pointed out, Fitawrari Meshesha is delineated as a figure typifying members of the class to which he belongs, the feudal lords. His pattern of

thinking, and his mode of expression, is all that of a typical autocrat. In all his bearings, we see him living himself out as one and thus an embodiment of the oppressive system that he upholds. Hence it would only be appropriate to respond to the conflicts involving him and the social class he represents as conflicts on the moral plane.

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Hopefully, sufficient explanation has been given of the moral universe in *Fiqir Eske Meqabir*. The society in which the characters move and operate is one of autocracy with all its elaborate hierarchical system. In such a society children have to peremptorily obey parents even if it is at their own expense, and members of lower classes must accept the wills and whims of their masters even if they are denied their rights as human beings. As a matter of fact, human rights to such a society are both alien and unthinkable. Ethiopia has lived through its medieval period and Haddis depicts a society reminiscent of that period, a period of darkness.

But he had a vision for that society though in retrospect. He casts into relief such sparkling characters as Bezabih, Seblewongel, Kassa Damte and Abeje Belew. As was pointed out earlier, these characters constitute the positive core group pitted against the evil forces in their society.

In the portrayal of Bezabih and Seble the basic moral principle we see at work is the striving of the individual toward self-actualization and self-assertion. This is quite so particularly when we consider the insurmountable risks and challenges they take. It is, therefore, the purpose of this subsection to examine these characters' moral gestures-motives and actions- in the context of their moral universe.

Though coming from different social backgrounds, Bezabih and Seble have the same destiny in terms of having to face the full impact of evil elements in the

feudal social system. In his art, Haddis gives expression to this fact by subtly weaving into the narrative their common background of parental attempts to determine their destinies.

Bezabih's portrayal is one of a youth confronting a moral dilemma. Right from the very beginning of his life, he has been consecrated by his parents to the saints and angels, of course on account of his poor health. Consecration for him, however, comes to mean denial of the joys of life, particularly in his prime days: playing with peers, loving and being loved, marriage and, later on, even career. Therefore, as he advances in age, he realizes that he has to make a choice between serving the Tabots all his life as per the terms of the consecration and living his own life as per his inner calling. After a lot of hesitation, though, he chooses the latter.

Nevertheless, such a choice is unbecoming, for a consecrated individual like Bezabih cannot afford to live in the same community while defaulting the terms of consecration. Hence, Bezabih flees his village looking for a place where he can lead his own life incognito.

Here one must note that Bezabih's choice involves a symbolic defiance to an order of both spiritual and social significance. The name he bears is a reminder of the healings and favors supposedly bestowed upon him by the spiritual agents. Bezabih, however, would not allow even them, let alone his parents (humans), to deny him the essence of his own being by disregarding his will.

Indeed, Bezabih's delineation as such signifies that of an individual trying to break a metaphorical bondage that would otherwise deprive him of the kind of happiness that he could attain by being and acting like himself. In other words, it is an individual's gesture to attain his freedom from a society with suppressive values and even from the spiritual realms that confer blessings upon such values.

From a traditional perspective, Bezabih's move is probably abominable. For it is impious of him to defy the Tabots like that. It is also ungrateful and even selfish of him to have turned down and deserted his aging parents. Considering the fact that both of his parents die as a consequence of his (their only child's) deserting them, there is every reason to hold him responsible for such a tragic turn of events.

However, Bezabih's mode of thinking is to be viewed from a different plane. He fully realizes that he has a life to live as an individual and that this life has its own destiny. He is, therefore, determined to respond to the calling of his life and to go wherever that destiny will take him.

Bezabih's motive and action to that effect mark him as a character seeking to be in full control of his own affairs without leaving himself up to fate and others' manipulations. Put differently, that is an expression of self-actualization and self-assertion. As such we see him not only challenging traditional thinking but also assuming a revolutionary role, if only in its symbolic form.

At this point it would be apt to comment on Taye Assefa's (1986: 142) observation regarding the slackening of the major action of the novel in the first fifteen chapters. Taye is highly critical of this part of the novel and maintains that it is a formal defect. But Haddis' purpose for that would be obvious if one approaches the novel from the perspectives of its moral vision. I would argue that the material presented in those chapters, except in some places where a more rigorous editing may be called for, is essential for the development of Bezabih as the type of character we have examined so far. The socio-religious milieu into which he is projected provides a natural setting for the all-important subsequent act of his consecration. The moral dilemma he undergoes, the choice he ultimately makes and all the events leading to the symbolic dream marking his release from the consecration are all indispensable for the development of the character.

What we witness of Bezabih hereafter is a character fully matured and impeccably living himself out with friends and associates. We see him playing a pivotal role in the demonstration of the values of love and friendship. In his conspicuousness, he easily commands people's attention and has a unique way of infecting them with warmth and trust. That is what accounts for the fact that he easily makes and maintains friends with others. Once he has made friends the latter usually have difficulty to part with him as is the case with Lady Tejitu of the village of Debreworq. Bezabih is also capable of making friends pay scarifies for his safety and well-being. Kassa Damte and Girageta Qelemeworq, for example, sell out their most treasured belongings to offer him money at his time of need.

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For all his strivings to attain freedom, Bezabih finds himself in yet another situation where parental intrusion is even more daunting. True, he has managed to convince himself that that tether of consecration has been broken ever since his parents' deaths and that has been ascertained for him in a symbolic dream (p- 62). Nevertheless, his leg of destiny brings him to Dima, where he finds himself in yet another chain as he falls in love with a girl in the bosoms of a highly possessive snobbish family.

This girl is Sebleworngel, daughter of Fitawrari Meshesha and Lady Tiruaynet. As is evident in the famous conversation quoted in the preceding subsection, Seble's case of repeatedly foiled betrothals becomes a major preoccupation of both the family and the public at large. A paragon of virtue and beauty though she is, she comes of age before getting married solely because of her parents' excessively high opinion about their family tree. As a result, Seble frustrates and begins to feel she is wasting away. Like Bezabih, she too has not enjoyed the joys of life in her prime days since she has grown up in an imposed isolation from her peer-mates, supposed to be children of ordinary folks.

Reflecting on her predicament Seble considers herself in a much worse condition than Habtish, her slave attendant, whom she even envies for the freedom she enjoys, flirting and playing about with anyone she pleases. It is in the same scene as that that we see Seble being at one with herself and nature. She even considers herself denied things in the very order of nature such as procreation and fertility. For she envisions herself wasting away before enjoying the joy of love and the bloom of marriage. That line of thinking is brought out forcefully amid myriads of images of butterflies, grasses, bushes and flowers thriving and dying, having gone through their natural courses of growth and maturity. How deep and heart rending her feelings are, can be illustrated in her own words:

*It is the same with human life: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age and then death. Their seeds will perpetuate those that have seeds. The seedless ones will end up being trampled in dust and mud.... Just like blooming plants are surrounded by dancing butterflies and humming bees only to be deserted when they shed their petals, so also are human beings abandoned by those who used to surround and admire them in their prime days (Trans. mine, p. 92).*

It is at the apex of her crisis described above that Seble meets Bezabih as her tutor. A son of ordinary folks notwithstanding, Bezabih infects her with his unique warmth and friendship which eventually grows to a passionate love. Following this Seble gets ready to follow Bezabih wherever he goes. But this cannot be easy for her as her father obstinately objects to her falling in love with the man he calls “a scabby issue of a poor peasant”. The following is what she says as she retorts to her father’s scornful remarks concerning Bezabih:

*A peasant, too, is a human being and so is a son of a peasant. Let those who believe that only a progeny of a noble man is worthy and that of a peasant is scum bother themselves about pedigree. As for me, I love this man that you call a son of a peasant. There is no reason for you to insult him just because I (want you to know) that I love him (p.410).*

Here again we have one other courageous gesture of moral significance pursued in search of self-assertion and self-fulfillment. Like Bezabih, she defies her parents, come what may. Like him, too, she defies their gods, for their belief in "noble blood", is as good as a religious devotion. It must be noted as well that Seble's vanishing into the darkness on the eve of her supposed wedding<sup>9</sup>, thus subsequently causing the deaths of her parents, has its parallel in Bezabih's fleeing of his village with the same consequence to his parents. It is this chunk of search for self-assertion that Bezabih and Seble share. Again it should be noted that there is a pattern in that pursuit, something akin to a passage of rite. Bezabih has run away from his parents and their gods; and so has Seble. And this is precisely the endnote that reverberates in the title of the novel "Love unto the Grave".

With all that said and done, it would require of us just a stretch of imagination to conclude that the union between these two brave souls represents a challenge to the social system together with its beliefs and values. The fact that their love starts and thrives under the very roof of Fitawrari Meshesha signifies that there is a germ of the good even in such a society where hate and bigotry are rampant.

But such a germ of the good would require a caretaker and deliverer, so to speak, and it is with respect to this aspect of the novel that Kassa Damte comes into the picture. Kassa Damte, commonly called Gudu Kassa (Kassa the strager) for his radical view invariably taken for lunacy by his community, is the most brilliant character in the narrative and performs the function of an oracle and a seer in this Amharic classic. In a manner in keeping with the visionary scheme of the novel, he is characterized as a man of clear and deep insight into the nature of the society depicted. That is what accounts for his highly critical attitude toward the church and its clergymen, and for his consistent and scathing criticism of Fitawrari Meshesha and the system he upholds. Furthermore, not only does he recognize the moral legitimacy of

Seble's and Bezabih's cause but also offers to arrange their elopement. It is his personal involvement in the latter case that particularly shows Kassa in the light of a caretaker and deliverer of the good represented by Seble's and Bezabih's love. In those instances, as well as in his taking of a slave girl (Inquopa) for a wife, Kassa is brilliantly shown to live up to his conviction.

In Kassa's intellectual physiognomy, we also have a vivid representation of the spirit of enlightenment although we may wonder how he has attained it. Habtish and Seble are the most affluent beneficiaries of his enlightening thoughts. The former is grateful to him for opening her eyes thus letting her to see her own predicaments as a slave woman, if not capable of changing them (see p.313f.). If it weren't for Kassa's insightful ideas and views, Seble would remain as ignorant and naive as any of her fellow village girls. Of course, she has a discerning mind in her favor, but that only entitles her to the benefits of Kassa's brilliant ideas, as is also the case with Bezabih to some extent. So Kassa serves as a guiding principle, a catalyst for her to also realize her own need for self-assertion to which is added her own natural courage to pursue it even unto death.

To conclude, what Haddis portrays in *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* is a spirit of rebellion and defiance against a moral milieu of which basis is authoritarianism. Injustices wantonly committed by human authorities are shown to be the stark reality of the moral milieu. Moral provincialism in the context of the novel is then all about the highly discriminating attitudes, beliefs and thinking patterns of the nobility or the privileged class with respect to members of the lower class or the marginalized sections of the society. Attitudes such as contempt for others are by and large based on limiting morality only to their social group believing that others do not measure up to morality and the benefits it offers. This is what is reflected in the self glory and vanity that characterizes Fitawrary Meshesha and his likes.

Nevertheless, morality is human by nature and thus all human beings are entitled to it and the benefits it offers. What is to be discovered in the spirit of rebellion and defiance on the part of the oppressed and the marginalized sections of the society depicted is simply a moral gesture in keeping with that human tendency. As has been shown in the foregoing discussions, Bezabih and Seble bravely struggle against the tide of insensitive and callous authorities of both humans and customs to assert themselves and realise their dreams. In so doing they brave the tyranny of tradition which, in the guise of loving and caring parents, sought to curb their freedom thus trying to determine their destiny. Although their love is not consummated, both are redeemed in that they have broken free and gone on their way to meet their common destiny which is “love unto the grave”. Likewise, the peasants are shown to have effectively challenged the authorities who have as good as denied the fact that the former have their own purpose to live for. In their moral gesture, the peasants too are redeemed in that they have demonstrated their capacity to say no to the parasitic social system. Such a spirit of defiance characterizing the mood of the 1974 popular revolution, there is every possibility to hold that *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* anticipated the revolution, which did away with the defunct system for once and for all. In short, the moral vision of the novel is all about human striving making a difference and people seeking to be masters of their fate and captains of their souls.

### ***3.2.2. Quest for Justice in Yelm Izyat***

There is no qualitative difference in the treatment of the socio-political settings in Haddis' novels. That is to say, it is the same hierarchical social system depicted with a few leading an invariably parasitic life and the underdog masses subjected to ever-increasing wretchedness and misery. But *Yelm Izyat* has its own uniqueness in that it also deals with an after-effect of a foreign intrusion imposed upon the country by Italian occupation. As such, it depicts a society trying to come to terms with its past and present.

This subsection examines the moral vision portrayed in the novel, which is again enshrined in the motives and actions of the protagonists, Demeqech and Beshah. As we closely follow the narrative account, we discover that these two virtuous characters live for causes or ideals, each unto their calling. Demeqech's calling is living for her child as an ideal mother while that of Beshah is one of justice and of dedication for the cause of genuine freedom for his country, which was just emerging out of the ravages of the war against the Italian occupation. Nevertheless, owing to the working of vicious elements inherent in the society, each gets disillusioned about their callings, which they have pursued selflessly. They are redeemed, however, as they join in a union of marriage, which seems to signify the celebration of their virtues and ideals.

"Yelm Izyat", as the title of the novel, is taken from a poem by Demeqech. In the poem (p.493f.), she reflects on the heart-rending disillusionment she experiences following her son's going abroad on a scholarship, deserting her. He goes away without even bidding her goodbye, for his scruples will not allow him after he has disowned her in public. Tekeste (the son) does this in a bid to make up for his sense of guilt following his blatant claim that his father is a man of distinguished title, a Dejazmach. "Yelm Izyat" is basically a word formed by compounding and it means "plenty in a dream".

We meet Demeqech in the beginning of the novel as a very young girl of nine whose hands are given in marriage to a certain Tamirat, a man of fortune. Tamirat has money but not a title after which he hankers so much so that he tries to acquire it, at least for his offspring-to-be, by getting married to someone from a noble family. Her noble parents, poor that they are, allow him the marriage on the tradition known as "Madego". This tradition requires the husband not to make love to such a young girl until she grows to a reasonable level of maturity. Not heeding the terms of that tradition, Tamirat deflowers her and subjects her to repeated torturous sexual assaults. At about 12 or 13 she bears him a child. Wishing not to go back to that brute of a husband,

Demeqech, together with her child, runs away from her parents' house (where she has been taken care of) first to the wilderness and then to Debremaqos. Through some good people she manages to get to Addis Ababa, where she takes a job as a maidservant in a certain Dejzmach Assefa's house. There she finds an abode where she feels she can safely stay beyond the reaches of her husband, the hatred of whom subsequently forms and shapes her negative attitude toward all men. This attitude is strengthened by amorous advances that other men make on her even in that respected compound: As she grows into a full-blooded young woman of extraordinary beauty and charm she becomes a centre of attraction for all sorts of men, both young and old, officers and ordinary folks. In all this, Demeqech has always been keen on keeping her integrity as a chaste woman.

Demeqech also faces a tremendous challenge from her mistress, Lady Tsige. The latter pesters Demeqech because of her child, whom she bitterly hates claiming that he has been fattened on her butter and milk. For all her troubles, Demeqech raises her child with undivided attention, which accounts for his bouncy health and plump growth. The heaviest price she pays for his sake is getting arrested and flogged through Tsige's connivance as she accuses her of stealing her jewels. Even after she manages to get Tekeste enrolled in a boarding school, which she does by pleading with the minister of education, Demeqech's undivided love and care has always been solidly with him. In the face of all those vicissitudes the heroine remains as adamant as ever, quite invincible. But her courage and strength are put to test when she learns of Tekeste's sneaking out of her sight and life in the manner briefly stated above.

As can be seen from the synopsis provided above, we have a vivid delineation of a courageous young girl growing from strength to strength through vicissitudes of life. In the picture he renders thus, Haddis dwells on two major moral issues of social significance. One concerns the plight of women in the Ethiopian context. To be born a female child in the Ethiopian setting has its own

setbacks, and it is this dire aspect of social life that is illustrated in the life of Demeqech. Deep in her psyche Demeqech realizes that she lives and moves about in a world of hostile men. Almost all the atrocities she suffers come to her in the hands of men. In his art, Haddis shows the seriousness and universality of the problem in the accounts he gives of her father's, husband's and son's involvements in her sufferings. It is her father who marries her off at that unnatural age; it is her husband who subjects her to the ordeal of sexual harassment again at the same tender age; it is her son who inflicts her with a heart-rending pain with his ungratefulness. On the whole, Demeqech finds herself a victim of men including those supposedly close to her heart.

Needless to say, this is a social problem with a strong relevance even to date. In her predicament, Demeqech would have been just one of the multitudes of girls and women driven to prostitution and street life by cruel husbands or callous parents. The narrator gives us a clear insight into this situation through the consciousness of a character in a high place, the minister of education with whom Demeqech pleads regarding schooling for her child:

*“So you’re one of the sacrifices offered for our harmful practices” said the minister fixing his eyes on Demeqech. At the moment, though, it was not just her that he was looking at but the multitudes of children all over Ethiopia that were subjected to similar practices (p. 133).*

The extent to which the problem worried Haddis is revealed in his extensive treatment of it in a separate chapter titled “Finote Dihinet”(pp.316-347). As for the protagonist, however, she is spared this kind of life owing to the strength of her character: her integrity as a chaste woman and her love and devotion for her child.

The other major moral issue of social significance relates to the state of the educated youth. Considering the selflessness with which Demeqech loves and

cares for Tekeste and looking at the ungrateful gestures in his bearings, including the manner he parts with her, one can also find how Haddis tackles a social issue of long standing importance. To be specific, this is the issue of disillusionment bound to be caused by alienation and identity crisis inherent in the contemporary educational system. Tekeste, in his school, lives and learns with many students whose parents are titled. In trying to emulate their life style, he begins to look down upon his mother, even disowns her, and purports that his father is a man of a distinguished title, a Dajazmach. Interestingly, this marks not only a tragic turning point in the mother and child relationship but also a beginning of what worse is yet to come. The latter is Tekest's total disappearance as he goes abroad, of course on a scholarship tour, without even letting his mother know of his intentions because of his guilty conscience for having disowned her. In that role Tekeste epitomizes a generation lost in a moral dilemma not knowing how to respond to the quest of identity. In other words, in the artifact of the novel, Tekeste's act becomes a symbolic gesture of treacherous acts on the part of the contemporary youth exposed to modern education. In the final analysis, the whole scenario is ascribed to the nature of the contemporary educational system which is characteristically alienating. This is what is implied in Beshah's analysis of the system in question (p.380f.). Accordingly, the kind of education then in place has made its subjects develop contemptuous attitudes towards all the good things that they, in principle, should cherish. In Beshah's words: -

*----- This is what the "ferengies" (foreigners') education has brought upon us (members of) the present generation and the contemporary society: running away from ourselves! Running away by hurling behind us our history, civilization, culture, customs, traditions; in general, our identity as Ethiopians; running away by severing all our ties with those aspects of our identity.---- . There is nothing that (this generation) would not do not to look like fellow folks and to resemble the foreigners. (To that effect) they would pay anything, even to the point of going bankrupt in terms of spiritual and material wealth----- (p.382).*

In keeping with what the author claims in his preface to this novel, his protagonists here, as well as those in the other two, exemplify the sort of those rare people in society who boldly defy the injustices inherent in the contemporary social system. His portrayal of such characters demonstrates that they play the said role as they intuitively react to suppressive and hostile situations. This is precisely the case with Demeqech, who has always sought to preserve and assert herself.

While her striving to assert herself marks a continuation of the same moral gesture from *Fiqir Eske Meqabir*, the recognition of her predicaments constitutes an implication for the quest of justice woven into the narrative scheme of *Yelm Izat*. In an elaborate manner that shows the author's empathy for his heroine, the narrative offers a three-phase account of her falling victim to the wrong-headedness related to the phenomenon of "noble descent". As shown in the synopsis, phase-one covers her helpless situation where she, at the age indicated, is given as a price for the exchange of wealth and status between her parents and her suitor. Her resolute escape from that torturous ordeal of early marriage marks only the beginning of her striving to be a master of her destiny. In phase-two we find her in a position of a person of "noble descent" having fallen on hard luck. Resolutely bent on her pursuit of self-assertion, she is shown sustained by her fighting spirit throughout her long-drawn and strife-ridden stay in Dejazmach Assefas' household in Addis, where she continues to be subjected to cruel treatment not only in the hands of amorous men but also in the hands of a cruel mistress. The third phase of her predicament involving the issue of descent concerns the fact of her being disowned by her son, who purports to be an offspring of a "Dejazmach".

In her role of defying the *status quo* involving the issue of "noble descent"- with all implications of authoritarianism and moral provincialism it embraces- Demeqech is shown as suffering not only in spite of but also because of her

ancestry. Quite clearly, she bears a secret contempt for the wrong-headedness surrounding the idea of ancestral link, and this is demonstrated by her total oblivion to the fact of her coming from a family that prides itself on pedigree.

The worth of the price that the heroine pays is to be seen not only in terms of her striving to assert herself but also in terms of an ideal mother who consciously lives for her child. Living for others thus emerges as a distinct moral gesture.

If not reciprocated by its subject, this magnanimous living, this self-less love, takes on a more sublime significance. That is why the third phase of Demeqech's predicament marks a new turn of events in the novel. In fact, it represents what is akin to a reversal of fortune at which we enter a transcendental and symbolic sphere. While not ceasing to be a person, the heroine takes on a symbolic representation of "Mother Ethiopia". In his treachery, Tekeste becomes just one of his contemporary citizens who, because of the alienating nature of the education they are exposed to, turn their back on their wretched and miserable country.

It is in this connection that quest for justice as a moral vision of the novel is highlighted. Justice has to be delivered to this "mother nation" after all that she has suffered for her son(s) (and daughters). Who is to deliver the required justice? Of course it is those who fought for her freedom and survival as a nation. Beshah being one of such people, in fact their surrogate, I will now turn to the ideal that his portrayal signifies in the narrative.

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In the novel, we once again have a saga of two virtuous souls whose virtues are refined and strengthened through vicissitudes of life. We have seen Demeqech's case in the preceding paragraphs and now let us focus on Beshah, who also has a calling to live for. His is that of seeing justice and genuine freedom prevail in his country, which was just emerging from the ravages of the war against

Italy. He has gallantly fought against the Italians and, later on, against their remnants and sympathizers. Even after the occupiers were driven out and their lackeys subdued, Beshah had to be engaged in a series of struggles against the nationals who indulged in corruption and injustice. All over the places, he saw foreign nationals secretly dealing with administrative officials and enjoying the fruits of the cause he and his fellow patriots had fought for. Although he could get a lucrative job and keep a family as a well-versed intellectual and honorable patriot, he would not settle for that. In fact, he vows not to get married and settle until after he manages to change the scenario whereby true patriots and nationals have been relegated to the background as second-rate citizens. Subsequently, he decides to take the law into his own hands, organize a clandestine squad under the nickname of "the King of the Darkness", and succeeds in eliminating many key figures considered to be social nuisance. Finally, he lands in prison where he serves a number of years.

As is evident from this brief synopsis, Beshah is a character filled with patriotic fervor. He has a steeled will power which even those harsh circumstances could not bend: After all those ups and downs of life, Beshah remains as adamant as ever. His selfless pursuit of his patriotic vision is revealed in his determination to remain a bachelor until after he sees truth, justice and genuine freedom prevail in his country. This is clearly reflected in the rhetorical question he puts to a friend who urges him to get married: "Am I supposed to get married by abandoning the cause for which I stand, by retracting my vow, and by backsliding from my faith by which I've lived?" (p.410). That is clearly a mark of resolute stance, which is sustained even after a torturous prison life.

All distinctive historical periods have their men. In *Yelmizat*, Beshah clearly represents such men. He is a type - yet an intensified type - an embodiment of the spirit of true patriotism typical of that period. The period in focus being that of transition in the aftermath of the victory over the war of resistance, it was,

however, characterized by a general lack of direction. This meant that it needed visionaries with some sense of direction. Beshah is this sort of man.

Through the access we are given to his consciousness, we learn that Beshah has a comprehensive perception of the the degenerative tendencies insinuating into the fabrics of his society. He has deep insights into the state of contemporary life of which educational system has but alienated the generation from its cultural and traditional moorings. This and his reputation as a champion of the cause of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized accord him a unique status as a visionary.

In view of the fact that the patriot is the most important person in the period depicted, it is appropriate that we have a character of Beshah's caliber in the center of the novel. Having been actively involved in the war and seeing it to the finish line, he thus proves himself to be a patriot of exceptional merit. But patriotism for him should not end there. It should continue until the remnants and associates of the enemy are gone and until justice is done to those victims left to perish in the streets of Addis after the victory they helped to obtain. Beshah bears the beacon of national feeling and pride and his voice is constantly that of quest for justice. Indeed, in his voice reverberate the voices of many contemporary patriots who experienced disillusionments about their similar situations.

The concept of patriotism in the full sense embodied in Beshah's fictional life concerns itself with the general human condition of the time. In his art, Haddis brings this out clearly in terms of Demeqech's predicaments in the latter phases of which we see Beshah deeply involved. This can be illustrated by considering an incident where Beshah attempts to dispense justice on behalf of Demeqech, who has been brutalized by the police following her mistress's false accusation. The charge is that Demeqech has stolen Tsige's jewels worth a huge sum of money. Seeing what the police chief, nicknamed "the black fascist", has

done to her on that account, Beshah vows to himself to avenge Demeqech by getting Tsige's house broken into in a bid to getting her robbed of the treasure in question. But having subsequently discovered that it had already been robbed and sold out, Beshah manages to recover a considerable portion of the proceeds that he offers to give Demeqech, by way of recompense, though she graciously declines to accept. Beshah's rationale here is that the jewels, which he knows had been looted from the wretched people of the then Gamo Gofa province, where Tsige's husband had been a governor (p. 275f), should by no means be a cause for yet another pathetic soul to suffer for it. In short, it is this sympathy and partisanship with the poor and the oppressed that underpins Beshah's moral gesture.

Moreover, this gesture of vengeance on behalf of Demeqech has a much more significant implication for the transcendental and symbolic relationship between the hero and the heroine. The hero being what he is, a patriot of uncommon breed, his act of vengeance on behalf of Demeqech is by no means out of any mean thought. He is rather acting in a manner consistent with his ideal of seeking justice for those helpless victims of injustice including the nation itself, which Demeqech in all her grandeur seems to represent. What is sublime and transcendental about the relationship between the hero and the heroin is, hence, to be seen in what is suggested about the kind of relationship existing between the concepts of patriotism and nationhood. And this is what is reflected in the following text describing a new kind of feeling creeping into Demeqech's thought as she wonders about what Beshah has done when he tried to average on her behalf:

*Then she recalled the wonderful stories that Wube the singer had told her about him, about the patriotic feats he had accomplished acting as an internal agent, as well as fighting in the jungle during the fascist occupation and about what he did in Addis under the name of "the king of the Darkness". The more she thought about those wonderful stories Wube told her about Beshah, together*

*with what he (Beshah) did for her that day, the more she began to see Beshah in a new, in a new wonderful light. All that virility, all that greatness revealed to her that unkempt and disheveled figure of him in a new and totally different form ... (p. 315).*

As can be seen from the accounts above, Beshah's sense of justice is so acute and urgent that he opts to confront "the law of the unlawful" and that by taking the law into his own hands. In the context this notion is brought to bear, Beshah is revealed elucidating a moral principle by which his sense of justice is apparently guided. The point he makes in this connection is simply that the law of the land in the period in question is that of the unlawful providing a cover up for all sorts of heinous crimes imaginable. For Beshah, therefore, taking the law into one's hands is perfectly justified. In his view, evil people in the society are given good names by virtue of which they are exempted from any accountability and hence calling them to account for is only in order. To an elderly friend sensing something unpalatable in his entire notion, Beshah articulates his view as under:

*...On the whole, I will be the last person to disagree with you if both evil deed and its doer were to be (effectively) done away with. But so long as bad deeds in good names prevail along with bad men in good names, it is impossible to abolish only that which is unpleasant to the ear. So what should be done is either to ignore the issue of name altogether and abolish both evil deeds and doers or leaving things as they stand now giving good names to all evil deeds and doers. If you wish, let me tell you something that may cause you a bit of discomfort. In so far as there are evil deeds and doers covered in good names, the fact that there are even worse deeds and doers taking the lesser ones to task will ensure the ultimate elimination of all evil deeds and doers (p. 272).*

Clearly evidenced in this extract is what Beshah is genuinely up to: taking the law into his own hands thus trying to deliver justice which is otherwise hard to come by.

While the entire idea here illustrates a typical case of relativism about what is morally right in the light of the situation in question, it is also important to note that this expresses a refutation of one form of moral provincialism by another. As a matter of fact, countering one form of moral provincialism by another is quite a scenario recurring in the literature depicting anarchic situations that ensue social upheavals and unrests. Bealu's *Ye'Qey Kokeb Tiri* and Tesfaye's *Ye'Burqa Zimita*, as we shall see in part two of this thesis, also bear witness to similar situations where anarchy reigns. This, however, does not detract from the fact that Haddis's hero, as well as Tesfaye's, act out of that acute and urgent desire to see justice done to the social groups they represent.

In his realism, we see Haddis being highly critical of Beshah thus making a tremendous effort to restrain his hero in his manner of struggle and this he does by giving him a spiritual guide in the person of one Mandefro, Beshah's benefactor and mentor. A man of remarkable learning and experience of life, including knowledge of the outside world, Mandefro tirelessly attempts to restrain Beshah, but in vain. For all the fact that he is appreciative of Beshah's zeal and ardor Mandefro perceives in the whole scheme of the struggle that a wrong means is put to use to attain a just end. This is how he describes it:

*It is not your goal that I call evil. I know your objective; your goal is a good one. But then, even for good ends it is vicious to hit people's nape of neck, to wound, to rob and to kill .My child, a bad way will not lead to a good end. A wrong means meant to achieve a right end would only turn out to be a bullet that kills the sought end. Meaning to achieve a good end through a bad means is like collecting a harvest of grain from a farm of chaff (p217).*

At this juncture, it would be interesting to note that there is a striking similarity between Beshah's characterization and that of Levin in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. The latter's case can be summed up in Lukács's observation: "... when is he (Levin) right? Strictly speaking: never. Tolstoy portrays his favorite's invariable errors of judgment with merciless incisiveness"<sup>10</sup>.

While we may as well ask the same question about Beshah, we should be mindful of the fact that his moral vision looms larger than his errors. Haddis seems to justify Beshah on the grounds that to err is not only human but also permissible of a man of action with pure and lofty motives. As he heavily gravitates toward that justification the author celebrates the moral virtues of his favorite. In deed, it is this celebration that is expressed in the marriage between Beshah and Demeqech, in whose portrayals we have parallelisms executed with respect to such aspects as living for ideals, making sacrifices, growing in strength through suffering and experiencing disillusionment.

Apparently out of his empathy for both Demeqech and Beshah, the author seems to have chosen to treat them with a poetic justice. And this is what can best explain the dovetailing of their lives at the end of the narrative. That this is clearly the case can be seen in the narrative structure where Beshah comes into her life (as a lover) just in time when her passionate relationship with her child begins to fall apart. Both have been subjected to disillusionment, each in their own way, because of vicious elements in their society. Their predicaments thus being duly appreciated, they are given to each other as complementing for what they have missed, lost or failed to attain: Demeqech her son and Beshah his dream of seeing true justice prevail. It would be far-fetched to argue whether or not the substitutes are valid. But the narrative concern that they both deserve some sort of solace or conciliation is clearly evident.

It is also important to point out the symbolic significance of the marriage between these two virtuous characters. Judging by the virtuous attributes with which they are depicted, Demeqech represents Ethiopia, which belongs to the truly deserving sons and daughters, the true patriots represented by Beshah. This appears to be signified by Beshah, with all his tender care and zealous guardianship, fitting in the slot that is left by Tekeste, the treacherous son. In

fact we are given a foreshadow to that end where Beshah all along has been nursing secret hatred for Tekeste as a rival of his love for Demeqech(p. 385)

Regarding Demeqech's representation, her virtues such as fortitude, prudence and enduring love are quite an indication to that effect. More importantly, the fact that her predicaments have their root cause in the social evils inherent in feudal system is a constant reminder of the typical features of feudal Ethiopia. In as much as every aspect of life in a feudal society is permeated by issues related to social hierarchy and its accompanying adversities, so also is Demeqech affected by the lingering effects of issues related to pedigree.

In asserting herself as a proud and brave woman, Demeqech does so with a conscious view to preserving herself for her beloved son. As such, she rises to a higher level of moral integrity at which she meets Beshah, who also has all the while lived for the ideal of fulfilling others' desire for justice, including that of Demeqech herself. In other words, in their selfless pursuit for their ideals, these two meet in ascent thus rendering their marriage much more than an ordinary marriage between ordinary people. Considering such sublime nature of the hero's and the heroin's portrayal, there is every reason to hold that the marriage is larger than life. The fact that Beshah, with all his patriotic zeal and fervor, comes in to Demeqech's life just in time Tekeste goes out , brings the symbolic significance of the marriage into a sharp focus. With Beshah filling in the slot left by Tekeste, we have Ethiopia symbolically restored to its legitimate subject: a treacherous citizen giving way to a true patriot. This is, in essence, an expression of a vision of justice for a nation that has suffered so much in its past and present.

### ***3.2.3. Triumph of the Good over the Evil in Wonjelegnaw Dagna***

Unlike in the first two novels by Haddis Alemayehu, in *Wonjelegnaw\_Dagna* we have a virtuous couple married at the outset. Tilahun Feyisa and Sofi are

university students of law and education respectively. Tilahun is dismissed from the university as a result of a sinister act by an otherwise intimate friend, Wondyirad. The latter conspires with an expatriate instructor whom he causes, apparently by bribing him, to give Tilahun a failing grade in the course he offers. As he later admits to Tilahun, Wondyirad's intent is to avenge Sofi for having despised him thus turning down his offer of love and marriage. Under the circumstances, though, the two lovers hastily get married and decide to go to a remote part of the country and work on the land. For, although a "foe of a friend" has caused Tilahun's dismissal, another friend by the name Wubetu has written him to say that a vast and fertile plot of land is awaiting him in Yeki, in the former province of Illubabore.

At their marriage, the couple take a matrimonial vow in a self-styled manner, and the essential part of their pledge is commitment to their shared ideal of serving the people, particularly the disadvantaged folks out there in that part of the country. Looking at the context of the vow, we have every indication that the virtuous couple are about to go on a mission of putting right what has gone wrong due to the working of vicious elements of society. In *Wonjelegnaw Dagna*, therefore, we have an Adam and Eve, not of the sinful sort of the Genesis, but the virtuous ones setting out to extricate society from the clutches of evil forces. As is seen in the case of Wondyirad trying to ruin them, the couple are victims, yet setting out on a mission of redeeming victims. And this is the most outstanding feature of their characterization.

They start their mission on the eve of their departure for Yeki by coming to the aid of a group of countrymen they accidentally see being stripped of their money by pickpockets. Particularly Tilahun is shown as a conscientious and brave fighter with a view to seeing justice done. Once they are in Yeki, they virtually wage a war on an array of social vices such as ignorance, disease, poverty, and exploitation. To cater for the various needs of the community, they open a school, a health center, and set up a mill. They do all in their power to

transform the lives of the indigenous people by launching a variety of innovative and community-based development activities such as irrigation, harnessing of river water and introducing of new methods of farming.

The hero and the heroine thus live up to the commitments they have pledged and are, therefore, extolled as having done things on par with miracles. But for people like Girazmach Dagnachew, the governor of the district later promoted to Qegnazmach, they turn out to have indulged in wanton and illegal activities enough to evoke anathema. The governor takes the whole situation as having a devastating effect on his authority. Consequently, Girazmach Dagnachew not only officially bans them from carrying out their developmental activities but also tries to ruin them: He gets Tilahun arrested and tries to rape Sofi with an intention of subsequently making her his concubine. Girazmach Dagnachew is notorious for this kind of atrocity, as he has done the same to his current wife, Tsige. The latter was the wife of a teacher, Tilahun's namesake. Finally, though, it so happens that Sofi wounds him fatally as he tries to rape her, and Tilahun finishes him as he tries to kill him.

With the couple having traveled from place to place under pseudonyms as fugitives to evade arrests, they finally end up in Addis, where Tilahun, still in disguise, presides over the murder case as a chief judge. His namesake, Tilahun Feyisa, having been arrested and charged with the murder case, Tilahun the judge rescues him by stepping down from his seat of judgment. The judge now turned criminal, and thus the significance of the title of the novel, is in turn rescued by Balambaras Gudeta Rago, who, representing the constituency of Yeki, arrives just in the nick of time. The voice of the people is described as that of God and on that strength Tilahun is released as a free man.

*Wonjelegnaw Dagna* is a utopia which the author uses to express his vision for change and progress of his country. Haddis seems to have the conviction that

such a vision can be attained if agents of change and progress are at once conscious and conscientious moral agents. That is why he puts Tilahun and Sofi at the center of his narrative. As committed people with university education, we see them challenging established orders of religious, social and cultural nature. And therein lies again the novel's moral vision.

From the religious perspective, the matrimonial vow they take at their marriage has a unique significance. As they take the vow, they do it in the presence of no one else but just the two of them standing in front of a painting (sketch) called "Qess Engziabiher" (Rev. God). Apart from giving the atmosphere an air of solemnity, this self-styled gesture seems to have a significance of showing the bride and the bridegroom as being innovative about marriage rituals where priests are routinely required to officiate. The philosophy involved in this case is that it does not matter who is present at such a time but the promise -involving not only the two as husband and wife but also their shared idea- given and taken. What is left out is just a matter of decorum to which they do not seem to attach any value.

What is more, given the order of the church, in this manner of the couple's bearing one can discern, something akin to blasphemy or even atheism, which was in the vogue at the time when the novel was published. Then socialism was having its hay day in Ethiopia when the power of the people was openly preached and extolled. Much stronger indications to that effect can be cited in a number of places. In one instance, for example, we see Sofi lapsing into a contemplative mood upon hearing the people seeking to avenge even God for their miserable life, as well as for the failure of crops. Sofi feels very strongly that the people's anger should be taken seriously. Indeed, the couple takes it seriously as they subsequently distribute their own land to some of them. Also toward the end of the narrative we have a reference to the voice of the people equated to the voice of God (p. 577f.). And it is the voice of the people that

ultimately counts in the release and absolution of the couple after the homicide they have committed.

The challenge Tilahun and Sofi pose to the political *status quo* is an open secret. All the development activities they perform concretely illustrate the fact that the administrative system with such inept officials as Girazmach Dagnachew Firisa is just a farce. Dagnachew's fear and furry that the whole scheme is meant to undermine his administration is not at all beside the issue. Exposing the ineptness of such officials is indeed part and parcel of the whole scheme, if not the only purpose.

Through his portrayal of the couple in the manner described above, the writer also expresses his conviction that the educated youth can redeem their country provided they have the vision, the commitment and moral integrity. The moral integrity with which they are characterized is in particular such that requires a thorough assessment of one's attitude toward education whereby a courageous decision is to be made to genuinely respond to the assessment made. Sofi speaks for the writer when she says that education is just a means of survival, not an end in itself. The implication in the context is that education is a tool by which society's life can be transformed. In a country where education is, by all practical means, regarded as a means of pomp and self-glory, Sofi's idea should be considered quite revolutionary. What is more, she and her husband live up to their conviction by setting a rare example of themselves. And that is the point the author drives home.

Moreover, we are given insight into how pernicious a view some educated people have about their role. In an argument he is engaged with his friend Wubetu on the issue, we hear the latter expressing contentment with his role as a loyal and servile civil servant to whoever is successful in power and authority. As for the unfortunate who are made victims of injustice and

exploitation (as is the case with Yeki's indigenous people), Wubetu maintains that it is a lot they deserve for failure in life. For him survival of the fittest is a highly treasured principle, and those who are not fit in the struggle are likened to the weeds in the crop field doomed to crush and turn into fertilizers upon which the successful ones are nurtured to ever more growth and success. That is why Wubetu is derisive about the visions, ideals and dreams held and lived for by people like Tilahun and Sofi. For him these are empty talks of the youth right from schools, green people with no experience of life.

In this polemical episode, Tilahun characterizes his friend as an apostate. He describes him as a man with two souls: one for his former progressive minded self and the other for his present self. In their school days Wubetu was matchless for his articulation of progressive views and ideas. But now he has made a u-turn and embraced such a dangerous, even Machiavellian view. Here Haddis addresses a real issue on the ground: the issue of new graduates coming out into society with all the zeal, enthusiasm and altruism to serve, but gradually turning and shifting to the reverse, of course, under pressure exerted by society.

All said and done, the most persistent moral vision of *Wonjelegnaw Dagna* can be termed as the triumph of the good over the evil. Clearly, the good is represented in the motives, actions and gestures of the virtuous couple. As shown above, Tilahun and Sofi go on a mission of changing the life of the indigenous people of Yeki for the better. Through their exemplary life, ingenuity and innovativeness they considerably succeed in doing so, and that against all the odds. Determined as they are to, even selflessly, pursue their goal of bringing about change and progress, the couple prevail over all the odds they encounter. While this includes the most daunting challenges that come to them from the district administrator's malicious attitude towards their otherwise highly commendable accomplishments, the manner in which they deal with him is accorded a special significance in the scheme of the novel. Indeed, they

kill him ostensibly in self-defense for which there seems to be every justification. What is more important is, however, that his death in the hands of his subjects signifies the triumph of the good over the evil. According to Balambaras Gudeta, who clearly sees this significance, what the couple did in eliminating the villain by far surpassed their accomplishments in terms of working towards the much sought progress and change. In his words: "For, in the interest of the people of this country, there can be no greater exploit than getting rid of a villain of Dagnachew's sort ..., your act of eliminating him is a feat no one else could have accomplished."(p.414). That this is by no means a whimsical view of an individual is shown through the couple's winning of the murder case brought against them toward the end of the narrative. It is worth noting that the story extends beyond the killing incident to show how good the triumphant good is. To judge by the dramatic ending of the narrative where the protagonist Tilahun Feyisa steps down from his judgment seat to stand in the podium of the convicted murderer, his name sake, the narrative appears to fully justify the killing. Here, moreover, we see the same Tilahun Feyisa we have seen in the beginning coming to the aid of the countrymen he saw being pickpocketed. Always intent on seeing justice done, Tilahun once again is shown applying the same yardstick even against himself. For he cannot afford to see the wrong person take the blame he is supposed to take. As for him, he leaves himself up to the conviction that he has done the right thing in terms of helping the people and even in ridding of a villain like Dagnachew.

## Summary and Conclusion

As has been pointed out in the introduction to this first part of this thesis Haddis's novels portray moral visions on a continuum. The distinct visions being self-assertion, quest for justice and triumph of the good over the evil, they generally correspond to *Fiqir Eske Meqabir*, *Yelm Izyat* and *Wonjelegnaw Dagna*, respectively. Self-assertion in *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* features as a natural reaction of the protagonists acting in a determined manner to ensure their own freedom to attend to such intimate desires as loving and choosing a mate as is the case with Bezabih and Seble and to refuse to be exploited as is the case with Fitawrari's tenants. As shown in the second section of this chapter, all these act defiantly against the suppressive feudal system, the universal moral principle of which is authoritarianism of both humans and customs. Self-assertion as a form of reaction continues into *Yelm Izyat* where a small girl defies her parents' callous decision subjecting her to live in a torturous life following her marriage at a very tender age. We find quest for justice to be another form of reaction in the same novel depicting Ethiopian society just emerging out of the ravages of the war of resistance against the Italian occupation. In this respect we have Beshah portrayed as a true patriot with all his vigour and zeal to see justice done, for he cannot tolerate the flagrant miscarriage of justice that victimized the true patriots who should have been rewarded. Again, this latter item goes into the third novel *Wonjelegnaw Dagna*. Here we have a learned couple quitting their university education to serve the people in a remote part of the country. Their service involves fighting elements of social evil such as ignorance, disease, poverty and exploitation. The time setting of this latter novel being that of budding capitalism in Ethiopia, just a few years after the war, exploitation of the rural people by a few propertied is particularly shown as aggravating the condition of life for the people. The couple thus find themselves

pitted against the newly emerging exploitative class whose interests are embodied in the district administrator, the villain that works towards their ruin. With the couple managing to eliminate him, of course, in self-defense, their act is considered just even in the view of the law of the land. Their triumph is thus to be celebrated as a triumph of the good over the evil.

Finally, while Molvaer's (1997: 150) assertion that Haddis's novels are a trilogy in time is a point well taken, I would argue that this claim would be much more relevant if we approach the novels as a trilogy of those distinct moral visions on a continuum. This is because those forms of reaction to the moral milieu that prompt them have something definite to say about the period in which they are set. Accordingly, self-assertion in *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* signifies the fact that, however extreme and severe the suppressive nature of the feudal social system may be, it cannot bend the human spirit of freedom. It is the progression and enhancement of this vision that we find in the quest for justice addressed in *Yelm Izyat*. For the individual's quest of self assertion, also pursued by Demeqech of the same novel, is merged with quest for justice oriented towards ensuring and securing one's legitimate right to the benefits of freedom and independence for which one has fought. Last but not least, it is the culmination of the visions depicted in those novels that we have in the triumph of the good over the evil featuring in *Wonjelegnaw Dagna*. In a word, Haddis's trilogy depicts those distinct moral visions on a continuum ranging from genuine and positive concerns about the self to concerns for others and culminating in the desire to see the triumph of the good over the evil.

## NOTES

1. In his M.A. Thesis entitled *Haddis Alemayehu as a Social Critic* (1987), Tsegaye asserts that the author has no vision for the future (pp. 30, 57). The thrust of Tsegayes thesis being the author's role as a social critic (p. 29), one would argue that the author cannot be a social critic without having a vision for the future. Yet, it goes without saying that Haddis has a clear vision for the society that he depicts, and it is this fact that Taye Assefa in his PhD dissertation *Form in the Amharic Novel* (1986), acknowledges in the opening sentence of his chapter on *Fiqir Eske Meqabir*. In his words: "This very popular novel represents a panoramic picture of traditional Ethiopian society with a prophetic vision of change and a defiant voice that speaks out against feudal despotism, exploitation and ignorance (p. 142).
2. In his PhD dissertation, *Realism in the Amharic Novel* (1982), Fiqre Tolosa states that Haddis, despite his idealism, has managed to reflect some of the major contradictions of feudal Ethiopia realistically. As such Fiqre realizes Haddis as portraying contemporary reality by means of typical characters acting under typical circumstances (p. 290).
3. See No 1. above
4. "Intellectual physiognomy", according to Lukács in his *Writer and critic* (1978), is a factor in characterization whereby a character is rendered a type while retaining his individuality. In such rendition "the total personality of each character is synthesized and exemplified through his mode of thinking, in his mode of self expression, and in his conclusions regarding the subject at hand" (p 150). An artist achieves significance and typicality, Lukács writes further, in his characterization only when he successfully exposes the multifarious relationship between the

character traits of his heroes and the objective general problems of the age thus showing his characters grappling with the issues of the time as their own personal and vital problems (p. 154). If Haddis's, *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* is a realistic novel, it is because of the intellectual physiognomy of his major characters and Kassa Damte is only one of these.

5. See Wallis Badge's (1932) *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menelik I* (pp. xvii-xviii).
6. A high ranking traditional title.
7. Writing of Levin of Tolstoy's *Anna Kerenina*, Wasiolek, in his *Tolstoy's Major Fiction* (1978), states that Levin "is concrete being who is at one with himself, those about him, and the physical world about him" (p. 161). This aspect of craftsmanship that Wasiolek calls "some brilliant stylistic stroke" (P. 160) is amazingly true of Haddis who also renders his characters in a similar fashion.
8. See chapter 2, section 2.
9. In defiance of her parents' decision to give her hands in marriage to a nobleman of her father's age, she runs away on the eve of her wedding.
10. For that, Lukács in his *Writer and Critic* (1978: 151) maintains that Levin is clearly delineated with an intellectual physiognomy.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **MORAL PROVINCIALISM AND CONFLICT BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW IN *ADEFRIS***

Adefris is the protagonist of Dagnachew Worqu's Amharic eponymous novel (1962: E.C). A final year university student, he goes to Debresina where he is assigned to work in national service. Intent on getting used to the area, he gets there ahead of time with a group of relatives led by Tisso, his uncle. The latter is a professional judge assigned to the area to preside over local litigations. The host to the guests being Assegash, a prominent landlady residing in Aramaya, a small village near Debresina, the rest of the crew include Woldu (Assegash's brother) Akalat (Tisso's sister and Adefris' mother), Frewa (Tisso's daughter), Belay (Woldu's son) and Kibret (an artist and Adefris's friend).

The moral vision of the novel centers about the protagonist's behaviors and actions against traditional values. He is shown up to be a mere alien. In his art, Dagnachew portrays Adefris as a man who thinks high of himself on account of his education. But his education is put to test in almost every gesture he makes in his confrontations with the society and its members: in his responses and reactions to the values that the members of the society adhere to. The major concern of the novel being one of conflict between the old and the new, its moral vision can be best approached by considering the hermeneutics of tradition and values offered in the novel as well as by examining the protagonist's position with regard to the way of life thereof.

One may wonder if there can be such a thing as hermeneutics of tradition and values. Indeed there is and the whole concept can be construed as a method by which we can draw out the significance of tradition for present actions i.e. for our life in present circumstances (McLean, 1992:110). Hermeneutics involves interpretation of values and is as such a creative unveiling of the content of

tradition in such a manner that it can have a bearing on our present as well as future actions (Ibid., 112). As one engages in this process of interpretation, be it in reading texts or in dialoging with others, one has to necessarily be aware of one's horizon as well as that of others. A horizon in the process is "a vantage point of a mind which in principle is open and mobile, capable of being aware of its own horizon and transcending it through acknowledging the horizons of others." (Ibid., 111).

Coming to *Adefris*, we have a clear and conscious attempt made at hermeneutics of traditional values. This is evidenced by the several dialogues in the narrative taking place between the protagonist, representative of the educated younger generation, on the one hand, and Tisso and Woldu, representatives and advocates of the older generation and traditional values, on the other. Owing to the setbacks suffered by the horizons of the two parties involved, however, the whole scheme of dialogues cannot be taken as hermeneutics proper.

In their wistfulness about the past the traditionalists tend to see nothing good in the bearings of the modernists. All they see in them is a threat to their established way of life. The modernists, too, seem to be resolved not to heed their counterparts' position about their traditional values. It is this polarity depicted in the dialogues involving the two contending parties that makes true hermeneutics impossible in the novel, even though the attempt is visibly there.

To put it differently, *Adefris*, in a manner consistent with the new-historical critica's view of literary text (Tyson, 1999: 292), maps the discourse of the time in which it was written. The discourse being that of tradition versus change, the text represents the human experience of the time in terms of interpretation of history as well as tradition from two competing and conflicting perspectives. It is these perspectives that we need to probe into for us to be able to establish the moral vision of the novel. So in order to examine the visions we need to

approach the text from three vantage points, viz, the narrator's, the traditionalists' and the modernists'. The narrators' perspective is valid for the purpose of this study in as much as it offers accounts revealing the moral universe of the characters. In so doing the narrator gives us the very picture of society and life that the contending parties strive either to keep intact or to change according their light and orientation. Therefore, in the following three sections of this chapter an attempt is made to highlight the issues in the stated perspectives on the basis of which the totality of the novel's moral vision is to be determined.

#### **4.1. The Moral Universe of *Adefris***

Examining the moral vision of *Adefris* requires considering the moral universe of its characters. As pointed out by Taye Assefa (1986:185), this universe is characterized by a total state of inertia of life which we find expressed in the unique description on the very first two pages of the novel. In this description of a small village called Qundi, life which is supposedly teeming with activities elsewhere - i.e. in the other parts of the world- is likened to "a murmuring and painfully slow flow of water beneath the lush grass in the open field "(pp 5-6). As a matter of fact, the narrator uses this image as a motif in the description apparently meaning to reinforce the idea of the state of inertia. As part of the whole scheme, the description offers the reader-of course at a considerable risk of boredom- with bare mentions of the very activities that routinely engage the inhabitants of the land. Also merely mentioned are self-same items on the daily meals and drinks, periodic events of fasts and of holidays spread over all the thirty days of the month, common names of people from various ethnic groups, names of the few known rulers (kings) as well as common features of the country's landscapes. All these details in the text are only suggestive in function, signifying sameness of life with its repetitive aspects strongly pointing to a standstill. Taye has made a fairly thorough analysis of the text and this is what he has to say in this context: "It paints a panoramic picture of a

traditional society whose life is pervaded by stagnation”(p.185). The possible boredom that the reader may experience as s/he goes through the description seems to be technically valid as the feeling itself is reckoned with to enhance the universal sense of stagnation thus conveyed.

Also marking the moral universe of the novel is the fact that inequality is the bedrock reality of social relationships. In the society that the novel depicts it is a common belief that people are not equal depending on whether they are born to a noble family or a family of the ordinary folks. Lady Assegash refers to such social distinction when she airs her view that people are by no means equal:

*...Even then! So be it... there are men among men. My child, haven't you heard the saying (that goes) "There is choice wood for the ark of covenant and choice men for appointments"? No, for example, am I going to regard my servants as my equals just because I 'believe' they are created in the image of God? No, my child. Appropriateness demands of one to look and see around as one speaks... (p. 101).*

When it comes to social interaction among people belonging to different social classes, custom would have it that they conduct themselves in manners befitting their status. This is well illustrated in the scene following the descriptive text we have referred to above. Here we have Assegash engaged in a long drawn dialogue with a bankrupt peasant who comes to borrow some measures of sorghum grain. Having been nursing a grudge against the peasant for failing to assist her during the previous harvest season, Assegash is now determined to seize upon the opportunity to get even with him. So in the course of the conversation she avails herself of her rich resource of expressions to make him feel that he is effectively dwarfed by her purported prominence. In her ubiquitous references to God she even enlists divine favor to that effect. At one point for example, she says:

*Yes, you see! You understand now... do you know why you understand now?... it's because God has "conspired" with your mistress against you by striping you off his favor and grace to the effect that your properties and possessions are gone. If only your farm had prospered and you produced much, you would have remained as puffed up with pride as you were (p. 7).*

Assegash thus verbally harasses the peasant with the view to making him feel no sense of self-respect. Even after she, in her crassness, talks him into referring to himself as a "shaggy dog that dies of hunger while others consider him alive" (p. 8), she goes on to sermonize to him as to why she has been so "favored" by God and the king alike:

*You're so much conceited. That is why you're so miserable... Yet, what can you do? 'A cock crows on every dung heap.'... Take me as an example! Yes, God has not denied me his favor, and nor has my (beloved) king grudged me honor. Even then, I'm not proud. How can I be proud? Who am I after all! A worm! A small creature! A little thing! But as you see me, because I humble myself so have God and my (beloved) king raised me higher and higher. So you see; someone who is strengthened by heavenly power is a person who can afford to be as meek as myself.... Bestowing his favor on me God made me stand in the king's favor (p. 8).*

By the same token, Assegash holds that the peasant should humble himself before her if he wants also God to bestow his favor on him. This being a microcosm parasitic relationship between the landlords/ladies and the peasantry, in this exposition of fixed hierarchy we are given a picture of a pyramid with multitudes at the base and the king at the top. That this state of fixed hierarchy is part of the total state of inertia referred to above is a matter of mere association. And hence the significance of the parallelism drawn between the two imageries: Just like the images of the peasant referring to himself as "a shaggy dog that imperceptibly dies of hunger" applies to the multitudes, so does that of the "lush grass beneath which water murmurs as it slowly flows" apply to the panorama of life characterized by stagnation.

Now, we may ask, what is the moral significance of the state of stagnation depicted in the narrative? Stagnation being a state of affairs, there is no sense in ascribing a moral disvalue to it. Nevertheless, there is every reason to consider that this state of affairs is a cumulative effect of decisions and actions of many generations of people from time immemorial. Moreover, stagnation, as the name indicates, is a multifaceted social privation with far-reaching consequences to generations to come. It is precisely for this reason that stagnation features as a moral issue in the scheme of the novel. Judging by the thorough consideration accorded to the issue, it appears quite reasonable to hold that the author is deeply concerned about it. For, if that were not the case, he would not care to go into the ramifications of this outstanding concern that we shall subject to scrutiny in the following two sections.

## **4.2. Moral Provincialism and Idealization of the Past in**

### ***Adefris***

Idealization of the past is a striking aspect of the novel's moral vision. That is why we have in *Adefris* a sense of being at perfect peace with one's traditional, cultural and spiritual values and heritage. Apart from *Adefris*, who is rather an intruder with his westernized view of life, almost all the other characters highly cherish their traditional life style. In fact they are quite assertive, even wistful, about it as they unequivocally express their convictions thereof. One should as well note that the novel gives expression to moral provincialism as a correlative aspect of its vision of idealization of the past. Moral provincialism, as has been pointed out, is a form of limited morality that defines morality by social groups. The social setting of the novel being that of feudalism, it is only natural that its values and ideals are favourable to the feudal class. What needs to be underscored here is, however, that such condition favours one social class or group over another. Moreover, as we shall see, there is a concerted elitist effort expressed in the novel where perpetuation of that partisan condition is called

for and becomes one with idealization of the past thus making moral provincialism an integral part of it.

It is hence, the implications of this integration of moral provincialism and idealization of the past that we find in the novel when we consider its "hermeneutics" on tradition and values. The significance of interpretation of tradition and values comes alive to us if we view the narrative from the perspectives of Adefris's queries about these values, on the one hand, and from Tisso's and other characters' beliefs and attitudes, on the other. Adefris plays a pivotal role of raising probing questions though with motives of less to learn than to challenge. His questions are wide ranging and centre around the history of the country, its traditional and spiritual values, cultural legacies; in short, around the essence of Ethiopia and of being Ethiopian. Some of the specific issues covered in the dialogues he prompts are topics like freedom and equality, why Ethiopians are not what they claim to be in their history, the need for individuality and diversity within the bracket of national unity or identity, and the need for change and progress. Nevertheless, owing to his characteristic derision for everything traditional, Adefris's questions and queries as such betray things of western acculturation thus marking him as alienated or estranged from his roots.

As the lot of answering these questions and queries falls to Tisso and Woldu, these two fulfil the responsibilities of forefathers who are duty-bound to instill all "the good things" in posterity, and of defending their positions as men well adept in things of value and tradition. In effect, what we witness in this respect is what Mclean (1992: 105) states about the role of one's forebears on whose shoulders one stands to be "able to discover and evaluate situations with the help of their vision because of the sensitivity they developed and communicate to us."

Viewed from the perspectives of Tisso and Woldu, the elderly characters who play out the role of the forebears, the situation of contemporary Ethiopia depicted in *Adefris* is that of a nation enjoying perfect peace, security and stability. Closely connected with this image is the unitary concept of identity that the citizens of the nation are not only believed but also required to share. I wish to call this image of the nation, the identity of whose citizens is supposedly reflected in the king, “a dome of peace, security and stability.” This is, in fact the very image that takes shape before us as we engage in a close perusal of the contents of Tisso’s and Woldu’s arguments aimed at protecting and preserving traditional values, norms and ideals. Given the fact that these two characters think and speak as ideologues of the ruling class to which they too belong, the image they have of Ethiopia as such only betrays the moral provincialism with which they perceive the nation’s socio-political *status quo*. In view of the reality on the ground, such a picture of the society will serve as an expression aptly referring to the situational irony of life in the nation. That is to say, if anything, the stated image will only serve as an encapsulation or enshrouding of the static state of life referred to above. The views articulated by the elite in question can substantiate this.

Firstly, let us consider Woldu’s attitudes towards such otherwise lofty ideals as freedom and equality. Claiming that Ethiopians, thanks to the king, have all they need to lead stable and secure life, including a parliament, which “even the French attained after a lot of bloodshed”, Woldu goes on to assert that the people of Ethiopia do not measure up to such ideals of the human imagination on the ground that they are ignorant. Accordingly, Adefris and his generation would do well not to advocate such ideals, for if they do so their fate would be that of Philip of Austria, who had to die in exile having been forced to abdicate his throne. Philip suffered this consequence because he tried to abolish the age-old hierarchic system where the son of prince became prince and the son of the poor became poor. Ignorant as the people were, they could not see the point of Philip’s ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity. Likewise, if the educated and

progress-minded Ethiopians should pursue such a goal, they would be surely considered insane. To Adefris's rhetorical question of whether Ethiopians would, of free will, choose inequality rather than freedom, Woldu has the following to say:

*Not only living in inequality... I would say he (the Ethiopian) would prefer stability to freedom...He would prefer to enjoy the stability that allows him to live by doing whatever he pleases –be it sleeping (in peace) or working. What is 'liberty'? ...'Security' is truly far better. For Ethiopian people the word 'freedom' is devoid of any meaning if it distorts the (essence) of stability. Terms like "one's wife", "one's property" and "one's religion" are his symbols of stability just as were 'liberty' ('equality') and 'fraternity' for the French...(p. 153).*

One need only recall Lady Assegash's and her father-confessor's views on equality and freedom, to realize that there is a strong affinity between Woldu's views and theirs on the issue. His claim that security and stability for the people should have precedence over freedom and equality secretly addresses the doctrine of inequality which his sister, as well as their fellow class members, holds to be a divine ordination (p. 101). As a matter of fact, Woldu's claim is shown to be null and void. This is because the harsh reality manifested through Assegash's and the peasant's exploitative relationship (see sec.1.), attests to the fact that economic security, which is the necessary condition for stable life, is inconceivable where freedom and equality do not exist. In such a claim that he makes, what Woldu does, in effect, is justify the injustice of inequality and deprivation of freedom. It is with respect to this rather gruff gesture of justification that Woldu, like his fellow ideologues may be said to be acting with moral provincialism, for he in so doing works in the interest of the exploitative class.

Just like Woldu tries to rationalize the need for inequality and deprivation of freedom, Tisso also attempts to justify loyalty to traditional authorities, in general, and the age-old dynastic rule of kings, in particular, and that by

constructing an ideological thesis pertaining to Ethiopian identity. Therefore, considering the line of thought articulated by him regarding the essence of Ethiopia and of being Ethiopian is only in order. In the image thus emerging before us we have a picture of a nation that prides itself on its time honored traditional values and cultural legacies and practices (see chapter 11). Sanctity of property and authority, cultural practices at family and community levels, etiquettes and mannerisms, various sorts of heritage such as musical instruments, architecture, monuments, traditional costumes etc., are all aspects regarded to count together when one thinks of nationality and national pride. So does everyone in contemporary society believe, one might contend. Equally important, according to Tisso, is, however, that to cherish such values and heritage is as much a mark of being Ethiopian as it is to be loyal to authority and to be faithful to one's religious beliefs. Central to the image of Ethiopian identity, accordingly, is the king, purported to be an embodiment of the identity of the individual citizen. Tisso speaks in his own name as he goes on to argue about the Ethiopian identity reflected in the person of the king:

*But a king is more than such temporary functions (otherwise seen in the figure of a president or a prime minister): he is an Ethiopian in whose person are reflected all that the country and its citizens permanently possess... including their cultural heritage, traditions, customs, attitudes and personalities.... Because all things I permanently hold to are reflected in him (the king), in everything he speaks and does, be it in his private life or in his bearing as a public figure, should be revealed my own identity as an Ethiopian (p. 90).*

In saying so Tisso is responding to an earlier remark made by Adefris calling for a more diversified and individualized identify of the Ethiopian. Tisso is shown here to have taken an extremely stern position against Adefris to whom even such common attributes of Ethiopians as patriotism, heroism, bravery, piety and hospitality will only give them the face of animals thus making it difficult to tell one from the other (p. 89). According to Adefris, the true face of the Ethiopians will show up if and only if they are treated as individuals. It is worth

noting in this connection that Adefris seems to refer to the notion of individualism, which accorded with contemporary progressive-minded people's tendency to approach individual people and social groups as separate entities unified in their diversities. Adefris gets to the heart of the matter when he, though in a perfunctory manner, talks about the injustice of imposing languages (for example Amharic) or cultural values on other linguistic and cultural groups (ch.26)

Apparently intent on placing his view on an ideological basis, Tisso is emphatic about the Ethiopian having his own special sense of truth and faith (p. 254-55). His truth is his faith in himself as having an identity reflected not only in the kings, dating back from the days of Menelik I, but also in the saints and martyrs. A kind of identity purported to have its genesis in the mythical past of Ethiopia, it is presumably far from being ordinary thus making it all the more justifiable for the citizen to take pride in it. This is the single most important aspect about which Adefris and, by extension, the generation he represents are both highly critical and skeptical. At one point, for example, Adefris raises an issue about whether or not saints and martyrs have existed and concludes that, even if they have existed at all, their significance is only dubious. Tisso's response is characteristically adamant:

*Don't you think so Adefris. They (saints and martyrs) have existed... and will continue to exist in the future. What matters is our faith. Saints are the beacons of our righteousness in life, our faith-fullness, our kindness, our spiritual power, the greatness of mankind... our multiple personalities (p. 222; also see pp. 217-23, 291).*

Equally adamant in his reaction to the young generation's query as to why the Ethiopian is no more as productive as it is claimed in his history in terms of giving forth more saints, martyrs and wise leaders, Tisso says: "Yes, the main thing is our faith. Just like a (big) tree is concealed in a (tiny) seed, the

Solomons (wise leaders), the saints and the martyrs that we aspire to have-though they may hide in our aim-will inevitably become a reality..." (p. 291).

In Tisso's treatise, so to speak, the Ethiopian is entitled to demand his own justice which is to be accepted as an entity with the stated essence of his being or identity. That is, he seeks "true justice" without which his land, property and even religion may mean nothing for him. He regards "true justice" as an eternal life and "injustice" as an eternal damnation (p. 251). If he is denied this justice, the Ethiopian would not hesitate to eliminate whoever attempts to do so. For he would not stand any "falsehood" perpetrated to destroy his truth, his faith in himself. Tisso's point in brief is the immutability of the concept of unitary identity of the Ethiopian citizen.

From Tisso's treatise summed up above one may conclude that it is a call for recognition of the Ethiopian "as a primordial disclosure of value", if I may adopt Caputo's words (p. 204). Indeed, it is an appeal to give the Ethiopian his due as worthy of respect. But the issue at stake is whether or not there isn't a misrepresentation in that concept of unitary identity. There appears to be one and this can be clearly discerned vis-à-vis the progressive minded people's notion of unity in diversity which Tisso tries to dress up when Adefris raises the issue (p89).

In Tisso's function here it is not only a misrepresentation of the reality on the ground that we see but also a conscious attempt at perpetuation of the mythical belief associated with it. The idea of the king as well as the saints and the martyrs being central to the Ethiopian identity has its roots in the mythical past. In this respect, *Adefris* recalls Afeworq's *Tobbya*, the first 'novel' ever in the vernacular. According to Yonas Admasu (1995), *Tobbya* had the moral/ethical concerns of "the nation of 'goodness', 'piety' and 'wisdom'" (p. 129). In *Adefris*, too, at least in its overall tone, we have an attempt to emulate those concerns. More importantly, what we discern in Tisso's image of the

Ethiopian identity is the same "glory or greatness of Afeworq's 'Ethiopia' that lies in the harmony of its citizens" (p. 130).

At this juncture, given that Ethiopia comprises numerous ethnic and cultural groups and seeing that the traditional elite's concept of identity focuses on their own cultural identities belonging to the main stream of Ethiopians of Semitic origins, the natural question would be what they would think of the other groups. As an answer, one may cite the author's claim in an interview (Molvaer, 1998) where he says:

*We have created certain values and a certain society where all contributed and (their contributions have) become part of us – it is not the contribution of only one particular nation (ality) but of us all....( p.298).*

But considering the bulk of references made to the dominant cultural groups in question, while virtually no references are made to the others, one would find such a claim (even by the author) unpalatable. It would have been more convincing and reassuring if the whole effort were geared to exhibiting the said contribution, although one may wonder what contribution the other groups could make to find themselves reflected in the bearings of the king as an embodiment of Ethiopian identity.

In any case, there can be no denying that the picture of Ethiopian identity delineated in the novel marginalizes those who do not belong to the mainstream cultural groups, thus betraying the moral provincialism on the part of the elite. And in retrospect, it is such attitudes that, in real life, have accounted for much of the social reactions witnessed in the ensuing periods of social upheavals and revolutions. Viewed from the point of view of the marginalized groups, the kind of identity elucidated by Tisso is, therefore, as good as an imposed identity or an identity by assimilation.

It appears that Tisso indulges in that kind of analysis of Ethiopian identity in a bid to dissuade Adefris , and by extension the younger generation , from embracing western values supposedly making inroads into the fabrics of the generation as a social group. Meanwhile, however, Tisso is shown appealing to authority of both customs and traditional leaders thus sanctioning and glorifying things of the past while demeaning or at least casting a shadow of doubt on things of the present. It is also in this respect that Tisso as well as Woldu perceives situations with moral provincialism. For the good, in their view, belongs only to the past so much so that the citizen's identity is rigidly defined in terms of the values achieved and created by forebears.

In a nutshell, then, Tisso's and Woldu's lines of thought towards the build up of that image of theirs about the nation and its citizens are significant in that they aim at protection against the already strongly felt encroachment of modernity. Protectionism has always been a characteristic form of reaction in this nation, particularly in the events of foreign aggressions and/or influences (Lipsky 1967; Ephrame, 1971). In *Adefris*, this is stated pointblank by Tisso, who concedes to Woldu's remarks to the effect of adopting the protectionist policy against the imminent threat posed by the modern civilization:

*You're right Ato Woldu... Just as ancient Ethiopia was protected from foreign invaders by its mountains, mountain ranges, religions and steadfastness so also will it be safeguarded from modern invaders of its identify by its antiquated style of attitude and ignorance (p. 228)*

From this remark by Tisso, as well as from our discussion about the traditionalists' views, it is clear that they are keen on virtually shutting out the nation from any foreign influence even at the cost of keeping it languish in ignorance. It is from the perspective of this militant attitude of the traditionalists that the image of the nation thus far discussed can be regarded as part of the larger picture of the state of stagnation considered in the foregoing section. The word "dome" in the phrase we have used to describe Tisso's and Woldu's image of Ethiopia as a nation whose citizens enjoy peace, security and stability can be related with the two imageries

the narrator uses: Just as the "lushness of grass" and "the shagginess of the dying dog" connote a notion of appearance versus reality, so does the word "dome" imply "enshrouding" or "blanketing" of what does not actually exist. In other words, the claim that Woldu makes about the people in the country enjoying peace, security and stability (p. 155) is incompatible with the reality on the ground. The meanings of those words being what we know, they simply do not exist in the context where Woldu makes his point while asserting that contemporary people of Ethiopia should be denied, by mere virtue of being ignorant, the blessings of freedom (from their oppressors) and equality (with others including their rulers). It is to be noted that Woldu in his assertion only endorses his sister Assegash's belief that humans are not equal as does her father- confessor, Aba Addise (also see the preceding section). Yet, we see Woldu, as well as Tisso, fretting a lot about loss of identity and Ethiopian personality (pp. 234, 285).

Finally, the moral vision of the novel from the perspective of the traditional elite is at best that of glorying in the "greatness" of the past, a retrospective vision pointing to the pristine purity of ancient values. At worst, it is an expression of pessimism about the future and this is manifested in the depiction of the problematic protagonist as a representative of the new generation. The latter aspect of the vision needs to be further examined and hence the following section wherein an attempt is made to show the protagonist's characterization as an intruder of a guest.

### **4.3. An Intruder of a Guest: A Symbolic Representation of Adefris**

It is important to note the significance of the setting where the protagonist is treated as a guest, of course among other guests. In the setting, Adefris, unlike the others, is soon singled out as an unwelcome guest and that owing to the "uncomely traits" he is endowed with. At a deeper level, his treatment as such is symbolic of the treatment to which his generation is also subjected as the traits he demonstrates are supposed to be common to his generation.

Adefris vents the air that he is educated. His self-concept is that he has the key to the riddles of life in the society he thinks is backward with useless beliefs and values. As he once tells a litigant who has come to him hoping to find a way out of his dire situation, Adefris says: "My education is about solving problems, tackling them at the root..." (p. 45). This is the whole purpose of his theory of "Libuse Tila"- roughly meaning "the ideal thing that perfectly matches the inner-self, the inner nature" (chapter 8). As he lectures to a group of peasants who have come on litigations, he tells them that divorce-related problems can be eliminated if people find their ideal life-partners. What is illustrated here is that Adefris tends to take a very simplistic approach to social problems, resorting to preconceived formulas. Apparently realizing that Adefris resorts to such approaches without the knowledge and appreciation of social realities and responding to his ironic remark that the true situation of the people must be known, Tisso admonishes him in the following words:

*... It is impossible to attain such knowledge and bring about changes in (your) jumpy manner. Without a thorough knowledge of the society, neither is it enough to propose to do things on the basis of hypotheses that seem to work in universities or offices. As you say, it is true that the real situation of the people must be known. But my view of what must be known differs from your view. My view is that people's attitude, even if my conscience doesn't welcome it as something comely, must be thoroughly known so that any change and improvement may be made on the basis of what is thus known. For I should not forget that the very thing that seems to be unacceptable to me may be pursued by its subject with clear and distinct purposes. (p. 99).*

Clearly, both Adefris and Tisso believe in there being something to be known about the people. Unlike Adefris, the latter appears to be very specific in this regard and that has to do with the people's attitude and beliefs. As he cautions Adefris against disregarding such matters, irrespective of one's feelings about them, Tisso is in fact consolidating his position concerning values and beliefs in

general while implying that Adefris and his generation need to learn how to behave themselves in this respect.

Coming to the view of him by the rest of the society, Adefris is no more than a mere intruder. In keeping with the meaning of his name in the vernacular- one who causes havoc and stirring- Adefris is invariably regarded as a nuisance to their natural and stable way of life. It is this state of Adefris being unwelcome amidst them that the narrative augments through various points of view and associations and through expressions with rather uncomely nuances. To mention but a few examples, he is depicted as a man of freakish nature with regard to his manner of dressing and hair-style. He is as sneaky and shadowy in his bodily movement as he is slippery and abstract in his action and thinking. His views are so mixed up and inconsistent as is the jarring and disharmonious music he plays on his organ. To people like Assegash, he is even a psychopath who needs some herbal treatment, and a demon-possessed to others like Aba Addise, Assegash's father- confessor.

The most outstanding feature of Adefris' characterization is his unscrupulous intrusiveness. At more than one place, for example, he is seen tickling and fondling Roman, a young girl brought up under Assegashe's patronage, and in his amorousness touching her for the feel of her erect breasts. As it were, this case creates a lot of havoc in the village to which such are acts of abomination commonly associated with the working of demons (legeon)<sup>1</sup>. If that is what Adefris is like externally, it only manifests what he actually is on the inside: As he can't restrain himself from touching a girl's breasts out of lustful desire, so can't he refrain from riding rough shod over people's belief and faith. That is what Frewa, Tisso's daughter, accuses him of when she complains to her father about Adefris's cynical attitude towards the religious practices of Woldu's wife: Seeing the woman wearing a fetish object (trinket) around her neck, Adefris blatantly scoffs at her for that (ch.47).

Let us now try to briefly see the significance of Adefris's characteristic traits surveyed in the preceding paragraphs and that in three categories. Firstly, his freakishness is associated with his upbringing involving five stepfathers and his educational background involving foreign teachers from various countries and ideological blocks. Again, his freakish as well as his slippery and shadowy manners are associated with his lack of conviction, confidence and steadfastness in what he believes in and does. This is ascribed to the shallowness of the education he has received and to the unsoundness of the new values he has embraced. It is this basic limitation of him as well as his generation that Tisso and Woldu refer to when they characterize the generation as having no moorings, thus allowing themselves to be steered about at others' will, and as behaving like chameleons. The following extract from Tisso's and Woldu's conversation illustrates these points:

*But what we say is that in order to embrace the new civilization we need to develop a personality stronger than the iron pillar. Why'. Even a beggar does not go out on a begging tour without taking his bag with him. So if we have to embrace the modern civilization, the first thing we need to do is strengthen our personality. Let's search for values in our cultures, traditions and customs; and holding fast to what we thus find out we can look for what we lack. Otherwise, we will make ourselves into a body without soul thus eventually turning ourselves into a personality that will be moved with a steering wheel. That is what we say (p. 230).*

According to Woldu, a personality steered about is characteristic of people who are uprooted from their cultural setting as is the case with those living and growing abroad without knowing the joy of love and care that only parents and relatives can give. It is also characteristic of those who are educated by teachers with various backgrounds- ideological, cultural, racial, etc, (pp. 230-31). Such people are not only subject to being steered about but also behave and act unpredictably. In this connection, Woldu also speaks for his fellow critics of

Adefris's generation highlighting some of the things that have gone wrong with them, viz., people embracing the western values:

*Let me mention some for you... Just to recall... for example... they say you tend not to respect your parents, to commit apostasy and to disdain authority. They say you alienate yourselves from your family and people. They say you're unlikely to yield promising results as you have been taught by foreign teachers from the west and the east thus developing personalities that change every now and then like chameleons, lacking in firm convictions and finally ending up in void identity (p. 231).*

Secondly, alienation of the generation through embracing western values has resulted in dire consequences of unscrupulous or even violent intrusion. Adefris is, for instance, shown violating Assegash's and Melefa's (Woldu's wife) "right of conscience" when he engages them in uncalled-for confrontations for their respective styles of worship (see pp. 206, 265). This is also symbolically manifested through Adefris's manner of using his two treasured possessions, namely his accordion and his rifle. Normally, music implies harmony. But the music Adefris plays is nowhere close to anything harmonious. In contrast to the melody played by his mother, Lady Akalat, on her harp, which is at once reassuring, majestic and graceful thus elevating the spirit of the listener through its various mystical effects combined in a mysterious harmony, Adefris' 'music' is described as follows:

*A little while later, from within the house starts to drift out a sound that looks like children screaming, kids shouting unmuffled voice of life- at times stiffening and then softening, then croaking- flaring up and then dying down (p. 91).*

A stronger manifestation of violent intrusion is rendered through Adefris's undertaking of game hunting with his rifle. The rifle, like the accordion, seems to represent western values and the rumbling sound it makes when fired amid the tranquility of the idyllic country stands for the violence associated with the concept of intrusion.

Finally, callousness and cruelty is shown to be an integral part of the violent nature of the intrusion. This is revealed in Adefris's blatant admittance of the cruelty he commits involving the birds that he shoots down. Imagining the possible ecstasy he is about to experience, he tells Tsione that he wants to see how much of the animal nature does remain in him by inserting his fingers into the hole to be made by the bullet so as to verify the accuracy of the aim he has taken. In his words:

*... It gives an indescribable, especial kind of pleasure- to shoot down jigra (guinea hen), qoqe (partridge), sorene, or sess, midaqua (a kind of antelope) and dikula (antelope). It does give unearthly pleasure to see them struggle for life and then suddenly die. You pick them up, feel the (dripping) blood with your finger and as you confirm that you have hit them where you have aimed it gives you boundless delight- sending your blood surging and your eyes glowing (p. 128).*

The fact that Adefris tells these things to Tsione is by no means a coincidence. In fact, this seems to foreshadow that Tsione will prove to be a victim of his cruel treatment towards the end of the novel. Considering the symbolic significance of Tsione as representing Ethiopia<sup>2</sup>, Adefris's cruel treatment of her by rejecting her impassioned plea of love seems to signify the generation's lack of capacity, courage and will to extract the country out of ignorance as well as other social and cultural quagmire in which it finds itself.

To sum up, the portrayal of Adefris examined thus far reveals two significant aspects of his characterization as a protagonist. For one thing, just as Adefris is regarded as an intruder in the house and the village he stays as a guest, so are the new ideas of change and progress advocated by him and his generation regarded as not only strange but also intrusive arrivals on the traditional landscape of the society at large. That Assegash and her fellow traditionalists would rather preserve the old values in their pristine purity but is no longer possible after the unhappy onset of the intrusion is expressed by Assegash herself. Amid her protest at Adefris's unscrupulous derision of her "bad acts of

worship involving kissing of hands, crosses, stones, etc,” she says: "I wonder if it will be the same with me any longer" (p. 20). This is, indeed, an outcry not of a single individual but of all traditionalists of the same vein. What we see in here is, as a matter of fact, the concrete manifestation of the traditionalists' retrospective vision discussed in the preceding section.

The other aspect is to be seen from the perspective of the implied-author or the narrator, who is quite naturally aware of the frailties of the character he so portrays. Adefris like most of his generation craves for change and progress. For all that he presents himself in the fictional world as an agent to that effect, he is gravely lacking in “the human face” that such an agent should demonstrate. Most of the traits in his characterization attest to this fact. Most importantly, his seemingly secret double-dealings with Roman and Tsione show him up as a man not only contradicting his purported principles of "the erudite" but also badly lacking in moral integrity. After he has apparently caused the two to run away from their cozy house, where wedding preparations were well underway for the one and marriage arrangements for the other, Adefris keeps the one as a mistress and treats the other callously, even cruelly. The latter being Tsione, the narrator seems to lay a great store by the relationship between her and Adefris: Having been in a passionate love with him, Tsione falls prostrate on his feet as she pleads with him. To evade any one but him she pretends to her mother, who has come to the scene in search of her, to have lost her virginity to the legion (the demons). But Adefris fails to understand Tsione: She has been lying to her mother meaning to preserve her virginity for this man she is deeply in love. Symbolically, it is like Ethiopia seeking to preserve her most prized treasures in favor of her educated sons and daughters. In this symbolic gesture we are shown that tradition remains to be the only option for Ethiopia and this is revealed in Tsione heading towards a church to become a nun<sup>3</sup>. Tsione does this by breaking away from a funeral procession held for Adefris, who has been killed by a stray stone while trying to call student demonstrators to an order. Such an abrupt ending to Adefris's life seems to reinforce the pessimistic

element surrounding his portrayal as a representative of the new generation. Given Tsione's symbolic significance, her resorting to the tradition of monastery life following the death of Adefris again reinforces the same picture of stagnation discussed in the early section of this chapter. In the final analysis, such an ending of the narrative signifies what appears to be the author's meaning of denied expectation with respect to the country. And this is what is typified by Adefris's symbolic characterization.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

In *Adefris* Dagnachew proved himself as a faithful novelist in delineating the social reality and this is revealed in his objective approach to the contrasting perspectives depicted of the conservative and progressive elements. Highly cognizant of the two positions, he is uniquely capable of exhibiting the perspectives to the reader thus making it possible for the latter to undertake value clarification. And this is a mark of artistic excellence on the part of the author.

Nowhere in the narrative do we see the author appearing with authorial comments particularly as regards his attitude towards the characters he depicts. But from what is revealed about them through their motives, actions and verbal expressions, and through others' views and attitudes about them, we can note that he is disapprobatory of the major characters such as Assegash, Woldu, Tisso and even of Adefris. Assegash is an impersonation of the contemporary ruling class with all her mischievousness, shrewdness, callousness and atrocities. A typical feudal lady, she is depicted as being fond of vainglory and the extent to which she is vicious is rendered through Kibret's (the artist's) portrait of the angel crushing a dragon having her face (ch.28). It is to be noted that the angel's face in the portrait is that of a peasant residing in the same village with her. Tisso and Woldu are her accomplices in that they, through the conservative ideology they promote, and through their idealization of the past, virtually endorse the system as a 'dome of Peace, security and stability' which in the final analysis is only part of the bigger picture of social stagnation. Adefris as well as his generation, is also to blame because he has proven to be incapable of influencing the prevailing socio-cultural situation though he regards himself as an agent of change and progress. Adefris suffers contempt and rejection by the society and that too chiefly because of his unsolicited traits and his negative attitude towards their values.

The moral vision of the novel is, therefore, to be sought in the author's implied disapproval particularly of the contending parties. The fact that there is a note of regret about the deadlock between the representatives (of both the traditional and the modern) failing to understand each other is an issue to reckon with. This is the very reason why we do not have a hermeneutics proper in the novel, despite a genuine attempt to that effect. The other vision discernible is what amounts to an apparent pessimism of the sort we have in the author's Amharic drama in verse, *Sew Alle Biyye* (1952 E.C), where he expresses his disillusionment about having no one to trust. In the novel too he virtually dismisses the contending parties. But he does so by carefully examining their merits and demerits. Yet, not without underscoring Tisso's cautionary notes not only to Adefirs's generation but also to all generations of all time that any change and progress of a nation should be squarely founded on the good things drawn from the old times. The issue at stake is, however, the skepticism on the part of the recipient generation as regards the validity of what the forebears value. In a word, the vision in the novel is that of a desire to see a society where successive generations genuinely understand each other so that healthy transitions of constructive values are made possible. And this is truly a moral vision of all time importance in Ethiopian setting and that for the same reason envisaged in the novel.

Finally, it would be indispensable to point out the significance of *Adefris* in the literature, particularly in terms of the problem being investigated. Although it limits itself to objectively revealing the contemporary attitudes and views towards tradition and values, it is significant in that it provides the very thesis of which antitheses are anticipated in some of the novels that were to come on to the literary scene in the two political eras following the one in which it was set. To be specific, the issue of Ethiopian identity by assimilation, on which the traditionalists so heavily capitalize, anticipated its antitheses in class-conscious and ethnic-conscious works of fiction witnessed in the stated periods. It is, therefore, these two trends that we shall consider in the following two chapters of this thesis.

## NOTES

1. “Legeon” is the Amharic word for demons and Adefris’s gestures including the music he tries to play on his accordion, are generally considered demonic. Aba Addise, Assegash’s father confessor, is particularly highly critical of Tsione’s growing interest in Adefris’s musical instrument.
2. According to Taye (1986: 216) the idealized characterization of Tsione reinforces her symbolic representation of Ethiopia. Taye realizes that the name “Tsione” evokes an association with the ark of St. Mary of Zion “an association which underlines the element of religion and traditionalism.”
3. In this connection, Taye (1986: 216) asserts that “Her (Tsione’s) relationship with Adefris can be interpreted as one in which her desire for change and modernization fails to materialize.”

## **PART TWO**

### **UTILITARIANISM AND MORAL PROVINCIALISM IN BEALU'S AND TESFAYE'S NOVELS**

*The novels by these two authors are significant for this study in the sense that they depict the human experience in the context of Ethiopia following the 1974 and 1991 upheavals. The 1974 popular revolution saw the removal of the imperial rule while the latter witnessed the over-throw of the military dictatorship which had replaced the former. As Patrick Gilkes in his foreword to Kinfe's **Ethiopia: From Empire to Federation** rightly puts it, "Few would disagree that these two events have changed the nature of the Ethiopian state irreversibly...". Culminations of what had been building up in the society because of social injustices such as exploitation, oppression and subjugation of class and ethnic or national nature, the upheavals obviously had strong implications of moral significance. The 1974 event was a fully-fledged popular revolution backed by the radical elements of the educated folks. The revolution as such sought to do away with the exploitative classes although it was later on hijacked by the armed group (Derg) which subsequently imposed on the people what was to be known as "garrison socialism".*

*Coming to Bealu's and Tesfaye's novels, we find that these are parts of the continuum with the cultural texts (literary or otherwise) of these two important periods in the recent history of this nation. It is in this sense that these works are the very discourses of the periods they depict. In view of the fact that the novels deal with the culmination of the social contradictions fermenting in the previous years depicted in Haddis's and Dagnachew's novels, these works can also be regarded as part of the continuum stretching way back to the previous history of the country.*

*In Bealu's socialist oriented novels and Tesfaye's novel dealing with ethnic problems, among other things, we have the antithesis of the social situations as portrayed in the works of Haddis and Dagnachew. Bealu's novels, namely **Derasew** (1971 E.C) and **Yegey Kokeb Tiri** (1973 E.C) concern themselves with the 1974 popular revolution where moral provincialism takes on a form of class struggle. With the revolution having negated the entire social system as portrayed by Haddis's novels, there is a direct correspondence between the works by these two authors. In so far as Ethiopian identity is concerned, we have a clear correspondence between Dagnachew's **Adefris** and Tesfaye's **Yeburqa Zimita** (1984 E.C). The strong implication of identity by assimilation reflected in **Adefris** is radically decried in **Yeburqa Zimita**, which appears to speak for Ethiopian identity securely anchored in the principle of unity in diversity.*

*The trend briefly stated above is in fact a trend in the moral visions expressed by the authors cited .As I take up Bealu's and Tesfaye's novels in following two separate chapters under this second part, my focus is on the moral visions they attempt to express in the light of the social systems envisioned in the historical periods to which they correspond. **Derasew** and **Yegey Kokeb Tiri** depict the few years following the 1974 popular revolution. Socialist oriented as these works are, they aim at utilitarianism, the Marxian tenet of morality envisaging pleasure for the underdog masses, of course, to be attained through class struggle. In **Derasew** we have a writer character at its center attempting to identify himself with the common folks whereas in **Yegey Kokeb Tiri** we are shown that it is not easy to maintain that kind of identification, for egoism stands in one's way.*

***Yeburqa Zimita**, on the other hand, relates to yet another period of turmoil covering a few years before and after the now EPRDF's (short for Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front) rise to power following the demise of the Derg. If Bealu's novels exhibit a period of reaction to the moral provincialism on*

*the basis of class distinction, Tesfaye's novel represents a marked shift of the focus of reaction by dealing with the moral provincialism having to do with ethnicity and national questions.*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MORALITY AND SOCIAL-CLASS IN BEALU'S SOCIALIST ORIENTED NOVELS

Unlike the novels we have examined so far, Bealu Girma's novels of socialist orientation, such as *Derasew* and *Yegey Kokeb Tiri*, marked major shifts in terms of viewing morality from the perspectives of social class. This was necessitated by the negation of the old social system by the new one: feudo-capitalism by socialism. Loyalty to authority was replaced by belief in the power of the people; sanctity of private property was negated by communal ownership, morality based on traditional values and religious teachings gave way to that drawn from Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Therefore, in these works by Bealu, we see a considerable effort made to promote moral values of socialist realist persuasion. And this is quite in keeping with what A'zis, in his book *Fundamentals of Marxist Aesthetics* (1977), has to say about socialist art:

*It (socialist art) upholds fine traits of character, noble moral virtues and attitudes of the new man born of the socialist era. Socialist art is a mighty force for the moral education of the masses (p. 68).*

In other words, these works by Bealu fall under what is known as "literature of commitment" (Craig, 1975: 446ff). Rendered at a time of a great social upheaval in Ethiopia, they not only reflected the prevailing social situation but also pioneered the literary method of socialist realism<sup>1</sup> in Ethiopian literature. Hence, the fact that they depict class-conscious characters marks these works as assuming an antithetic position to the kind of characterization commonly rendered in the previous Amharic novels.

As is said of the committed writer (Craig, p. 446), Bealu is involved in the world he creatively reflects and consciously acknowledges his involvement. He does this by creating writer-cum-critic characters through whose words and actions he unmissably expresses his convictions regarding committed writing. To Bealu, fiction and reality are so intricately intertwined that we even witness him sharing the destiny of one of his characters. This is evidenced by the parallel that exists between his own death on account of his last novel, *Oromay*, (1975 E.C) and the death of his character, Ema'elaf in *Yegey Kokeb Tiri*, who also dies on account of his work. What we have here is precisely a case of the writer not being a mere spectator in the drama he depicts but also an actor (Craig, 1975: 445).

Having made these general notes about the author and his two novels of our immediate concern, let us now turn to the more relevant issues addressed in these works. This being the purpose of this chapter, it sets out to examine the moral vision of the novels in two sections i.e “utilitarianism and identification with the common folks in *Derasew*” and “utilitarianism versus egoism in *Yegey Kokeb Tiri*”

## **5.1. Utilitarianism and Identification with the Common Folks in *Derasew***

As is true of any socialist- oriented creative work, the moral vision of *Derasew* is utilitarian. Hence, Sirak, the writer-critic protagonist of the novel, commits himself to pleasure for the common people. This commitment is to be viewed on two levels. Firstly, he identifies himself with the common folks in his life style, and secondly, he tries to assert and demonstrate that art should be subservient to depicting the life of the people.

### **5.1.1. The Artist's Life-Style, the Life of the People**

Teret Sefer, the name of the village in which Sirak lives, is almost a metaphor for the protagonist's life style. He resides in a shabby house with typical Ethiopian neighborhood, where women gather to drink coffee and read their fortunes in coffee dregs and to enjoy gossiping. The village is in one of the slum areas rampant in Addis Ababa, where he can hear, amplified by otherwise quiet nights, the bemoaning of an agonizing old woman, the whining of a dog, divinations and enchantments of a sorcerer and many other noises. During the day time all the people he sees around are such that life has not favorably treated: A blind man begging in a corner, a lame man hobbling about, a tailor patching old clothes for the villagers, and lepers singing for alms from door to door are common sights. It is as if the artist is in the midst of the very kind of life he so depicts- hearing it, seeing it and also smelling it (the stench around his house is unbearable) (p. 4). That he is at one with his world is succinctly expressed in the following words:

*The village coughs and agonizes along with the old woman, whines with the dog, whistles with the wind, murmurs with the thunders, sneezes with the writer, snores with his wife and dreams with his child (p. 4).*

Interestingly, in endowing his character with that mentality and proneness, Bealu seems to have in mind what M. Gorky, as cited in Khrapchenko's *The Writer's Creative Individuality and the Development of Literature*(1977), is said to have advised a young writer. In Khrapchenko's words:

*Gorky told him that he needed to "stand closer to life and make direct use of its suggestions, images and scenes, its thrills, its flesh and its blood. Do not concentrate on **yourself**, but concentrate on the whole world **within yourself**... The poet is an echo of the world, not simply the nanny of his own soul (pp. 395-6).*

In spite of the incessant nagging by his wife, Tsige, to look for another house elsewhere, Sirak insists that they should stay in Teret Sefer. Tsige's constant fear is that their child may get hurt owing to the sorcery in the neighborhood and to the village swage and the dirt that has littered the surrounding. What we witness in all this is Sirak's proneness to partake of the life of the people he writes about. In his words, "It (the house and its surrounding) is the natural place where I and my child belong" (p. 36). He goes on to say:

*Listen my (good) lady... That stench outside... all those jawless and noseless lepers whose nostrils and throats are exposed and all those blind beggars (rotting alive), all of them are a part of us, just as we are their part. They are parts of our world just as we are the parts of theirs; myself, (our) child and you, all of us.... So where do you say we should go from this (world)? Or do you mean that we should live in a dream-like world? Should we live like those people who live by imagining an island of their own in the midst of a sea of the wretched lest they should see the lepers, hear the wailings of the beggars, and listen to the crying of the oppressed; and that by constructing buildings surrounded by high walls, by erecting iron gates and making rose gardens lest their eyes should see the wretchedness of their world? ... Though it may appear to them like that, the eyes of "the wretched" can penetrate mountains, let alone buildings and walls...(p.35f).*

Hardly does a day pass without Sirak noticing these aspects of his surrounding. The repeated references to the aspects show that these are motifs about his constant awareness of what life is like for the people amid whom he lives. What is more, what he observes about life in the village inspires him to write about life and death and the courage and determination it takes to live. This idea comes out very strongly towards the end of the narrative when Sirak, amid an admiration for a militiaman back from a war front, contemplates about the possibility of defeating death through deed (p.188.) Living is not worth it without a mission, which should be undertaken with courage and determination.

Apart from his choice of living place, Sirak's marital life also reveals that his fate as a committed writer is intertwined with the fate of the people at the lowest rung. His marriage to Tsige, a one-time prostitute, is a vivid demonstration to that end. This is his second marriage after his first one broke when he declined to follow his former wife abroad. Martha, his former wife, was a daughter of an aristocratic family who had to leave the country following the Derg Regime's ascent to power. That means he chose to remain in the country to be part of its future. Considering the fact that he set great store by the then popular revolution, and seeing his subsequent commitment to it in terms of partaking the life of the people and applying his talent in the service of it, there is every reason to hold that his divorce and remarriage marked an ideological divorce with the past (previous system) and marriage with the new. This is vividly evidenced in what Sirak says to Tsige by way of proposing to her:

*As they say, "class exerts a stronger force of attraction than does a (Pulling by) bridle... She (his former wife) went to a place of her choice. May the "goddess of that place" receive her in peace! I, too, have come to my fellow class member. Let the bygone be bygone. What remains of my past for me is only reminiscence. Even then, life is lived forward, not backward. Therefore, I have come determined to live with you. So what do I have "for my mouth (my proposal)?" (p. 40).*

Indeed, it takes courage and determination to do what the protagonist of *Derassew* has done and that is the essence of his idea of defeating death with deed. Through his style of living and his latter marriage, he has shown himself up as a man capable of sacrificing personal gains and comfort. The concept of death here is that same concept we have in *Yegey Kokeb Tiri* wherein, as we shall see, its protagonist condescends to the state of moral degeneration by failing to act as a man determined to be worthy of a man. In the contexts of the novels, to be worthy of a man is to identify oneself with the common folks. To Sirak, as to the protagonist in the other novel, such identification is particularly a matter of acknowledging one's humble origin. This is in fact what is stressed

in the scene where Sirak encounters his former father-in-law (*Derasew*, chap.13.) Asked whose son he is, Sirak rather proudly responds that he is a son of a “nameless” poor peasant, a tenant(p159).Married though he is to Martha, the daughter of an aristocratic MP, it is not without having cautioned her that she would live to regret it as a marriage of unequals(p161f).

Thus courageously identifying himself with the people, Sirak henceforth has no problem in confronting whoever has a bleak view about the then popular revolution. He declares bravely that the revolution would bring about such a radical change that Ethiopia would sooner or later cease to be a country of miserable peasants (p159). Bravely again does he defy the otherwise tantalizing situation of following Martha abroad. A man of his people, Sirak realizes that, at this historic and crucial moment of revolution, he is much needed in the new Ethiopia, which is in the process of being delivered. So to those negotiating him into following Martha abroad he has this to say:

*You are shedding crocodile’s tears in vain. As for me, I wouldn’t be taking my foot off the land of this country, come what may. The fate of these people is my fate, their death my death and their joy my joy (p178).*

In the scheme of the novel, the condition of identification is rather supposed to be regarded as an imperative on the part of all the citizens who have accepted the revolution, and this accords with utilitarianism as a Marxian tenet of morality. That is to say, the altruistic principle -“the greatest amount of pleasure for the largest number of people” (*Mothershead*, 1967: 99, 159) favours the majority. What we have here is in fact a kind of moral provincialism that contrasts with that of the societies depicted by the authors we examined in the foregoing chapters. As can be recalled, morality in those societies was limited to the privileged or the ruling classes while here it is limited to the majority or the masses. In terms of this provincialism here revolutionaries are wholly good while reactionaries are degenerate or evil.

### **5.1.2. Committed Art an Extension of Committed Life**

*Derasew* is a frame novel that consists of two synchronous narratives<sup>2</sup> in progress. One of the latter is by Sirak, the protagonist of the frame novel while the other is by Eskindir, another character. Although they deal with separate subjects, these narratives perform a complementary function of revealing the underlying belief that a writer cannot help but be committed in his artistic intents. More importantly, they are complementary in envisaging a "new brand" of moral vision for the reading public on the basis of a new perception they endeavor to give about "life" and "man". It is quite in order, therefore, to examine the subjects of the synchronous narratives.

Sirak openly acknowledges that he writes about life and the courage and determination it takes to live. His character, Agafari Endashaw, is a man of great age with a unique urge for life. The latter's knowledge of the fact that "life is just a sparkle between stretches of eternal darkness on its either side" (p.10) appears to have made him cling to life even more zealously. According to him, it is within this sparkle that all dichotomies of life reside: love and hate, happiness and sorrow, pain and delight, etc. Where one of such dichotomies exists also resides its other and opposite aspect. Life is like a troubled ship in which all men voyage until each, in their own time, remain alone. For all that, life is good and its sole purpose and object is pleasure. So Agafari insists on defying death although he knows it is inevitable. Furthermore, he knows that human life is not a matter of mere existence as it is the case with animals and vegetables ("even cabbages live"). It is rather, a matter of exploiting the full potential of human faculties (sense, will and intellect) and experiencing life as it offers itself.

As Sirak reflects towards the end of the novel, Agafari is not alone in his self-delusions about death. It is in fact an attitude shared by the human race including the lame, the lepers, and the blind he sees around as well as himself.

In his view such an attitude is positive in that it entails the element of hope in life. But this is not all there is about the point of living. So, Sirak goes on to reflect, the sort of life becoming to man is that which has purpose and mission and thinks of the whole idea in terms of the possibility of defeating death with deed.

We may wonder why Sirak should have gone into those philosophical accounts about life. This certainly has a lot to do with the then ongoing revolution. As it were, the revolution had to be perceived as an all-embracing, continuous process of change. Chief among the aspects of the process is the world outlook of the reading public. Particularly, the peoples' view of life and their thinking pattern thereof had to be subjected to fundamental changes. For life, in the society in question, was generally construed to be either fatalistic or manipulated by spiritual forces. So, those accounts concerning life are basically meant to put right what the writer appears to believe has gone wrong with respect to the public's perception of life. In any case, the writer seems to assert, people should be reasonable in their thinking about life and realize that life has its own dialectics, as is the case with any objective phenomenon.

In the scheme of the novel, such an understanding of life is essential for one to live meaningfully. In fact, it represents a solid basis for a society where morality is ever more transformed and life revitalized. Sirak states in the following terms that achieving such objectives is the primary mission of socialist art:

*The mission of socialist art is part of the struggle in transforming the world. This means it is a reflection of the moral transformation and revival of life.... Socialist realism means inducing people to have an absolute faith in its capacity to effect continuous moral transformation.... A man (completely) content with his own life is not a man (at all). If Adam had not been banished from Eden, he would have remained an ape. In my own view, to be a man is living in a dialectical state. The role of art is to interpret this kind of affair (p. 152).*

The other synchronous narrative, which is also in the making, tells of a young man of humble origins seething with revolutionary fervor and accomplishing high profile feats as he selflessly engages in helping to implement the proclamation that turned land into public property. This young man, called Dejene, is a third year university student and commits himself to the cause of the masses as he enthusiastically joins the so called "Campaign for Development through Unity, Knowledge and Work"<sup>3</sup>. As such the narrative deals with a very topical issue thus making it sound like a propaganda work.

What is significant about the narrative is, however, that it is an end product in which Sirak's contribution as a committed critic of a Socialist realistic bent has materialized. It is the synchronous author's second attempt after the first one was severely criticized by Sirak on the grounds that it failed to effectively deal with its purported content having to do with the class struggle involving the peasantry. Such content, according to Sirak, is decisive for the artistic merit of a creative work in the literary tradition of Socialist realism. In deed Sirak knows too well that this is an ideological issue but quite an issue, unequalled in prominence, for any committed writer. It is in this connection that Sirak expresses his sublime ideals about man and about humanity. And to what extent he is committed to the human cause in general is expressed in the following passage:

*... I have a dream. But my dream is that of the broad masses. My soul desires to dream of their dream, to tell their tale, to laugh their laughter, to bewail their cause and to suffer their suffering. Words are not adequate to express the love and (good) wish my soul has for humans: words that can express their joys and sufferings... words that can tell that this world is not vain and that man's life is by no means meaningless... words that can tell of man's destiny to transform the world and lead a triumphant life- not of his defeat... words that can consolidate hope in people's life. My subject is humanity and my means are words, words and words; words are rare jewels but we don't use them with care... (p. 115).*

Why Sirak is so committed is self-evident. For him writing is a trade with a special mission of telling the truth about humanity, of course in beautiful terms (p. 117). Once a writer realizes that humanity is his subject, the next important thing is to have the right attitude about them: man is not a pitiable creature finding himself perplexed in the so-called "prison of life". He is rather a being capable of transforming himself and his world through labor, thus forging hope and meaning out of life.

Interestingly, this is the very idea echoed in what Maxim Gorky, the founder of Socialist Realism, wrote expressing himself decidedly against the debasement and abuse of man. In Michael Khrapchenko's words (1977: 397).

*Since then (the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) this tendency has grown considerably in contemporary bourgeois art, finding expression in the most widely differing forms. In various ways we find repeated the idea that man is a nest of filth and that he is a creature frightful and pathetic in turns, impotent in the face of the world's chaos and of the eternal riddles of existence. Criticizing the conclusions reached by all those who sought to debase man, Gorky wrote: "Man is not the nonentity that the class society is used to seeing in him, a society for which it is more convenient that he should be as nothing. Man is a miracle, the only miracle on earth, while all its other miracles are the work of his will, his reason and his imagination."..*

From the preceding paragraphs one can realize that a distinct attempt is made by the author of *Derasew* to offer a new perception about life and man, a perception that is indispensable for adequate understanding of the novel's moral vision as a whole. The basis of this perception being the Marxist-Leninist ideology, it represents a negation of the hitherto pursued so called "idealist views" of life and man. The anti-religious tone in the novel is, therefore, quite a point deserving our attention.

On a number of occasions the protagonist is seen alluding to religious and scriptural materials. In reality such allusions have very little to do with things of faith. Two facts can be established about them. For one thing, they are part of the author's stylistic endeavor to achieve an aesthetic effect by using them as euphemistic expressions in descriptions involving sexual delight as is the case in chapters 12 and 13 where Sirak has extra marital affairs with a certain Sebleworq ; that is, not to sound too pornographic in situations of love-making. Secondly and more importantly, such allusions are made use of by way of parodying on "the idealist outlook" at the expense of spiritual materials or subjects; in other words, by "artistically blaspheming" time honored religious beliefs and values. For example, we hear talks of the possibility for Adam (man) to have remained an ape if he hadn't been banished from the Garden of Eden (p. 152). Meaning to express his belief that man attains real transformation through labor, Sirak thus echoes Marx's famous maxim that "Man was created by labor". Elsewhere Sirak speaks of man's knowledge about life having remained "green" on account of the green apple Adam had eaten while in the garden:

*Had Eve not given Adam to eat the unripe apple, we would have attained complete and greater knowledge about life. Having eaten the unripe apple, Adam left for humanity an inheritance of unripe knowledge, ... (p. 138).*

Here the "green apple" no doubt symbolizes religion of which Marx is again often quoted to have said: "Religion is an opium of life."

A higher form of Sirak's anti-religious attitude finds expression in his reiteration of the artist being equal to God by virtue of his being in the creative process.<sup>4</sup> The idea takes on its own evolution in the course of the whole narrative. That is, it starts with religious objects, values and rites as the given. It assumes a higher phase when the artist equates himself with the Creator. An implicit parallelism with scriptural materials should be brought out here: God created man who subsequently fell from Grace because of his will. By the same

token, Sirak created a character, i.e. Agafari, whose mark of dignity as a man is his unique love for life. The artist's man is in constant search of the fruit of life (p. 138) denied to the original man because of the original sin. All this account is implicit in the novel. Equally implicit is the stark contrast regarding the solution to the problem. That is, while the original man is promised by God the way to the tree of life through faith, the artist's man is envisaged to attain it through his own effort by which he can also attain perfection.

To sum up, the moral vision of *Derasew* is illustrated in the life and work of the class-conscious protagonist. His sympathy for and identification with the common folks is a practical moral gesture indicating a determination to change their life for the better. The fact that he is a “creator” of Socialist Realist orientation suggests the need for creative agents who can play the role of transforming society and life through revolutionary means and ways. Reiteration of the dialectic of life and the notion of man as being capable of changing himself and his world through labour appears to be a way of rectifying “the hitherto idealist views of man and life”. To such an extent that religious beliefs as well as fatalistic views have permeated every aspect of the society in question, such notions as dialectics of life are radically unfamiliar to such a society. It is to be noted, however, that the author in his style uses familiar terms and images from religious materials to express such revolutionary views. The idea of the possibility for man to have remained an ape if he hadn't been banished from the Garden of Eden, for example, as much suggests Darwin's theory of evolution as it does the transformation that occurs through labour.

## **5.2. Utilitarianism versus Egoism in *Ye'qey Kokeb Tiri***

The period in which *Ye'qey Kokeb Tiri* was set can be described as one of the bleakest moments in the history of this nation. That was the time when, in the Ethiopian context, man's capacity for evil was demonstrated. It was all done in the name of socialism or communism, which was all about making the world a safer place for humanity.

The name for the whole scenario was revolution, a social phenomenon eagerly anticipated, in the preceding decades, by radical elements including university students with the hope that it would do away with the nation's long standing problems- political, cultural, economic, etc. Now that the revolution has come, it comes with its own challenges. The class struggle in which the progressive people were involved meant that its architects competed amongst themselves in a fashion that seemed they wanted to prove more revolutionaries than their fellows.

The reality on the ground was, however, what Kifle (2001: 202) describes as “political opportunism” characterized by “the race for power in politics in which ideology and altruism were unethically compromised for individual and group gains.” (p. 202). Forming themselves into clandestine political groupings namely MEISON, (short for all Ethiopian Socialist Movement) and EPRP (short for Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Party) the radical elements entered into a cut-throat competition for power, thus allowing themselves to be out-manuevered by the armed group. In the process, animosity prevailed soon and spread like wild fire thus delving the country into what has gone down in its history as the “reign of terror”. Writing of the horrible consequence, Kifle puts it as “the start of the bloody period whose horrid scepter could only be matched by the dramatization of the most horrifying Hollywood film” (ibid.).

To an artist of Bealu Girma's caliber, there was no truth that mattered more than this irony of welfare to humanity unfolded in the daily drama of killing. Indeed, Bealu for one believed in the welfare that communism preached. He was part of it himself<sup>5</sup> but, as a conscientious writer, could not afford to stand by and watch as the irony unfolded. Bent on telling the truth from the point of view of a writer committed to the methods and ideological doctrines of socialist realism, he had to capture the mood of the prevailing reality and give it an expression in his art. *Yegey Kokeb Tiri* was a product of such a conscious effort.

What was the truth told? It is simply about the role of egoism in a revolutionary mission and the general sense of uncertainty accompanying the state of anarchy that prevailed during the 'Derg regime' particularly between its early years (1976-1978).

The reader, from the very beginning, is given a foretaste of the horror that has engulfed the city of Addis Ababa from the vantage points of a terror-stricken household. Amid the incessant shootings, heard in the background, an elderly couple, Gulilat and Amsale, fret about the properties they have lost to the revolution- urban and rural land and houses- while at once fearing for their children who are in the thick of counter-revolutionary activities. To make matters worse, Deribe, their foster- son, joins the revolutionary camp thus exacerbating their fear of being considered enemies of the revolution. For he knows the details of their background including the secret of the weapons he has helped them bury in their backyard.

But Deribe has his own trouble and that largely on account of them and their daughter Hirut. Although he has accepted the calling of the 'Red Star', symbol of the revolution, his concern for the couple and his love for Hirut continue to be an impediment for him not to pursue his mission with clear conscience. Thus caught between conflicting tendencies, Deribe finds himself in a state of moral dilemma, the one single aspect of *Yegey Kokeb Tiri* emphasized in this section. That is to say, the novel deals with the inherent problem of utilitarianism versus egoism.

If Deribe gravitates towards the revolution, it is mainly because of his natural parents who had been subjected to the brutalities of the defunct social system. Bereaved of his parents at a very young age and thus being forced to grow in a harsh condition as a houseboy, Deribe appears to have a good cause to be embittered. So serving the revolution is a matter of doing justice to his past as well as to his sense of self-identity that has suffered setbacks resulting from

contemptuous treatments he has been subjected to as a member of an oppressed class.

Given the class nature of his foster parents, and the fact that Hirut is a member of EPRP (a clandestine party considered to be an avowed enemy of the revolution) Deribe's love for her, as well as his sympathy for them, is a tendency incompatible with the requirements of the revolution. It must be noted that the revolution, like a jealous woman, demands his undivided commitment and devotion. But Deribe persists in loving Hirut throughout the narrative.

Let us see a bit further what it means for Deribe to be in such persistent love with Hirut. This takes us back to when it all started. One day, amid her restlessness in one of her high moments of sexual desire, Deribe happens to be in her bedroom with a pure motive of performing his daily routine of arranging it for her as a houseboy, though by now he has been a fully grown young man. Hirut would not miss this chance: she induces him into making love to her. Hirut, in so doing, uses him to satiate her carnal desire. This is a rare case of a man being seduced by a woman. What is worse, she has always hated him afterwards even to set her eyes on him. Characteristically, she doesn't stick to men she has slept with; but him she hates. It is in the latter's connection that she is likened to a "queen bee" that kills the male in a mating.

Why Deribe's love for Hirut is depicted in terms that evoke a feeling of mortality is significant in more than one sense. For one thing, he becomes morally corrupt and degenerate as he blindly pursues his motto of "making a man of himself one day". In his view, Hirut treats him like that because she doesn't consider him as a human being. So in order to be a man worthy of her attention he has to be an achiever in life. That Deribe has never reflected upon what it means "to be a man" is stated in the following extract:

*There was hardly a moment when he tried to reflect upon what he meant by being a man one day. For him to be a man meant only one thing: to captivate Hirut's heart and to attract (arrest) her eyes. This was in short what is meant for him to be a man, to be a man one day. (61)*

This is actually an understatement of the fact that Deribe has not realized “the death of his conscience”. Under the blindfolding impact of Hirut’s love, he has sunk to such a low level where he plays the role of a lackey and gossip-bearer for a corrupt official who even doubts his shadow. Deribe does all this to get promotions and salary increments in quick successions, to get the wherewithal to captivate Hirut's heart. In so doing, he becomes instrumental in causing many fellow workers to lose their jobs and salaries.

Deep in his psyche, however, Deribe knows that he is doing this against the grains of his conscious belief that he is wrong. Nevertheless, he feels that this is his own way of taking his share of meat from “the Caracas”, a metaphor for the anarchic situation that prevailed in the transitional period after the demise of the feudal system. For him everybody has turned into a vulture taking lumps of meat from “the Caracas” (p. 63). Whoever does not take part in the scramble is only a weakling who does not want to be a man one day. Deribe attempts to convince himself thus justifying the unjustness of his action. However, how deeply troubled his conscience is evident in the extract below:

*... there is no room for "tears of the conscience". After all, whose conscience have we seen shed tears! Though they dress their motives in progressive sounding terms, most folks strive for personal gains-for power, promotion and salary increments. Hasn't the Caracas fallen for them to-like strong vultures jostling with the weaker ones - tear from it!... The strong shall live while the weaklings fall. So why should I bother myself... (pp. 63-64)*

As is evident from the preceding discussion, Deribe’s love for the “queen bee” has sent him veering with the consequence that his conscience is dealt a morbid blow. But this is not all. “Death of one’s conscience” is shown to entail

“death of one’s sense of self-identify.” This other death, only implied in the former one, is made conspicuous in the resurrection it attains as Deribe watches a work of art, a play by another character Emaélaf. In the play the protagonist, who enacts the role of an office-boy acts like a rabid dog and hangs himself in the manner of Judas the Iscariots upon realizing that he, by being a lackey to a boss - as does Deribe himself - has betrayed his fellow workers in the same office.

Although he later on argues with the playwright that the latter should not have made the protagonist kill himself - on the grounds that he betrayed his class for want of knowledge - Deribe is never the same afterwards. As he subsequently admits, Emaélaf has opened his eyes for him thus causing him to attain knowledge of his self-identity i.e., to regain his class-consciousness. In that sweep of realization, Deribe vividly recalls how his natural father had been brutally murdered only because he tried to defend his right of property. As the story goes, a landlord comes to the village to claim the only thing - a lamb - that the poor peasant, Deribe’s father, possesses. The landlord having grabbed the lamb by force, the peasant kills him and escapes into the wilderness. Subsequently, security men hunt him down and then hang his body in a market place. Moreover, the peasant’s only child, Deribe, and the latter’s mother get evicted from their place as a family of a bandit. In short, it is this old wound that the play opens.

Deribe thus attains a new light as to why he should serve the revolution. He fully identifies himself with the “oppressed” thus getting resolved to selflessly serve their cause. Responding to the inspiration by Finote, Emaélaf’s fiancé, to accept the call of the “Red Star”, a metaphor for the revolution, he finds himself in the thick of revolutionary activities. His acceptance of the election to the chairmanship of his Kebele’s revolutionary guards at the very time when people in that same position are marked for death, vividly shows that Deribe is indeed

"in love" with the revolution. For, in Finote's words "a love for a revolution and a country is stronger than any other kind of love" (p. 96).

The real issue at stake is, however, whether this new love can erase his love for Hirut. He knows too well that she is a member of EPRP, short for Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party, a clandestine party that has gone on the spree of assassinating revolutionaries like him. That very "queen bee" that caused the "death of his conscience" is out there striving to "kill the revolution" which he has come to equate with his resurrected or revived conscience (p214). But Deribe is still deeply in lover with her. Relating the dilemma the protagonist experiences the narrator states thus:

*His troubled conscience was still with him. So he was like a stranger standing at a crossroad not knowing which way to go: he didn't know whether he should proceed along the one or the other. His heart was as heavy as a boulder (p. 29)*

Note that this brief account of Deribe's dilemma takes place at the very beginning of the narrative. As the narrative progresses it gets deeper and towards the middle we find Deribe saying: "The love I have for her and for the "red star" is getting more and more entangled" (p.149). At the end, we see him trudging towards her parents' house carrying her body that has sustained deadly wounds.

At one point Deribe openly admits that he has not inherited his father's trait of courage and bravery. What a confession! His father fought and died for his right. Supposedly, Deribe is engaged in a function set to abolish, by revolutionary means, a system that subjected his father and millions of his type to that dire situation. Nevertheless, Deribe lacks the courage to part with the very thing that stands between him and the revolution. What we find materializing here is sheer egoism hindering the protagonist from achieving his altruistic goal, which is in fact the ultimate goal of the revolution.

In the final analysis then, the situation thus depicted through the protagonist's characterization was a common situation for the contemporary youth involved in the revolution one way or another. Just like him everybody else had their own things to love, care for and protect, despite the fact that they professed serving the cause of the revolution selflessly. True to the words that Bealu puts in Emaéla's mouth, he through *Yegey Kokeb Tiri* (p.83) vividly depicts contemporary human situation, particularly human weaknesses in the face of such a daunting task that was supposedly to determine the fate of the nation and of generations to come. Looking at it retrospectively, the genocide cases that have been running for over a decade now came about on account of the moral failure on the part of those involved in the revolution. Arguably, the genocide case is by all accounts incomparable to Deribe's situation. Yet, it merits as much as this small mention for it is all committed with egoism of the extreme form, though in the name of socialist revolution, which is utilitarian in objective. Finally, in rendering possible the kind of moral vision we have in this novel, Bealu gives posterity a glimpse of the moral state of the generation in question.

## Summary and Conclusion

The moral vision of utilitarianism in *Derasew* is naively structured on the binary opposition of evil (feudalism) conquered by good (socialism). This is indeed consistent with the universal sense of optimism that ensued in the very first year of the revolution. To many intellectuals, in particular, that year seemed to promise an end to the defunct feudal system and with it all the country's problems. But that was only a lull before what was to be experienced in the following few years (1976-78). And that is where *Ye'qey Kokeb Tiri* takes off.

According to Swingewood (1975: 56), author of *The Novel and Revolution*, revolutionary socialism is not merely a theory of changing both the individual and the circumstances, but an attempt to re-integrate the individual into society as both a political and social being. Of the two novels by Bealu, *Derasew* is quite an attempt to that end while *Ye'qey Kokeb Tiri* goes beyond that assertion to show the fact that egoism is also quite a factor to reckon with. As has been discussed in the foregoing sections, *Derasew* depicts an attempt to promote a new social system. Its protagonist plays the role of the civil man trying, of his own free will, to transform himself and his society. In that attempt we see him identifying himself with the commoners. His commitment to that effect is also extended to his work of art, in which case we see him as good as preaching socialism and doing his best to live himself out as per the precepts he preaches. Basically, what we discern in the novel in line with that observation is what Swingewood calls "revolutionary praxis". That is to say, in an attempt to abolish social distinction, which in the previous social systems was a condition for inequality and exploitation, it undertakes a revolutionary role. It is in this connection that moral provincialism of the previous social system is reacted to. When it comes to *Ye'qey Kokeb Tiri*, Bealu appears to have attained a considerable degree of maturity, for he is no longer as naïve in his

character delineation as he is in the other novel. Rather, he tends to focus on the inner life of the characters, particularly the protagonist, thus trying to reveal the moral dilemma which the latter experiences because of egoism that stands in his way. Truly, Bealu has no way of overcoming one of the major limitations of utilitarianism or Marxist morality which is, to use Mothershead's (1967: 174-5) words, "the great unselfishness" that Marxism calls for.

## NOTES

1. Fiqre Tolosa (1982) in his *Realism in Amharic Novel*, contends that there was no fertile ground for socialist realism in the Amharic novel of the period in question. He ascribes this to the idealist background of Amharic novelists by virtue of which they were unable “to represent contemporary reality realistically”, let alone to represent it “socialist-realistically”. Of Beálu’s novels, particularly *Yegey Kokeb Tiri*, he maintains that it is “a tendentious novel which is good only for one time reading” (p. 290). But there is every reason to argue that Bealu pioneered the method of socialist realism in the Amharic novel even by the very criteria that Fiqre says one is required to meet in order to practice this literary method (pp. 10, 290).
2. Laurie Henry, in his *The Fiction Dictionary*, defines “synchronous narrative” as “novel-within-a-novel” (p. 193).
3. This was government sponsored campaign where university and high school students were required by decree to render national service in the rural parts of the country.
4. Notably, Beálu reflects the same idea in his other novel *Keadmas Bashager* (1962: 33) where he expresses that man’s ultimate destiny is to be a deity.
5. Holding the office of Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information in 1969, Be’alu is said to have been politically on the side of a “Marxist” grouping called “Seded” (See Molvaer, 1997: 344).

## CHAPTER SIX

### ETHICS AND ETHNICITY IN *YE'BURQA ZIMITA*

The relation between ethics and ethnicity is a contentious subject. As cited in Gikandi (2001: 6), Christopher Miller author of *Theories of Africa* (1990), holds the view that there is an inherent connection between ethics and ethnicity. Gikandi further points out that it is in fact said of Miller as insisting on the nature of difference as a theoretical imperative (p. 7). Nevertheless, Gikandi objects to Miller's position on the ground that theories of difference should be guarded against. This is because, among other things, "the atrocities that define our times have been committed in the name of one theoretical enterprise or another and have been pegged to some ideology of difference" (p. 12).

Miller's position, though, is positively regarded by K.W. Harrow (2002: 155), who, writing in his article "ethics and difference...", reacts to Gikandi's position of Miller. Accordingly, Miller's stance on theory of difference should be perceived favorably as he "argued that ethical understandings required appreciation of ethnic difference..." His argument in favor of maintaining appreciation of ethnic difference is based on his conviction that statements of truth, characteristically discursive as they are, cannot rise above such differences. Hence, ethical questions are intrinsically related to ethnic relationship of one sort or another. Again as cited in Harrow, defining ethnicity in terms of the fact that "there is no real ethics without ethnicity", Miller concludes that "any theory of difference, be it termed ethnicity or nation, must enter into dialogue with ethics for it to justify its goal", (p. 155).

If we try to relate those two positions on the relationship between ethics and ethnicity to the Ethiopian context, we will find that they have vitally important implications. With respect to the first position I would like to cite an example of the conservative ideology of Ethiopian identity given expression in *Adefris*. As shown in chapter four of this thesis, this ideology marginalizes the non-Semitic

Ethiopian ethnic groups as it focuses on the legacies of the Semitic Ethiopian kings of the past. As the recent history of Ethiopia indicates, such an ideology (theory) has but proven to be counterproductive. The query that Ebsa Gutema, one of college day student poets, raised in his poem "Etiyopiawiw Manew?" (Who is the Ethiopian?)<sup>1</sup> (1993) has been and still is a question not only raised by many but also led them to a series of rebellions and resistance movements against the centralized Ethiopian governments of the past. Writing on this issue in his book, *Ethiopia: From Empire to Federalism* (2001), Professor Kifle Abraham has the following to say:

*Evidence of the fact that Ethiopia has been bedeviled by a century of conquest, subjugation and resistance of various ethnic movements are profusely abundant (p. 348).*

The century referred to here dates back to the period when Minilik II reigned. That was the period when the so-called "Neftegna" class gained prominence and of their catalytic role in the process of resistance Kifle writes further:

*The process of resistance intensified because the Neftegna were given a free hand to allocate land to themselves and their likes on the basis of the criteria of loyalty to the rulers (p. 350).*

The federal system in place now is indeed a consequence of, among other things the challenges put up against the ideology of identity which came to be recognized as part of a process of identity by assimilation. If adherents of that ideology were to persist in sustaining and imposing it on others or, conversely, if those who see a threat of identity by assimilation were to pursue some heinous line of thought, then it will be a cause for the danger hinted in Gikandi's concern aforementioned.

Harrow's position of Miller that any theory of difference must enter into dialogue with ethics is also relevant to the Ethiopian situation since it seems to go well with cotemporary thoughts regarding ways and means of resolving contradictions stemming from ethnic differences. And even more so if we

consider the fact that Ethiopia is home to close to eighty ethnic groups and that it has had unhappy records about its handling of ethnic differences in the past. It is, therefore, only imperative that Ethiopian writers concern themselves with the issues in a manner that forges a much better future of ethnic relationship. It is in this respect that *Ye'burqa Zimita* (Burqa's Silence) holds a strong appeal to us thus meriting an in-depth analysis in this chapter.

*Ye'burqa Zimita* (1992) by Tesfaye Gebreab is a historical novel with a political overtone of building up EPRDF's<sup>2</sup> image. In this image the party is depicted as having a vision of doing away with injustices that stemmed from ethnic inequalities. This being the case of reaction to the long-standing moral-provincialism that characterized the ethnic aspect of Ethiopian politics, its ramifications can be seen in the two-part analysis rendered in this chapter. Meanwhile, let it be known that *Ye'Burqa Zimita* is the only novel of its kind in the vernacular in that it boldly enters ethnicity into dialogue with ethics.

But first let us consider the structural significance of the combined effect produced by the aspects of the novel such as myth-making and history, as well as the "queer" blending of fiction and reality.

Having two narrative frames- one broad and another one narrow- the novel devotes its broader frame to the civil war in which the now EPRDF and the former Derg regime were involved. The war thus represents a cosmic conflict between the overwhelming power of evil on the one hand, and the victims who fought it to its demise, on the other. As the build up of the profile of the victims shows, the latter constitute individuals who have been pushed to the margins by the Derg's brutalities to the point where they take up arms against it in quest for justice (pp.42, 91, 105, 199, 77, 250). Within this frame of the novel we have a subsumed narrative frame in which the issue of ethics and ethnicity is distinctly addressed. The narrative structure of this latter frame is constructed in a manner that seems to emphasize that the idea of quest for

justice should also go beyond the narrative present of the cosmic conflict depicted as there remains a score to be settled, albeit in retrospect.

The aspects of the novel mentioned above have a function of reinforcing each other to the effect of giving a strong expression to the one single thrust of the novel, i.e., the quest for justice. This effect is achieved by a literary technique where the formal boundaries between history, fiction, reality and even myth are virtually abolished. A brief account involving the nature of interactions between the major characters in the novel, each representing a definite ideal of some social and historical significance, will suffice to demonstrate this fact.

As we open the first page of the novel we are given a prologue where the death of Hayalom<sup>3</sup>, the character of a historical figure, is received with a shock by the authorial narrator. Subsequently, the latter learns of a character, i.e. Hawoni the protagonist, having fallen unconscious on hearing the tragic death of the said figure. The authorial narrator who in fact talks to the protagonist in the prologue where he narrates from the first person point of view, disappears from the rest of the narrative only to reappear in the epilogue where he once again narrates from the first person point of view. In the epilogue we see him holding lengthy conversations with the protagonists, particularly with Anole, who is also said to have had personal knowledge of Hayalom. Hayalom is portrayed as a paragon of virtue and thus an inspiration for all the fighters who, in pursuit of justice for themselves, as well as for their people, fought and ultimately brought down the "defunct regime" of the Derg. Hawoni adores Hayalom for this very reason and starts out as his biographer. Anole, too, highly values Hayalom's integrity as such. Along with Hawoni, Anole represents the interest of their kinsmen i.e. the Oromos of Burqa village, who have been earnestly seeking to even out or settle scores with the people they call the "Neftegnas". With a myth-like tale woven into their lives, the protagonists look set to live up to that destiny for which they have been pre-determinately groomed.

This, however, does not mean that the protagonists maintain the same position on the issue. While Hawoni works towards restoration of her people's dignity, which the system she calls "Neftegnahood" had deprived them of, Anole holds an extreme position of seeing justice done in a form of retribution and restitution.

In pursuing retribution as a form of justice, Anole does it not only as a matter of conviction but also as a gesture of allegiance to his foster- father's lifetime commitment to that end. The latter figure, Waqo Abadula deserves mention at this stage since he too has his prototype coming from pages of a history book called *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1950*. In his article "*imperialism and expansionism in Ethiopia*" comprising a chapter of that book, Harold G. Marcus (1969: 452) gives a brief account of the said prototype. His name being Roba, "an Arussi Galla Chieftain", this figure is said to have grudgingly submitted to Minillik, but not without subsequently making the following prophetic remarks about an imminent independence: "The hour has not come, but it will come; perhaps our children will see the departure of the oppressor" (Ibid.).

As a matter of fact, it is the possible fulfillment of these prophetic words that the subsumed narrative frame of *Ye'Burqa Zimita* fictionalizes by perpetuating the idea through Waqo's consciousness. Not being able to see to it through the finish line, Waqo bequeaths the "promise of independence" to his foster children Anole and Hawoni. As a token to jointly shoulder this responsibility, these two have been betrothed from childhood and are therefore always mindful of the prophetic words by the former's prototype (see pp. 152, 288).

As was pointed out above, the protagonists, however, differ in the positions they take with respect to the promise of fulfilling the prophecy. So when one considers the moral vision of the novel it would be imperative to take into account the distinct positions represented by the protagonists and it is these features of the narrative that the following two sections set out to explore.

## 6.1. Ethnic Chauvinism as a Social System: Features and Legacies

In *Yeburqa Zimita* ethnic chauvinism is decried as assuming an extreme form of ethical provincialism practiced by a group of people called "Neftegnas". The word "Neftegnas", roughly meaning "riflemen", generally and derogatively refers to Emperor Minielik II's men involved in his "imperial expansion" toward those parts of Ethiopia that had their own Kingdoms (p. 285ff.). With the "Neftegnas" having settled in the areas they helped the Emperor to subjugate the natives and with their successive generations having done their best to socialize them (the natives) into the hegemonic values of their ethnic group, the natives are depicted as always nursing grudges against the former. To this effect, the narrative demonstrates features and legacies of moral provincialism and/or ethnic chauvinism practiced within "Neftegnahood" as a "social system" (p. 282).

According to Hawoni, the protagonist, "Neftegnahood" first and foremost represents the mentality of a small section of Amharas, i.e. the elite and the ruling class of the ethnic Amhara, who regard and treat other ethnic groups, particularly the non-Semitic ones, with contempt. So it must be noted at this juncture that the novel makes a clear distinction between "Neftegnas" as a social class and the rest of the ethnic group who are themselves subject to oppressions and exploitations inflicted on them by the same masters. Hawoni spells out this fact in the following terms by stressing an otherwise perfect relationship existing between her own ethnic group and that of Amhara.

*Perpetrators of "Neftegnahood" have relentlessly exerted efforts to pit the oppressed Amharas against the Oromo people. Their reason is obvious: Unless the Amhara people are set against the Oromos, "Neftegnahood" will not prevail. In order to thrash out the defiant spirit of Oromo people, they had to use the Amharas who (actually) led no better life than the Oromo peasantry. In their resolve to withstand our defiance they had to inflate the Amhara peasantry with vainglory. They have even made use of*

*their religion to preach that Amharas are superior to Oromos.... we have to try and make the oppressed people of Amhara realize the venomous shrewdness that the chauvinist rulers have up their sleeves. (p. 203).*

That this is indeed the case can be illustrated by the following bravado rhetoric made by Asnake, who in his capacity as a Nefteгна leader of the Amharas living in a village close to Burqa, tries to instill courage and virility in his fellow men, and that in the face of an imminent threat of insurrection by Burqa Oromos.

*Fellow folks, listen to me.... If we review Ethiopian history, all good things were done by Amharas. Amharas and Tigreans ruled (Ethiopia) taking turns for three millennia. What did the Tigreans do (by way of nation building)? Nothing'. If we have to speak, let it be about the accomplishments that those (great) kings had done and gone. If we consider only those deeds accomplished by Minilik and Hailesellasse, we can discern that Ethiopian civilization is the yield of only Amhara. Amhara is wise. (He) is mighty. (Amhara) takes pride in his Ethiopian identity. We have to (thus) be proud of being Amhara which in itself is beauty. Everywhere in the world Ethnic Amhara is dependable. Amhara means bravery... Go to the Addis Ababa University, so close to us... it is the Amharas who are its engines. So, is it fit for anyone to reproach him? (p. 81).*

"Nefteгнаhood" is characterized as a system that dehumanizingly stereotypes members of other ethnic groups. Hawoni elucidates this to be the case by referring to ethnic Walaytas, Yems as well as Oromos (p. 282, 285-6). Talking of the latter, for example, she refers to a highly celebrated Amharic dictionary that dubs Oromos as "Ghallas" and goes on to point out a range of contemptuous nuances that this infamous word stands for (p. 282). The severity to which such an attitude affects subjects of the system is also illustrated in the following conversation involving Anole and his kinsmen:

"Ababoru!"  
*It was Anole speaking in Oromigna.*  
 "Yes, my child?"  
 "Did they beat you in the prison?"  
 "No, my child, they only insulted us. They did not touch us"  
 "Who was it that insulted you!"  
 "It was a long time ago, my child!"  
 "What, Ababoru?"  
 "Since it all started!"  
 "Ababoru!"  
 "Yes, my child!"  
 "What did they say to you?"  
 "Me... they called 'a fool Ghalla' "  
*He bemoaned. It pained him as though his side had been pierced with a spear. As he inhaled he felt a hot breathe pass through his nostrils.*  
 "Can you recall the ignorant guy who said that?"  
 "They also ridiculed us saying 'You're no better than the asses you chase."  
 "It must be the same dog that sounds so 'reeky' "  
 "When are you going to get civilized?' They scoffed at us."  
 "What did you say in reply, Ababoru?"  
 "'Under whose patronage can we get civilized' I said to him."  
 "So what did he say in reply?"  
 "They recited a proverb: 'A hen strangled itself on hearing about others having strangled themselves."  
 "Aren't they unbeaten at proverbs? Their life is proverbial and so is their mode of thinking. What better do they know than telling tales like an old woman?..." (p. 52).

It must be clear from the above extract that the subjects find it extremely painful even to talk of contempt and humiliations to which they have been subjected. We are told that Anole "bemoaned" when his kinsman related to him that the "Neftegnas" called him (the latter) names. Each time his conversant relates what names they called them, Anole reacts with angry remarks that betray his fury at such words of insult. What we have here is precisely the proverbial case of the eye shedding tears when the nose is hit.

Calling others names and ridiculing them for want of virtues is obviously indicative of self-righteousness. This being a typical case of ethical-Provincialism, it would be useful to briefly consider how the "Neftegnas" see themselves. For example, we are told that they regard themselves or even pride

themselves on their purported role as civilizing agents (p. 61). Asnake, one of the groups living in the village near Burqa, blatantly maintains that his ethnic group is virtually synonymous with wisdom, might and beauty (p. 81). Elsewhere, Hawoni points out that they regard themselves as people chosen to live a free, noble and victorious life and also as people destined to rule (p. 282). What do the subjects of "Neftegnas" make of the latter's professed virtues? In a word, they regard their claims to be hollow or at best expressions of sheer hypocrisy, arrogance or chauvinism. To Hawoni these people are such foolhardy fellows who are even unable to present their position in seeming manners (p. 82). Waqo in his initial assessment of "Neftegnas" and what they represent offers the following statement in which we can also discern the ethical provincialism from the Oromo's perspective:

*It was they who introduced to us "arage" (home brewed strong spirit). They drank 'tej' (mead) and 'arage' for three millennia while Oromos drank milk for eight millennia. Sarcasm is not Oromic; and nor is concubinary... Mischief is not known to Oromo. Greed and cowardice aren't either. Oromo's heart is clean. Oromo doesn't despise others. (He is) sincere (or good natured) (p. 65).*

It appears that such attitudes as are held by "Neftegnas" about the Oromos, as well as about the other ethnic groups, are closely associated with the harsh manner of subjugation the latter had undergone. As the narrative relates in many places Minilik's men had to crush resistance by committing all sorts of atrocities: Mass killing, maiming of breasts and limbs, turning many into slavery, etc. (p. 93f.). The legendary figure Waqo Abadula is repeatedly referred to as keeping the memory of such atrocity alive among Burrqa villagers. Some of his rhetoric as recalled by Anole runs as follows:

*Minilik abolished the Ghada system; exterminated Oromos and their leaders; imposed upon us an alien system that is (inherently) antidevelopment thus dehumanizing us... They (the "Neftegnas") grabbed our land. Oromos were reduced to the status of servitude for their servants.... They dutifully took to abolishing Oromos' language and culture. Whoever resisted were either wiped out like flies or humiliated by getting their nails pulled or by being castrated. They made those brave people bow down with shame. They turned those innocent people into skeptics.... (p. 93, also see p. 65).*

Needless to go into details of accounts of similar atrocities purportedly committed against other ethnic groups such as Walayita and Yem (pp. 285-286).

Another feature of ethnic chauvinism vehemently decried in the novel is the identity crisis that the subjects have undergone. Accounted for as a cumulative effect of the contemptuous attitudes and the dehumanizing subjugations they experienced, identity crisis is in fact viewed as a legacy of the system. Hawoni points out that the system is so insinuating as to cause Oromos to lose their identity as members of their ethnic group to the extent that some have come to taking Amhara names for their children<sup>4</sup> (p. 287). As a matter of fact, she equates the situation with killing of one's identity which she describes as the worst thing that "Neftegnahood" as a system can do to its subjects. This is what Hawoni discerns in the tendency of Walayita ethnic subjects to evade their identity:

*The reason for members of the ethnic group to evade their identity is the untold brutality and psychological trauma that they have been subjected to by the "Neftegnas". It would have been much better if the "Neftegnas" left after pillaging and murdering. But (unfortunately) that did not happen. They had a pernicious habit of killing identity (p. 285).*

At this juncture, it would be worthwhile to relate the concept of identity in *Ye'Burqa Zimita* with that which is articulated in *Adefris*. As was shown in chapter 4 of this thesis, *Adefris*'s moral vision hinges on the authoritarian moral principle according to which the age-old social system with the king at its

center is purportedly justified. Given the fact that the citizen is required to confirm to the aristocratic socio-political system with all the myths and legends that legitimized the rulers and with all the accompanying hegemonic values, there is every reason to maintain that the Ethiopian identity reiterated in *Adefris* is an identity by assimilation.

Coming to *Ye'Burqa Zimita*, we have a clear tendency not only to defuse that kind of identity but also to assert and promote an entirely different type of identity. That is why Hawoni, apparently believing in the notion that "difference is the essence of identity", urges her fellow Oromos to dutifully honor their identity:

*So my fellow folks, brace up for the new journey. If we honor our identity others too will honor us. The identity which we have not nurtured we cannot expect others to water and nurse for us (p. 286).*

In reading such accounts heavily impregnated with historical facts one would wonder if such materials are not out of place in a literary work of this kind. One may also wonder if at all there is any value in recounting wrongs done in the past believing that the bygone should be let as bygone. These are indeed legitimate queries. The wrongs depicted in the novel are ascribed to Minilik's "ill-advised methods and policies". Even then such bitter complaints could be dismissed with something like what Dr. Getachew Mekasha is said to have written: "But Minilik successfully accomplished everything within the logic and the light of his days" (as quoted in Kinfu's *Ethiopia: From Empire to Federation*, p. 112). Nevertheless, *Ye'Burqa Zimita* takes the issue even further as it tells of a sustained tendency to prescribe vengeance and retributive justice to the "perpetrators of the infamous system". A consuming desire for vengeance is depicted through an intensive and methodical account of a highly radicalized, ethnic-conscious group residing in "Burqa Village" in Arsi. And it is this aspect of the narrative that the following section attempts to address.

## 6.2. Desire to Avenge: Retributive Justice as a Moral of Vengeance and its Implications

In *Ye'Burqa Zimita* retributive justice constitutes one of the basic discourses methodically woven into the structure of the novel. That is to say, retribution as a form of quest for justice takes on a distinct framework in which are given expressions of retrospective angry reactions against "the infamous system". In order to look into this aspect of the narrative it would be indispensable to consider such technical elements as myth-making and radicalization of characters. With respect to the latter, we have a picture of a whole village (community) thoroughly radicalized under the influence of a legendary figure, Waqo Abadula. A man of great age, Waqo plays a unique role acting like a bridge between the past and the present. In fact he is an impersonation of Roba<sup>5</sup>, the historical figure after which he is fashioned. Not only does he keep alive the memories of past atrocities committed ever since the brutal subjugations of the ethnic group, but also agitates the people to keep the fire of vengeance burning. It is this purpose that is served in his habit of gathering farmers on the plateau where he would vent out his embittered outrage about the "Neftegnas" who he claims had done all sorts of atrocities ranging from adulterating the Oromos' culture to grabbing their fertile land, amputating limbs and breasts and to massacring whoever resisted their expansionist advances (p. 93-94). Waqo is exceptionally pungent in his reference to the "Neftegnas" cutting breasts. For he compares their act to farmers shearing sheep or to that of a carnivore voraciously eating raw flesh. That Waqo wouldn't settle for anything short of vengeance is implied in the following excerpt:

*Fellow folks, do you know why a dog is humiliated? It is because it submissively accepts oppressions and humiliations that people inflict on it. If only it resisted and defied wrongs done to it, our children's names would have been "different". So is it possible to remove the insulting word ('doggy') by legal means? Do tell me, fellow men (p. 94).*

Conditioned as they are by their own predicaments of which perceptions are deepened by Waqo's ceaseless agitating rhetoric, there is little wonder that the Oromos in the village of Burqa are depicted as nursing strong and pungent grudges against 'Neftegnas'. The village, with the offsprings of the original "Neftegnas" living in an adjacent village, is thus accorded a special place in the narrative. This is because it symbolically signifies the spirit of rebellion as well as an ongoing struggle of the people to recover their lost dignity (p. 119), which they believe they can do only by dispensing retributive justice.

It is to this effect that the narrative mystifies the scenario by weaving a wrought-myth, authored and disseminated by the legendary figure, involving the river after which the village is named. The myth holds that the Burqa River, which previously routed its natural course meandering around the hills of the village, submerged itself underground, like a coil of a great python, ashamed as it was of the Oromos having been defeated and humiliated by "Neftegnas" (p. 321). The chief who purportedly realized this and meaning to put an end to Burqa's self-imposed vow of silence, tried to put up an offensive to force the "Neftegnas" nearby to flee the land they have occupied ever since the day of Minilik, but in vain. Seeing that the Oromos couldn't make it, the river once appears to the chief in a dream and prophesies that it would resume its natural course after 70 years. That is supposedly the time marking the chief's death which is to harbinger an unprecedented anger of Oromos sending the whole world in turmoil. In the words of the personified river, the text runs as follows:

*Behold, Waqo!, the youth of this age have proven inept to restore your dignity. My silence shall as well continue. Nevertheless, on the very day you die, Oromoes' fury shall once again boil over thus setting the land quaking. Youth shall be led by youth thus exhibiting their bravery. It is then that I shall raise my head. Oromos shall then (once again) be enthralled by the music (of my flow), shall learn of my heroism which they shall inherit, and shall listen to my (sweet) tales (p. 33).*

Prophecy is bound to be consummated and a foreshadow to that end is given in the above extract. Interestingly, this prophecy involves Anole and Hawoni, the protagonists referred to as "the youth leading youth" on the imminent doomsday. As such, the narrative scheme of radicalization and myth-making is carried over to the portrayal of Hawoni and Anole as the offsprings entrusted with the task of fulfilling their forefathers' unaccomplished craving for vengeance.

It is, therefore, important to note the myth-like tale woven into Hawoni's and Anole's fictional lives. Of these two, it is said that they were the only remnants of Ogelgo massacre. The latter had taken place when Emperor Haileselassie I's soldiers crushed the resistance put up by the Oromos of Ogelgo village who could no longer tolerate the exploitation and oppression they were subjected to (pp. 78-79). It was when the neighboring villagers of Burqa went to bury the dead that they recovered two children from the bosoms of two dead women. These children being Anole and Hawoni, they were subsequently brought up by Waqo and the whole community as a token of God's miraculous saving. For it was said: "Agrieved at the sufferings and the massacre of his people in the hands of the Neftegnas, God shed two teardrops which saved two children." (p. 79).

Surrounded by a halo of such a supernatural touch as Anole and Hawoni were, there is little wonder that the whole community lays great store by them by way of counting on them as future redeemers. That is precisely why the villagers of Burqa lavishly offered them love, care and education and even betrothed them at their tender age.

The myth of Burqa's silence, and thus the significance of the title "Ye'burqa Zimeta", is a "sweet dream" as the Burqa elders relate to Anole at the deathbed of his foster father (p. 79). But considering the fact that it always haunts Anole and Hawoni, the myth cannot be dismissed so readily. For they seem to have

discerned that it is, as a matter of fact, a dream that has to come true with their sacrificial commitment to the cause of their people.

As has been pointed out the narrative purpose served by radicalization and myth-making is to give an emphatic expression to the ethical problem stemming from ethnic differences, the handling of which is presumably a total failure. In a nutshell, this failure is not only regretted "to the bone" but also adopted and wielded as an opportunity to start afresh and forge a new kind of ethnic relationship whereby related ethical problems can be resolved. It is in this connection that the implications of the positions taken by Anole and Hawoni come into the picture.

Reserving Hawoni's position for a later discussion, let us first consider what is implied in Anole's zeal for vengeance. In his portrayal, Anole represents the most radicalized elements of his generation. This fact is attested to by the extreme position of retribution he pursues in the style of his foster-father, who in turn is narratively fashioned after his prototype from the history book, i.e. Roba Dadi (see pp, 152,288). So toward the end of the novel, immediately following the sweeping victory of EPRDF, Anole forms a clandestine group to loot and rob properties from whoever they believe are remnants of "Neftegnas". This way Anole believes to have dispensed restitutionary measures against them; and on that conviction each time his men do the robbing, Anole sends the proprietor a receipt bearing the following statement of acknowledgements:

*In appreciation of your first round act of remitting (a part of) the fortune and wealth that you have unjustly amassed by utilizing the land, rivers and lakes graciously given to the Oromos, we send you this certificate which we kindly request you to display for our men to see when they come again (p. 321).*

What is more, Anole incites unrest among Burqa villagers and causes them to rise against the Amhara living in the adjacent village. Consequently, many lives

are lost from both sides. Anole's involvement in such terrorist assaults seems to be justified as an expression of the narrative consummation of the prophecy of an end to "Burqa's silence". Indeed, it is a narrative fulfillment of the long awaited "retributive justice" with a possible message meant to scare away the "Naftegnas" as well as whoever tries to behave like them in the future.

Vengeance is by no means a positive thing. But in the context of the narrative we may discern it to be depicted and justified as a human conduct upon which is predicated a desire to restore or heal a wounded feeling of pride. Indeed, we have other Amharic novels dealing with vengeance as a common theme where that kind of desire is depicted. *Dem Bedem (Blood for Blood)* (1992) by Andarge Mesfin can be mentioned from among such works. While these works focus on the nature of such a desire at individual and family levels, *Ye'Burqa Zimita* is of national and interethnic significance. In other words, the significance of the novel lies in that one ethnic group calls at least a section of another one to account for a purported system of atrocities and subjugations.

If we perceive this work, particularly Anole's position, as though it is meant to spread seeds of discord among the ethnic groups that have coexisted over the centuries, which is in fact the most likely impression of the undiscerning mind, we would run the risk of missing the point of the novel. Like I said earlier, *Ye'Buqa Zimita* is perhaps the only novel in Amharic literature that boldly enters ethnicity into dialogue with ethics. Establishing the value of the novel as such requires discernment free of temperamental attitudes. In its methodical perpetuation, through the consciousness of the protagonists and their forebears, of wrongs done in the past, the novel admittedly opens old wounds. So what should be regretted is not that the issue is raised in such a fictional work, but rather that there was such a scenario in the past. If what was done in the past cannot be undone, contemporary and subsequent generations should see to it that such anomalies as were observed in the history of ethnic relationships in Ethiopia would not be repeated.

Failure to do so will only perpetuate the unfortunate zeal of vengeance which raises its ugly head particularly at times of trouble. Note that Anole finds such times to be conducive for his "mission". Fully convinced that he is doing justice to the cause of his people, he is perfectly at peace with himself taking the law into his own hands, acting with determination to exploit the condition lurking in the twilight between war and peace. For Anole, it is now or never that his people can restore their dignity which he believes has been trampled down by generations of "Neftegnas". Eager to accomplish his mission before any authority stands in his way, Anole would not have to get his moves sanctioned by the officials of the victorious and newly emerging EPRDF, not even by Hayalom, whose integrity he considerably values. In fact, in portraying Anole as such, Tesfaye is only transpositioning the very elements that were busy looting, pillaging and vandalizing in the brief period following the fall of Derg<sup>6</sup>.

The whole import of the protagonist's position portrayed thus is this. If not healed with all sincerity, vengeance along ethnic line will flare up in greater proportions when time allows. The scenario thus elaborately and methodically depicted seems to indicate that the worst possible condition lurking in the twilight of war and peace, which the protagonist is shown to be keen on exploiting, is and should be a matter of concern. And it is in this respect that the timing of an end to "Burqa's Silence" i.e., the consummation of the narrative prophecy, makes ample sense.

Apparently *Ye'Buqa Zimita* makes a lot of clamor about ethnic identity, honor and dignity. Indeed it does, and this is further depicted through Hawoni's position. As is revealed toward the end of the narrative, the reader is given access to Hawoni's consciousness through which he can discern the fact that "Neftegnhood" as a social system oppressively stereotypes Oromos and other non-Semitic ethnic groups as unworthy of honor and respect (pp. 276ff.). In the lengthy speech she delivers at a conference in Nekemt, when the town falls to EPRDF, Howoni tries to boost the morale of the natives by telling them of their

history as a great race (tribe) in the horn of Africa thus trying to revive their sense of dignity. As they say in West Africa (Ebo), the people needed to be told where the rain began to beat them so they would know where they dried their bodies. In short, Hawoni's engagement here demonstrates the essence of "the calling" she claims to have found (p. 275).

But that the thrust of the novel goes beyond ethnic pride is stated in the explicit account given through Hawoni's and the narrative author's conversation in the epilogue. In a manner that contrasts with Anole's position of retributive justice, Hawoni holds that any talk or view of honor while one is suffering from setbacks of poverty and backwardness is null and void. In her words, "there is no generation that desires to inherit pride with a 'sackfull of poverty' " (p. 460). Her vision for Ethiopia's future is envisioned in the possibility of sincere unity among Ethiopians. By that is meant a unity that recognizes diversity in the true sense of the term. This is indeed in keeping with the discourse widely circulating at the time the novel was written, particularly among the newly emerging politicians: Unity in diversity and mutual acceptance rather than unity by assimilation. Finally, Anole would have agreed to that but for his deep seated mistrust of the politicians.

## NOTES

1. This same query was expressed by Walelign Mekonnen, a very prominent figure in the history of Ethiopian students' movements:

*Ask anybody what Ethiopian culture is. Ask anybody what Ethiopian language is. Ask anybody what Ethiopian music is. Ask about what Ethiopian religion is. Ask about what the national dress is. It is either Amhara or Amhara- Tigre.*

Kinfe (2001: 347) uses this excerpt by Walelign to prelude a chapter of his book *Ethiopia: from Empire to Federation* and maintains that the excerpt “underlines the sense of national alienation experienced by the Oromos and some of the other nationalities in Ethiopian history”.

2. EPRDF, short for Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front, is the current ruling party in Ethiopia. It came to power in 1991 by overthrowing the Derg, the military regime that ruled for 17 years.
3. Hayalom is one of the prominent generals that led the front to its victory. He was assassinated in 1999?
4. See also Kinfe (2001: 347).
5. See Marcus (1969: 452).
6. The researcher vividly recalls such a scenario to have happened in the area he was living at the time in question.

## **PART THREE**

### **TRANSCENDING MORAL PROVINCIALISM IN FIQREMARQOS DESTA'S AND SISAY NIGUSU'S NOVELS**

*As can be seen from the preceding four chapters in two parts, attempts have been made to show the thesis-antithesis relationship between the socio-ethical systems depicted in the novels examined. While works by Haddis and Dagnachew articulate moral visions against the background of moral provincialism that prevailed in feudalism, works by Beálu and Tesfaye give expression to visions in keeping with the new social systems that negated the previous ones. In this third part, we have yet another two chapters dealing with works by two authors namely Fiqremarqos Desta and Sysay Nigusu. As opposed to the novels examined in the preceding part, the works by these two authors are selected for their common tendency of transcending moral provincialism. Put differently, these works merit an important place in the Amharic novels we are examining because they reflect a trend towards contempt for the notion of moral provincialism altogether.*

*Fiqremarqos's novels, among which are **Ivangadi** (1990 E.C), **Land of the Yellow Bull** (2003) and **Achame** (1992 E.C.) are ethnographic and his view of man is fundamentally informed by anthropological insights. Focusing on what is common to humanity, he sees more similarities among human beings than differences in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, etc. In his works such as **Ivangadi** and **Land of the Yellow Bull**, where he depicts inter-racial relationships, and in **Achame**, where quest for identity and search for one's root are illustrated, we find the thrust of his art being the sense of respect furnishing the moral basis of his characters' conduct. It is in this connection that one can speak of his works as transcending the notion of moral provincialism.*

Sisay Nigusu's novel **Requiq Ashara** (1995 E.C.) is a novel on the subject matter of morality itself. Quite legitimately, it comes in the very last chapter of this thesis because it artistically shows ways and means by which the contemporary society, that is undergoing moral degeneration, can be salvaged. The central concern of this novel is the need for conscience to be heeded, a repository of morality as it is. By the same token the novel implicitly celebrates the view that the human conscience is infallible. Transcending moral provincialism in the work is evidenced by trust in each individual's conscience irrespective of the subject's class or otherwise affiliations.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE MORAL BASIS OF HUMAN RELATIONS AND IDENTITY IN FIQREMARQOS'S NOVELS

Fiqremarqos Desta is an ethnographic novelist. One of the leading writers among the newly emerging generation of authors, he has six works to his name: *Kebusk Bestejerba* (1987, E.C.), *Ivangadi* (1990 E.C), *Ye'zersiwoch Fiqir* (1991 E.C.), *Achame* (1992 E.C), *Ye'nisir Ayin* (1993 E.C) and *Land of the Yellow Bull* (an English novel, 2003). All these being ethnographic and thus concerned with the anthropological or cultural life of their subjects, they can be legitimately examined by using a combination of the archetypal and cultural (new historical) approaches of criticism.

As Wilbur S. Scott (1979: 251) writes "Anthropological literature seeks to restore us to our entire humanity, a humanity which values the primitive elements in human nature". Scott adds that in doing so the literature "reestablishes us as members of the ancient race of man". That is why archetypal criticism is said to be an appropriate approach to the literature. As such, again to use Scott's words, archetypal criticism "seeks to discover in the literature the dramatization of this membership". This is also tersely expressed in what Lois Tyson (1999), writes about structural anthropology. Accordingly, structural anthropology "seeks the underlying common denominators, the structures, that link all human beings regardless of the differences among the surface phenomena of the cultures to which they belong" (p. 203).

Fiqremarqos's novels selected for this study namely *Achame*, *Ivangadi* and/or *Land of the Yellow Bull* are not anthropological in the sense of containing any primordial image, myth or archetype<sup>1</sup> that recurs in literature. But one thing is

true: they do celebrate humanity by focusing on the very function that, as stated above, structural anthropology is said to perform.

The fundamental question that needs to be addressed in this connection is then: what are the underlying common denominators that link the characters in Fiqremarqos's novels despite their differences? The most important link is their characteristic consciousness of the fact that they are fellow human beings. In our discussion of the works selected such a link is important for two reasons that mutually co-influence each other. For one thing, it presupposes that the moral sense of respect be adopted to promote and enhance understanding among people who are different with respect to their socio-cultural identities. This point relates to the author's conscious attempt at living up to what he puts in his protagonists' mouth in *Ivangadi*: "Mature men see similarities, not differences" (p. 143). For another thing, such a link establishes the framework and renders the atmosphere in which the works in question are shown up as participating in the long-standing discourses aimed at promoting genuine equity, equality and fraternity among peoples of various ethnic, cultural and classist groups in the country.

As such Fiqremarqos's novels deal with issues of tremendous appeal to the critical method of new historicism and/or cultural criticism. It is, therefore, necessary that we bear in mind some of the commonest questions that new historical critics raise about literary texts (Tyson, 1999: 297). One such question is whether the texts function as part of a continuum with other historical or cultural texts from the same period in which the text emerges or in which it is interpreted. Another question relates to how the texts promote the ideologies that support or undermine the power structure in which they are written and interpreted. Question can also be raised as to what the texts suggest about the experience of groups of people who have been ignored, misrepresented or under represented by traditional history.

Written in the wake of the introduction of the federal political system in Ethiopia, Fiqremarqos's works reflect enough for one to discern that they indeed function as part of the continuum with other historical or cultural texts from the same period. Chief among these is the 1995 constitution of the Federal Government of Ethiopia. Although the works are strongly critical of the tendency of some people, particularly intellectuals of some ethnic groups, for being narrow minded in their identification with their ethnic groups, their narrative attitudes towards the various social groups in Ethiopia are essentially in tune with the spirit of the constitution<sup>2</sup>. For the latter claims to be a document that ensures equality and fraternity among the ethnic groups, nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia thus putting an end to any form of domination of one over the other. As can be seen from the "thick descriptions" of the cultures and customs of the various socio-cultural groups in south Ethiopia as rendered in *Achame* and those of the Hamar community in *Kebuska Bestejesrba*, *Ivangadi* and *Land of the Yellow Bull*, it must be clear that narrative attitude towards the peoples' ways of life in general is consistently one of respect and admiration.

The ideological discourse that Fiqremarqos's novels uphold and articulate being that the people of Ethiopia, for that matter people of any given community, are never wanting in respectable beliefs and values, one would safely argue that his works are remarkably assertive about what they suggest concerning the experiences of the social groups they depict. Quite arguably again, his works do promote the ideologies of the power structure in which they are produced and that is amply evidenced by the fact that the author exhibits a marked interest in the minorities of south Ethiopia, chief among which are his favorite ethnic people of Hamar.

Notably, considering the fact that these social groups are among those that have, in the history of Ethiopia, suffered subjugation, contempt and marginalization by series of ruling classes, such an attitude by the author

represents quite a departure within the realm of the literature. And that is in perfect keeping with the ideological discourses circulating in the power structure in which his works are written.

The critical questions raised above and the connections established with Fiqremarqos's novels can also be related to what moral philosophers call "cosmic budgeting". As discussed in section one of the second chapter of this thesis, cosmic budgeting, which is analogous to moral judgment of human conduct, refers not only to the moral agent and his time but also to others and to the future. In the context of the changing face of moral vision in the Amharic novel, "cosmic budgeting" is a matter of putting right what had gone wrong in the past. Indeed this is what actually happens in the novels discussed in part two of this thesis. While the same thing can be said about Fiqremarqis's novels, the latter show this to be achievable by living through the present or, more precisely, by accepting the way people live as their natural or traditional way of life, i.e without having to impose any alien system of beliefs and values<sup>3</sup>. That is why we find the author at his best controlling and gearing his creative genius to such a human end as indicated above: to asserting whatever values and beliefs people have attained through experiences of countless generations. It is in this sense that the moral visions of Fiqremarqos's novels are transcendental as opposed to the novels of moral provincialism examined in the preceding two chapters.

As I now turn to the specific moral visions of Fiqremarqos's novels, I want to focus on two aspects of his vision that in common have the moral basis of respect for others. Accepting others for what they are, rendered in *Ivangadi* and *Land of the Yellow Bull*, being one such aspect, this foregrounds a rare vision where a genuine quest for understanding marginalized groups is depicted. The other aspect, reflected in *Achame*, is quest for identity and/or search for one's root in the context of unity in diversity. This represents the very ideological discourse circulating in the power structure in which the novel is written. It is,

hence, the ramifications of these aspects of the novels' moral visions that the following two sections set out to examine.

### **7.1. Inter-Racial Relationship: Accepting People for What They Are**

The idea of accepting people for what they are hinges on the realization that they deserve respect by virtue of being humans. This accords with what Caputo (1992:202), referring to the Kantian principle of moral sensibility, writes: "that the person is given to us in the feeling of respect as a being of intrinsic worth and dignity." Caputo goes on to elucidate this concept by stating that the "world" is a world shared with others so that the other person is "not only on my screen, a being-for-me which can be situated on my horizons, but a being – for –himself, irreducible to me."(*Ibid.*).

It is precisely this concept regarding the moral feeling of respect that informs Fiqremarqos's ethnographic novels such as *Ivangadi* and *Land of the Yellow Bull*. But the author, by reason of the inter-racial world that he creates, goes beyond to demonstrate that respect for others is also a function of some concrete vitality. This he does by depicting an interracial sexual relationship between two members of two extreme communities: Charlotte from among the erudite of the British community and Delti Geldi from the ethnic Hamar in south Ethiopia.

Accepting people for what they are entails understanding them thus enabling one to see their hidden beauty and vitality. As a matter of fact, this is a dictum borne by Charlotte, a major character in both *Ivangadi* and *Kebuska Besteierba* as well as their English version *Land of the Yellow Bull*<sup>4</sup>. Ever since she decided to follow in her father's footsteps as an anthropologist, Charlotte has always adhered to the truism enshrined in that statement. Whether the truth of the statement is relevant to her scholarly undertaking is a matter outside the scope

of this study. However, the fact that Charlotte lives up to her conviction as well as the ethical note that rings in her committed life-style is of particular interest to this study.

An accomplished anthropological researcher affiliated to Manchester University, Charlotte pursues her plan of living among her subjects: people of Hamar ethnic group. She has such a great moral stamina that has induced her to perform a feat of “approaching the lion of the jungle (apparently a metaphor for the hero she falls in love with), living with him and popularizing his wonderful natural life to those backward people who think they are advanced” (*Ivangadi*, p. 139). One of such people is Steve, a British diplomat who dates her whenever she comes to Addis. According to him, Charlotte’s plan is unpalatable. As they argue over the issue, he tries to remind her of her being a citizen of the great nation. Thankful that all her countrymen are not as cynical and chauvinistic as Steve is, she dismisses his idea as that of a hypocrite who dances to the popular tune of “We are the World”, not caring to grasp the essence of the song (p. 141).

Charlotte’s belief as an anthropologist is that there is no real difference among human beings (p. 143). If there be any, it is at best a matter of geographical location or at worst a making of people’s mind. This is not to say that Charlotte is unaware or totally oblivious of the apparent differences such as race, color and creed. Interestingly, however, Charlotte views such differences as mental blocks that have to be removed if one has to get to the people one wants to know well. On the whole, as far as she is concerned, “mature people see similarities not differences” (p. 143).

Thus being able to free herself from any taint of bias or discrimination against her subjects, Charlotte has no qualms about mixing with them. Of course, Charlotte does this as part of her research undertaking, her project being studying the role of women in Hamar culture. As is explicitly demonstrated in

*Land of the Yellow Bull*, Charlotte approaches her project by finding and pursuing a supposedly viable method of being accepted into the community itself (p. 107ff). This means involving herself in the mainstream Hamar life. As she rightly reflects in one place: “All human behavior revolves around the urge to gain pleasure or avoid pain” (p. 189f). But her choice, in a seemingly odd fashion, is in favor of the pain of a full-blooded European girl living the Hamar way. For, to be accepted, she has to abandon her European clothes in favor of barely a goatskin hanging from her waist, get flogged to prove herself a worthy Hamar girl, and give up washing her vagina lest she should be considered barren. More importantly, she has to take a man as a lover with whom she dances “Ivangadi”<sup>5</sup>, the moonlight dance.

Delti Geldi is Charlotte’s partner. He is a hero and a man of great success by Hamar standard. He has numerous head of cattle, owns several wives and has killed big game animals among which are a lion, a giraffe and a rhino. His art of love-making is so superb that the hearts of Hamar girls hanker for his manly body. Charlotte is no exception in this respect now that she is part of the community.

For her, Delti proves to be a man who not only knows how to love but also opens for her the gateway to the wonders of Hamar life. As a matter of fact, she considers herself doubly advantaged in that her passionate relation with him gives her the benefit of acting out the roles of Hamar women, which is in fact the focal point of her research.

Now, what is the significance of Charlotte’s gesture from moral point of view? For one thing, it is significant in that we are shown the two types of value identified by moral philosophers as “limited and unlimited (priorities)” (*Mothershead*, pp. 25-29). The limited value (priority) is that which has to do with professional ethics involved in her research undertaking. Here we have Charlotte deciding “to present herself as a necessary sacrifice on the

professional altar” (*Land of the Yellow Bull* p. 193) and that in a bid to live up to her calling as an anthropologist: “an ambassador of human relations” (p. 191). I don’t have to pursue this point any further because it lies outside the scope of my study.

The unlimited value (priority) is associated with morality *per se*. To a moralist of traditional, formalist or normative orientation, Charlotte’s gesture in the context of her affairs with Delti may be regarded as that of a person who cannot rein in her passion, who, on the pretext of professional undertaking, cannot refrain from sexual indulgence. The narrative’s ethical position is, however, that of the protagonist partaking in the life of her subjects so that she can discern the beauty of their way of life. In the words of *Ivangadi*’s narrator it, is that of “taming the lion of the jungle, living with him and popularizing his life-style” (p. 139).

Arguably, “taming the lion of the jungle” as referring to Delti, the native man of Hamar ethnic, is a derogatory term of the sort commonly used in Eurocentric discourses. “Eurocentrism”, an ideology vehemently attacked in post-colonial criticism, designates “the use of European culture as the standard to which all other cultures are negatively contrasted” (Tyson, 1999: 366). From this perspective, then, Charlotte is supposedly a metropolitan to whom native peoples are savage, backward and undeveloped. And as much is clearly reflected in the view of Steve, the British diplomat we have referred to above. But then, what we note in the case of Charlotte, as depicted in the author’s novels, is a complete reversal of such biases as are expressed in Eurocentric ideologies. That is to say, rather than considering her subjects as inferior and savage “others”, she attempts to understand them from within thus trying to discover their values and beliefs.

Much of what Charlotte discovers the way she has lived has to do with Delti Geldi, the very man I have described as having opened for her the gateway to “the wonders of Hamar life”. Of course, Charlotte has observed a lot and

learned enough about Hamar people's life to conclude: "probably respect, sharing and love for others are the three fundamental pillars of the humility of Hamars..." (*Land of the Yellow Bull*, p. 363). But then, her intimate relationship with Delti Geldi, "the prime mover of her mental situation" (p. 366), has provided her a rare opportunity to see for herself, to taste or experience the unique kind of love that a Hamar man can afford. To an undiscerning mind, again, their ubiquitous sexual extravaganza may be nothing more than an over indulgence of a most sophisticated metropolitan girl from Europe foolishly flirting with a "bushman".

Nevertheless, such an attitude would do a disservice to what essentially amounts to a system of moral meaning in which a humanity of the sort that values "the primitive elements in human nature" is emphasized. Far from promoting the ideology of "othering" (with all its implications of marginalization and subjugation), this system of meaning foregrounds the fact that respect for others is the moral basis of human relations, particularly where race is concerned. It is precisely in this connection that the author's ethnographic novels can be said to emphasize the underlying common denominators that link all human beings regardless of the differences among the surface phenomena of the cultures to which they belong. In order to decipher such a meaning then, we need to briefly consider and examine some component codes underlying the narrative structures particularly of *Land of the Yellow Bull*. Most prominent of such codes being "**nature**", "**dance**" and "**sex**", these are in fact the very motifs that in unison give us a clear understanding of the said system of meaning. In other words, these codes represent much more than what they appear to suggest at the surface level of the narrative of *Land of the Yellow Bull*.

The author is quite romantic in his glorification of nature which for him is a manifestation of certain inherent qualities of the folks he depicts; qualities such as grace, majesty, beauty, serenity, and innocence. His ethical imagination heavily draws on such manifestations so much so that they constitute the ultimate

basis for his ethical standard with which he perceives the lives of traditional people close to nature. Endowed with a similar mode of thought Charlotte, the protagonist of *Ivangadi* and *Land of the Yellow Bull*, regards Hamar people's life and experience with as high sense of appreciation and respect as the love and adoration she has for their natural world. In *Land of the Yellow Bull*, she in fact goes to the extent of claiming that these natural people have their own vitalities to share with the rest of the world. In her words:

*... I can assure you that nature and life in Hamar is clean and delightful indeed. The people are honest, have an advanced system of social life, natural love and self reliance.*

*... The time has now come for the rest of the world not only to assist Africans but also to cherish and learn a great deal and, moreover, respect them (p. 386).*

The way to understand such people is the way Charlotte has chosen to. As she rightly observes on one occasion, "nature might not be pretty unless you were in love with someone, someone who is part of it" (p. 362). To be in love with such a person would obviously require of one to be part of the nature of which the beloved is a part. Certainly, it requires of one to come out of one's "ego-centric shell" (p. 390).

In the context of the system of meaning under consideration, the word "**nature**", on the whole has multifarious significance. For one thing, it designates the natural atmosphere in which the kind of human relationship depicted in the novel thrives. Because nature exerts a spell on them, the characters in the novel shed their differences (racial, linguistic, cultural, educational etc) where upon they begin to see each other as fellow human beings ready to help each other by putting their personal resources at each other's disposal. For another thing, it is about the atmosphere that enhances the kind of delightful feeling of satisfaction and fulfillment that the parties involved enjoy. It is also about the factor and source of the kind of vitality and energy that Charlotte discovers in Delti, otherwise a "bushman" or a

“nomad”. In short, it is about the sort of perfect communication (at all levels—sense, spirit and intellect) noted in Charlotte’s and Delti’s acts of dance, sex or otherwise, despite themselves. This is certainly the case as in their act of dance where “their natural feelings communicated through nature’s code” (p. 112) and as in their act of sex where the two are said to be “beginning their best performances in nature’s hall spicing their love with natural flavor” (p. 313).

“**Dance**” in the system of meaning we are considering signifies the willful coming together of the parties involved in the human relationship depicted. The least they needed to do was just to take the first initiative to join the dancing party, a metaphor for a practical step towards mingling with the people and living their life. Note that to do this is Charlotte’s first and foremost objective as an approach to studying the cultural life of Hamar people. Once that initiative is taken, one will certainly learn the rules of the game illustrated by the synchronization and coordination of steps in the actual act of the *Ivangadi* dance. In this regard it is indispensable to note that “Charlotte realized that each step and movement was coordinated in such a way as to sexually arouse the dancers.” (p. 108). Again that description succinctly epitomizes that Charlotte is ushered into the rhythm and pattern of Hamar life. The reference to the “sexually arousing” is obviously an indication of the inevitable: the perfect union or mingling of Charlotte with the community which the very act of sex emphatically suggests. Dance is almost always a prelude to sex in *Land of the Yellow Bull* and the meaning I have claimed it suggests, is strongly evidenced and reinforced in the following brief account of Charlotte’s revelry over the excitement and joy it has given her:

*Charlotte had understood that the right kind of dance had the power to make people merge together and swim up and down with maximum interest, to attain great pleasure. She was impressed by the exciting nature of the dance and its coordination, moreover by the ability of Delti to take care of her feelings (p. 115).*

Fiqremarqos is wildly explicit about sex, almost pornographic. Such openness in matters of sex is a strict taboo to the Ethiopian readership, particularly to those who believe that indulgence in sex is morally corrupting. To my knowledge, he is among the few young authors with a strong tendency to breaking the taboo on sex matters. Furthermore, at least in so far as the system of meaning under consideration is concerned, he utilizes “**sex**” as part of an artifact, as a metaphor representing the very essence and purpose of the natural relationship between people from different worlds as in the case of Charlotte and Delti in *Land of the Yellow Bull* and Agness and Lokaye in *Ivangadi*. For him “sex” signifies the very kind of communication process they enter within the channel of nature. It is about delivering and receiving the message loud and clear, the message consistently being one and the same: that both Delti and Lokaye, the former merely a “bushman” and the latter a freed slave, have such a rare vitality and energy as master love-makers.

In short, to put it in terms of what Charlotte is particularly up to, the author uses sexual gratification as a way of depicting Charlotte’s appreciation and respect for the natural life of Hamar people and that by focusing on Delti’s enormous potency. The testimonies to that effect given by the narrator of *Land of the Yellow Bull* from Charlotte’s point of view, as well as by a local young woman called Goity, are telling enough as to why both women are mad for him. In the narrator’s words, “He (Delti) had his own persuasive way that could lead his captive without uttering a single command” (p. 150). Quite notably, this wouldn’t be possible without Delti’s matching mastery at taking “care of her feelings” (p. 115). The narrator goes on to tell us more in this connection.

*Charlotte didn’t want to deny the emotional and physical power of Delti Geldi. What astonished her more was the fact that it was the previous night that she experienced the deepest delight for the first time in her life. She had the most incredible orgasm and cried out despite herself. Who would not have been surprised when he discovered something unique at a place and among people yet untouched by civilization.*

*She had once met, in her life, a man who could touch all the sensitive parts of her body and rolled on top of her. But Delti Geldi's furious sex was without comparison. She guessed that the source of his super strength might be his diet... She was convinced that... a solution of animal blood and milk..., a whole potful of honey... roasted meat, wild fruits and leaves could have contributed to his vitality (p. 115-6).*

Elsewhere we are also told that “he was a man who touched her innermost feelings rather than feed her words” (p. 118). Note that nature is the direct source of Delti's potency, the raw things of nature shown in the ingredients of his diet mentioned in the text above.

Goity, a Hamar girl also deeply in love with Delti, has the following to confess and this will complement the narrative testimony given above:

*Yea! How can I tell you? I think there are some women who, sadly, have never had a great lover. But the romance of Delti's lovemaking is so special and different. He looks calm but he has the spirit of a romanticizing singer. The piece he (makes) is melodious and simple. When you hear it you will melt like butter, even with the shine of the moon. Before he starts flirting, suddenly, for no apparent reason, he could compress your heart, would make you stick in his body. Probably, it is because he is a hero. Or else, may be, he has a courageous appeal. Whatever you call it, he has a power to erase what you have kept in you mind- even if you feel empty, you feel comfortable in his hold. You haven't a bit of space to find for others.*

*Presumably, he is incredibly supportive when you need him most. In addition to this, his secret smile and heroic being is his greatest weapon that leads me in to his bosom. I feel delighted when I flirt with him. When he is inside me, I also have a feeling that I am a hero as well. A real hero, who kills big game in the bush, has the potential to win the women's heart in the contest of love game... that is why he always makes me mad in his love... (pp. 320-21).*

To conclude, those three words (“nature”, “dance” and “sex”) are metaphors that in combination signify the kind of social intercourse depicted in the novel. Put

differently, they constitute a system of meaning analogously dramatizing the entire process involving a well-meaning foreigner's effort to understand a community of people. As shown above, "nature" signifies the natural world of the subjects with which one needs to identify oneself as well as the childlike innocence involved in the relationship. In Charlotte's words, "what was important was accepting their way of life and becoming a strand in their harmonious life force" (p. 351). To be a strand in their harmonious force of life one would need to join in the rhythm and pattern of their life out of one's own volition and this is what the notion of recurring "dance" stands for. The gratification of "sex", which is again ubiquitous in the narrative, represents the sense of satisfaction and fulfillment produced by the kind of social intercourse depicted. That this is indeed the case is revealed in the parallel expressions that Charlotte uses when she equates the happiness that Delti has unfailingly given her with that which she gets from the entire community. In other words, it is the same vitality that she sees in Delti that she discovers in Hamar life and society. To this effect, she has the following to confess about the community:

*...they will continue to offer happiness to whoever comes into relationship or contact with them. They remain so full that no one goes empty. Their gates are open to all without discrimination (p. 272).*

Finally, as I have pointed out earlier, respect for others informs Fiqremarqos's ethnographic novels. And that is indeed a function of some concrete vitality. From what has been discussed in this section, it must be clear by now that learning about others and accepting and understanding them would require some condescending, some humility. As a matter of fact, humility in Charlotte's perception is a virtue that is capable of sparing one from "falling into the abyss of arrogance and self complacency" (p. 335). If it weren't for that, Charlotte wouldn't have been able to mark her subjects' virtues (their high sense of respect, love and generosity). Indeed, these are the very vitalities that ultimately induce the narrator to assert: "Whatever discoveries and achievements were

reached... the human intellect will finally attain something not far from what she (Charlotte) has experienced in Hamar” (p. 363).

## **7.2. The Ethical Basis of Identity and Search for One’s Root in Fiqremarqos’s Novels**

As was indicated in the foregoing parts of this dissertation, the issue of identity is a recurring theme in the literature. In Fiqremarqos’s novels, as well, we find this same theme extensively dealt with. If we have to once again commit the subject to discussion in this chapter, then, it is more because of the perspective accompanying it than the mere facts related to it.

Again the ethical, as well as the anthropological, insights that inform his novels provide the perspectives from which the concept of identity is illustrated. As he reiterates in his novels, particularly in *Achame*, identity has much more to do than with simply identifying oneself as somebody’s offspring. Basically, identity in the author’s novels is viewed as a phenomenon in which the moral feeling of respect for oneself and for one’s people is all that counts. Depicted in the context of Ethiopia, which is home to several ethnic and socio-cultural groups, the concept of identity generally addresses the issue of not only equity but also that of identifying oneself with all the groups as parts of the entity called “Ethiopia”. As such, we find the author addressing the moral problem we have already identified as moral provincialism. His ethical standard in this connection is that of transcending any form of moral provincialism, and that for reasons I shall return to later in this section. So, as we consider the concept in line with identifying oneself with social groups, we need to consider the two outstanding components that the author largely dwells upon: corporate values and corporate identities.

This is clearly brought out in *Achame* where Tenagne, the daughter of the title character, reflects on the subject. Apparently in the dark about her own

identity and, by extension, about that of her father, who is enshrouded in enigma and silence, Tanagne pesters him with questions like “who are you? Who am I? Give me my identity card!” (p. 41). Having told her a few things about his ancestors and about their “holy land” (Ethiopia), Achame gives her his grand father’s diary for her to decipher the answers for her questions.

Forming the bulk of the novel, the diary appears to have a unique function of depicting the concept of identity in a new light. The concept here goes deeper than the sort of sentimental sense of identity shown in *Ivangadi*, where characters like Sora and Lokaye express their identity through emotional attachments with the soil and the flag of their native country. Valid enough such gestures may be to express one’s feeling of identity. But in the light of the recent historical and political developments which tend to emphasize the life of the people in Ethiopia, one would do well to look beyond in an effort of depicting the concept of identity. *Achame* marks a significant shift in this regard, for the emphasis on things like soil, flag and even blood gives way to that of the entire people and their way of life. As Tenagne would have us believe, of course on behalf of the author, the concept should hence be perceived in terms of the citizen’s or the agent’s responsibility to recognize that the peoples of one’s country have legacies, artifacts and heritages worthy of bequeathing from generations to generations (p. 181f). The whole idea comes cascading to Tenagne as a revelation, after she has read her great grandfather’s diary, thus replacing her old notion of identity as having to do with the status of one’s progenitors. So in the light of her reading of the diary the concept of identity crystallizes as “getting to know one’s fellow people, their country, as well as their history, thereby discharging the responsibility that such knowledge entails” (p. 182).

That is, indeed, what Negarshiha, Tenagne’s great grand-father, has done coming all the way from Gujirat (in India) to Ethiopia, the holy land whence his “Abyssis” (Abyssinians) ancestors had gone many centuries earlier. Coming to

Ethiopia across its boarder with Kenya, Ngarashiha travels through habitations of various ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious communities. As he travels along his route, he is elated and inspired by whatever he observes; by the cultural practices full of wisdom and by the plenty and diversity in all that. Moreover, he is enthralled by the beauty of the natural world, the fauna and flora, the culmination of which is expressed in the dazzling beauty of one Yeshimebet, whose instant sight love stops him from continuing his travel.

Likewise, Conchit of *Ivangadi* comes to south Ethiopia to pay homage to the native place of her maternal grand-father, Lokaye. The latter had been taken to Spain as a slave where he stayed all his days yearning to be among his fellow people and to be close to the natural world of his native place. Conchit comes to Ethiopia as per her grandfather's trust which he had committed to her when she was just seven.

In both instances we are shown cases of searching for one's root with a view to both getting to know one's people, in the sense of learning about their history, cultural life and traditional values and thereby trying to see ways of preserving and promoting the same. Conchit, who is awestricken by the innocence and wisdom of her grandfather's kins and their natural way of life, is determined to popularize these. As shown toward the end of the novel (*Ivangadi*) she lives up to her commitment by staging a cultural fare in Madrid depicting Ethiopia. In *Achame* Negarshiha preserves his observations about the peoples' ways of life through the ethnographic accounts he has recorded in his travel diary.

In such undertakings by these major characters of the author's novels what we see in basically the ethical aspect of accepting one's people as part and parcel of accepting oneself. For it follows from here that he who does not accept himself cannot command others' respect. Accepting one's people in the context of the novels in question includes accepting whatever they value in their way of life: their history, cultures, traditions and customs.

As Caputo (1992) puts it, the term “value” expresses the good as related to persons who acknowledge it as a good and respond to it as a desirable (p. 100). Over time, the pattern of values that the persons or groups of persons develop in common constitutes and mirrors their “corporate free choices”. It is, therefore, the recognition and acknowledgement of these corporate free choices of their fellow people that the characters we are referring to are concerned with. Put simply, what they are doing is try and perceive the content of their peoples’ traditions which have withstood the test of countless generations.

In their apparent perception of the fact that traditions are repositories of “inherent authority and normative force”, again to use Caputo’s words, Conchit and Negarshiha seem to fully accept and approve of everything they observe in the respective communities they have been to. Given their modern backgrounds, Conchit as a European and Negarshiha as a well educated Indian, there is every reason for them to be repulsed by certain cultural or traditional aspects of their respective subjects. For example, they both come across many practices and oral traditions that may be considered as superstitious beliefs and rituals that may strike any new comer as oddities. Nevertheless, far from being repulsed, we find them adapting an attitude which is consistently one of admiration and respect for whatever they happen to witness, and that with the conviction that it is part of their identity and root.

The rationale for such an attitude is succinctly expressed in what Negarshiha says in one place in *Achame*: “My son, life here cannot be discerned without meaning (and purpose)” (p. 74). By the moment he makes those remarks Negarshiha has already been to quite a number of communities among which are the Gedeo and the Borena ethnic groups. So implied in those words is Negarshiha’s acknowledgement of the fact that everything he has witnessed about those communities, including the supposedly outmoded and superstitious beliefs and rituals, has a meaning and a definite function to fulfill in the context of the subjects’ traditional ways of life.

His admiration for such aspects of life is considerably brought out in what he writes in his diary about the Borena Oromos' traditional administrative system called "Ghada". Humility combined with high sense of responsibility is the whole mark of the traditional leaders of this system so much so that Negarshiha recommends it as a viable and sound model for the whole world. Notably, Negarshiha uses the names of Ethiopia and Africa interchangeably as he pays tribute to the said system in the following extract:

*As per the legends I've been told from my childhood, Ethiopia has a "golden culture". Her traditional leaders are in particular unique from the rest of the world...*

*In Africa leadership is a mark of responsibility. It imposes limits to pleasure and comfort. The Ghedamoithics (traditional leaders) in Borena, do not exercise authorities wantonly. They don't lead better (than usual) life, change their huts (living quarters) and amass wealth. Instead, their sentiments are checked, their desires are restricted... In African cultures, the public are the mirror images of their leaders while authority is a function of sacrifice. Authority is humility. Authority is offering conscientious concern and capacity; authority is discharging one's own duty. That is why I feel like wishing the "Ghada" system for the entire world... (p. 123).*

Illustrated in this extract is the recognition of the status of one's folks as having the capacity to command respect by virtue of the viable system that has made possible their social existence. But for lack of the will to understand them, as does Charlotte the Hamar people as shown in the preceding section, these people have legacies to share with the rest of the world. At any rate, though, such legacies are indispensable aspects of one's identity in that they constitute the very core of the existence of one's communities, of their strivings toward collective fulfillments.

This is as well the subject of Tenagne's reflection. As she clearly discerns, human communities, along with their experiences of life and their cultural (traditional) values, deserve respect. That is to say the values of cultural life and

established human experience rest with the functions they perform in enhancing and perpetuating peaceful coexistence and cooperation among communities of people (p. 188).

Such assertions are reiterated in the author's novels and their purpose seems to buttress the assumption that there is no ground for one to regard any community's way of life with contempt. It is this awareness that we see working in Achame's reaction to a race motivated attitude to which he is once subjected. A German father, upon realizing that Achame is in love with his daughter, taunts him for his "cheeky ambition". In the man's view Achame does not measure up to loving his daughter because he comes from Ethiopia, a country whose people are poverty-stricken and whose adults are incapable of thinking as coherently as even a ten-year-old German boy (p. 233). In his reaction Achame retorts that he has the requisite vitality to love and be loved. This reminds us of the kind of vitality reflected in Delti's and Charlotte's love-affair as discussed earlier. As for the reference to his fellow country people, Achame proudly says that they have their own life experiences that are on par with any other people's experience. If there be any difference among communities of people, it is only a matter of exposure, of types of experience and opportunities (p. 233).

The issue of corporate identity is a broad view of identity discernible in Fiqremarqos's novels. Negarshiha is a Sidi, an Indo- Abyssinian (p. 121), who is at the same time an Ethiopian and African. Although he apparently manages to trace his people's root in the Gedeo ethnic group (p. 75), he is appreciative of all the ways of life of the various communities he has been to and gives us no indication of narrowly identifying himself with any specific ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious group. He appears to be rather strongly intent on partaking of the corporate entity called 'Ethiopia' with all those diverse communities he observes giving it its very essence. While the concept of that entity remains the same concept of Ethiopia more often than not referred to as a mosaic of ethnic,

cultural, linguistic and religious groups, Negarshiha's sense of belonging and attachment to this corporate entity appears to have a uniquely significant tone.

This tone gets even more pronounced when we consider Tenagne, who also has multiple identities. Her father, Achmae, being the grandson of Negarshiha, is an Ethiopian with Sidi blood. Her mother, Emona, is a hybrid born of a German father and of an African mother (Kenyan and Tanzanian). We may wonder as to why the author should give us such a cast of character. The purpose is to be sought within the broad concept of identity that cuts across mixed race, interracial marriage, nationalism, pan- Africanism and even internationalism. The excitement that Tenagne expresses at realizing that she has such an identity provides an ample clue that she greatly appreciates to have it. For she declares, upon having finished reading the said diary, "Alas, Achame has told me my identity, the fact that I am an Ethiopian, that I'm born of mother Africa." (p. 182). We find her elated at the thought of her identity not only as an Ethiopia, or African but also as part of the world thus making us recall, like Charlotte in *Land of the Yellow Bull* (p. 364), what Socrates is said to have once remarked: "I am a citizen, not of Athens, or Greece, but of the world". As a matter of fact, Tenagne seems to call up on us to partake of that transcendental identity. That is why the refrains of some popular songs such as "We are the world", "Mama Land Africa" and "No man no cry" (pp. 182f) rush to her mind whenever she reflects on this aspect of identity.

Now, the real question is what is the significance of such a portrayal? In a word it is an expression of what it is to be an Ethiopian in the sense of partaking of both corporate values and corporate identity. Tenagne's mindset in this respect is more important than the fact that she is a hybrid of many races. For we are told that she greatly honors people with an internationalist leaning or mentality. But, short of that, she expects at least a sense of being an African from any African who is in his/her right mind (p. 191). To her utter dismay,

however, there are people who don't even have the guts to consider themselves as Ethiopians. For we are told again:

*She (Tenagne) shuddered at the thought of the intellectuals who, like the supporters of Hitler's Nazi acted on their memories of avenging past wrongs. Such people acted regressively by condescending from the level of consciousness of identity as Ethiopians, let alone as internationalists or pan-Africanists, to that of ethnicity and religion. What is more, they even took to forming family-like groups and further regressed to something like turning to the wall of their mothers' wombs all the while singing the old tune "My Birth Place" (p. 191).*

From the discussion above it is clear that Fiqremarqos makes an important distinction about the concept of identity and search for one's root that he depicts. That is, he uses his rendering to that effect to show up what he considers is a narrow minded concept of identity which he compares with something like a child seeking to return to its mother's womb. The author makes such a distinction by way of teasing out the notion of identity that he presumes is propagated along ethnic lines in the recent political trends developing in Ethiopia. Such a conception of identity, accordingly, is counterproductive in that it doesn't add to enhancing human values, but rather only serves the purpose of some sinister elements bent on perpetuating discord and strife by capitalizing on vengeance for past wrongs (*Ivangadi*, p. 24; *Achame*, p. 192). Thus being particularly unhappy about the tendency of evening out for past wrongs, Fiqremarqos looks to South Africa as a shining example of handling problematic legacies. That is why he repeatedly cites Nelson Mandela for giving a wise direction and leadership to the politics of Post-apartheid South Africa thus leading it to lasting peace and reconciliation (*Ivangadi*, p. 24; *Achame*, p. 192).

If we compare and contrast Fiqremarqos's and Tesfay's treatment of the subject, we find that both have basically the same response to the situation though they differ in emphasis. Tesfaye (author of *Yeburqa Zimita*), with all the

details he shows us about the feeling of wounded pride of the subjects he depicts, emphasizes that forfeiting vengeance or forgiving is not easy though it is a necessary end. Fiqremarqos, on the other hand, tends to make light of such concerns as are expressed by Tesfaye's novel. For him wrongs of the past being committed by the ruling classes that had, for their own purposes, pitted the peoples of Ethiopia against one another, any related mean thought should be closed along with their chapters in history. On that perception, Fiqremarqos strongly suggests that any idea of vengeance, along the ethnic lines, should be thrown out of the window. The peoples of Ethiopia, as well as fellow Africans, are already united in having a common goal of overcoming poverty, ignorance and backwardness. In view of such a formidable task, fellow peoples of Ethiopia cannot afford to sting one another like scorpions. This is absolutely unbecoming of such great peoples who, through their tested traditional means, have known how to forge mutual tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

To sum up, the concept of identity that Fiqremarqos depicts is to be seen as that which values everything Ethiopian and its ethical basis is the moral feeling of respect. This is clearly what we discern from Negarshiha's diary, which records several ethnographic details as well as historical events and figures. As a matter of fact, it is this point that is emphasized in both Negarshiha's and Tenagne's multiple or corporate identities discussed above.

As I conclude this chapter, I want to stress that both sections underpin one important aspect of this thesis. That is, the sections indicate that the author in effect addresses the issues in question in a manner aiming at diffusing moral provincialism, one of the long-standing moral problems of this country. Accepting others' ways of life, the way Charlotte does, and accepting oneself as well as one's fellow people with the same attitude of reverence we have discussed appears to be a lasting solution to the problem. As such transcendentalism in Fiqremarqos' novels is a function of a conscious attempt at reconciliation (or rejection) of two contending tendencies: contempt for, or

marginalization of others and narrow ethnicity. Essentially the author's concern is so humane as to deserve being taken seriously.

The idea of federalism in full swing in Ethiopia is by no means alien to the kind of thinking Fiqremarqos expresses because it tries to address the same concern of respect for people and their way of life. But then people should also be given the opportunity to see themselves as part of the whole world and, to achieve that, they need to be able to have wider view of life beyond the narrow circles of their ethnicity, culture and religion. Equally important is the notion that diversity is a blessing, not a curse. And such are the kinds of transcendental views that we can take away from Fiqremarqos's ethnographic novels.

## NOTES

1. The great tragic characters such as Orestes, Hamlet, and Oedipus can be mentioned as examples of archetypal figures occurring in poems after poems and tragedies after tragedies. (See Scott, 1962: 253).
2. See the preamble of “The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia”, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 1995 (pp. 75-6).
3. Again this is perfectly consistent with the constitution referred to above. It is to be noted that such impositions had been characteristic of the previous socio-political systems in Ethiopia.
4. Most of my references in this section are to this novel which is an English version of *Ivangadi* and *Kebuska Bestejerba* in one.
5. “Ivangadi” is a traditional entertainment where men and unmarried women are engaged in an eratic kind of dance.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **HEDONISM AND QUEST FOR CONSCIENCE IN *REIQ ASHARA***

Hedonism, a Greek word for pleasure, is of two types: Egoistic hedonism and utilitarianism. Egoistic hedonism aims at promoting pleasure for the individual whereas utilitarianism concerns itself with maximizing pleasure for the greatest number of people (Mothershead, 1955: 209).

As we look into the moral vision of *Reqiq Ashara* by Sisay Nigusu, we find that it considerably favors utilitarianism over egoistic hedonism. In fact it laments sheer egoism as representing the basis for the universal moral and spiritual deprivations existing in the society it depicts. In his art Sisay depicts egoism as a moral phenomenon of people going astray as a result of failure to heed their conscience. Such a failure, however, is assumed to be an after-effect resulting from social conditioning. While its single most important moral vision is to bring about salvation of a society undergoing stagnation and decadence and that because of moral degeneration or privation, the novel undertakes this by showing that people should heed their long abandoned conscience.

Technically, *Reqiq Ashara* is an allegorical novel where conscience as we know it is externalized and personified in the figure of a woman character, Hilina the protagonist. Telling a story woven around a rare treasure, namely mercury, it portrays the state of morality in contemporary Ethiopia thus exposing vices and extolling virtues. Hilina, whose name is an Amharic word for “conscience”, is depicted as a center of virtue towards which almost all vicious characters of the novel gravitate. It is in this sense that we speak of the novel’s moral vision as that which calls people to their own conscience which they, metaphorically speaking, see externalized in the figure of Hilina; for if only one heeds one’s conscience one will know to morally conduct one self. In other words, the novel projects a moral vision of the search for the conscience. Exploring the novel for

its moral vision, therefore, requires that we consider the two aspects of hedonism that we have just referred to. But before that it would be legitimate to consider the socio-ethical milieu of the novel.

### **8.1. The Socio-Ethical Milieu in *Reqiq Ashara***

*Reqiq Ashara* is written from the perspectives of what moral philosophers call ethical naturalism. As Mothershead (1955: 93) puts it, the ethical naturalist “regards all choice and action as determined by natural causes”. This is not to say that the naturalist does not care about the normative function of ethics. For, as Mothershead goes on to say “it (ethical naturalism) does not stop with an explanation of conduct but seeks to alter conduct according to the principles of right” (p. 94).

In the novel, likewise, there is a clear tendency to ascribe characters’ ethical or unethical conducts to causative factors deeply rooted in the social milieu. It is, therefore, necessary to give a brief account of the socio-ethical milieu in which the characters in *Reqiq Ashara* function. Set in a society that is in a tight grip of both material and spiritual poverty it attempts not only to show why people are what they are but also how they can be different. As is illustrated through the conducts of most of the characters, people can be unscrupulous, ruthless or even murderous in their avaricious pursuit of amassing fortune. This, however, does not mean that such people are inherently evil. Rather, they might be behaving in a manner that they have been conditioned by the society, which has received legacies of opportunistic-parasitic nature from its past. Mekbib, a conscientious character in the novel, refers to these very legacies as a “bad nest” in which were hatched many of the contemporary moral and social problems (p. 274). A specific point in case here is the fact that the former system of government (of the Socialist Republic of Ethiopia) justified and sanctioned confiscations of properties while eliminating those who tried to

defend their rights thereof. And this is specifically singled out as setting the precedence for many citizens to follow suit.

This is precisely what Atnafseged, one of the major characters in the novel, points out in his accounts of how the Derg regime murdered his father and confiscated their properties as a result of which he had been led into making money in a like manner (p. 265f). Atnafseged's situation is a microcosm of what was universal in the Ethiopian setting following the fall of the Derg. Misusing the liberalized economic system in place afterwards, many took to prosperity by unjust means. Bribery was practiced as though it were legal thus helping to facilitate shortcuts for illegal prosperity. Overwhelmed by the temptations, even the most incorrigible officials indulged in corruption, fraud and embezzlement. Businessmen like Atnafseged increased their fortunes by evading taxes and by doing secret and illicit transactions involving such a rare item as mercury. Uncritical of how their riches were amassed, society took to raving about the "success" of such businessmen. Small thieves hankered for being among the big thieves, for the latter did not only manage to elude legal institutions but turned themselves into formidable forces by making inroads into the legal systems. All this led to inversions of values: society condoned vices and shunned virtues.

Viewed from the perspective of Hilina, the protagonist who has had ample exposure to values of the western world, the society is portrayed in all its wretchedness. After eight years of stay in the west where the Ethiopian Diaspora struggled to satiate the insatiable material greed of life, and having enough of it herself, Hilina Tadesse comes home to live with her uncle and mentor (i.e. Mekbib) residing in the same locale of Shromeda in Addis. Much to the disappointment of this highly conscientious character, what she observes about this locale and by extension about the whole city, is one of a society in a process of deterioration and disintegration. The following account will give us a glimpse of the picture:

*When she returned to Ethiopia, Hilina went straight to the same house of her uncle where she had been brought up. Mekbib (her uncle) had managed to improvise the house. But she found Shiromeda in an even worse state than the dusty village she had known before. She could read haggardness in the faces of both the children and the elderly. Many houses have been dilapidated. Many of her old friends have been married away while still many others have been wiped out by the endemic AIDS. A considerable number of them have left for America through DV- lottery. Still some of them have been exiled to the Arab world to lead life as maidservants. Even those few who have remained behind are a “living corpse, not knowing where to go and yet with their hearts abroad” (p. 277).*

Hilina vividly recalls that a great many youth had been eliminated through the “Red Terror” waged by the “fascist regime” of Derg (p. 28). Now that AIDS is killing off what few youth have remained, she is saddened by the scenario to the extent that she grows anxious as to whom the nation could be bequeathed.

As the narrative maintains further, poverty in terms of material life is indeed a universal phenomenon taking a heavy toll on the whole nation. But what more deeply concerns Hilina is the ever increasing lack of moral or spiritual “wealth”. Her observation of the socio-ethical milieu gives her an insight into the fact that living within one’s capacity or means is a totally forgotten thing, that the society has indulged in irrational appreciation of material wealth irrespective of how it is attained, with its members envying and coveting those who amass it even if they know that it is gathered unjustly.

Shunning the light of conscience, and thus opting for parasitic way of life, people have thus taken to seeking prosperity by short-cuts (p. 28). Hilina’s probing insight enables her to vividly visualize a grotesque social force emerging. This is the pith of her worry that she shares with her uncle in the following words:

... Listen to me dear uncle! Can't you see a floating force? A force "rowing" in the air, "knifing" at water (as though cutting meat), restlessly seeking money and power; contemptuous of work while wanting it; despising the jobs that it seeks; having the illusion of being superior to what he actually is; inflated in delusions (falsehood) of his own making; walking in masks, sniffing at illegal short-cuts to success; admiring what others have rather than valuing its own; fond of depending on others rather than desiring to stand on its own, increasingly getting detached from its base: a society faltering in confusion, losing faith in itself and indulging in excessive (superficial) act of worship (Piety)? (p. 96).

Clearly the picture of the society thus depicted is that of humanity pretty much abused or debased. Brought into existence by legacies of the past that are of parasitic-opportunistic nature, this picture is reinforced by manifestations of a phenomenon that Marxists call "commodification". A typical feature of capitalism, "commodification" stands for "the act of relating to objects or persons in terms of their exchange value or sign- exchange value" (Tyson, 1999: 59). If we have to adapt this term for the situation depicted in *Reqiq Ashara*, it is because it readily lends itself to designating the situation where characters "commodify" each other to promote their own financial and social advancement. While the novel recognizes that the ethical conducts of the characters is deeply rooted in causative factors of socio-economic nature, it heavily leans towards ascribing their behavior to egoism and avarice. This in turn is ascribed to people ignoring their conscience. Reserving the latter subject for a later section, let us now take up the issue of egoism and its manifestations depicted in the novel.

## **8.2. Egoism, Avarice and Aspiration in *Reqiq Ashara***

As I have pointed out, there is in moral philosophy what is known as "egoistic hedonism", a concept that is all about promoting pleasure for the individual. So long as this sort of egoism ensures genuine pleasure even for the individual, Sisay doesn't seem to have a cause for concern. His real concern rather lies in

the kind of crass egoism that constitutes the basis for the universal moral and spiritual deprivation existing in the society he portrays in *Reqiq Ashara*.

Society in the novel is satirized as a degenerate entity with its members given up to avarice and absurd aspirations. Money is generally regarded as omnipotent. Hence getting rich in the shortest possible time appears to be an obsession with every body thus driving them to seeking and employing all mean methods and tricksters. To that effect, there is a picture in the novel showing an intricate net of deceit, betrayal, conspiracy and murder.

Those are indeed the vicious tendencies with which most of the characters are endowed thus representing the cross-section of the society depicted. As such Atnafseged, Colteneh, Feleqe, Ashebir and Geremew represent the underworld. Likewise, the couples, Colonel Zerfineh and Wro. Worqe, on the one hand, and Atalay and Tafach, on the other, stand for the elderly and the youth sections of the society, respectively. Atnafseged, nicknamed “the Lord of Mercury”, and the squad boys, Ashebir and Geremew are the sorts of people forced by their society into clandestine criminal activities unable as they were to earn their living by decent means. The colonel, with his history as a murderous and ruthless officer of the Derg, is a residue of the infamous regime now defunct. The young couple has a very distinct representation in that they try to emulate the elderly in their pursuits of indecent and egocentric earnings.

The story centers about a supposedly illicit business affair involving selling out of “mercury”, a rare treasure by means of which many people are believed to have prospered. Colonel Zerfineh claims to be in possession of the treasure and solicits the support of Atalay, on whose slyness and unscrupulousness he greatly counts for a successful transaction. Colteneh and his assistant Feleqe are brokers mediating between Atnafseged and the couples, who together form the mercury procuring party. Each after their heart, they eagerly await for the

proceeds from the anticipated sale while resolving themselves to partake of whatever criminal activities the enterprise would entail.

Avarice being what they all have in common, each has their own hankering, in pursuit of which they are not only pitted against each other but also together pose a threat to the society at large. In other words, in the satiric portrayal of these characters we have a clear picture of the daily melodrama of egocentric drives and absurd aspirations made concrete through the great many comic scenes in the narrative.

Basically what the author aims to achieve here is to portray what he apparently believes is the universal scenario of the voice of conscience being muted. That is essentially what explains the fact that the characters are given up to avarice and absurd aspirations. To that end there is a clear pattern in the novel showing the relations between such vices as selfishness, unscrupulousness and slyness. Avarice is indeed what causes most of the characters to betray and sacrifice their associates, and friends. Colonel Zerfineh, for example, relates his own account of having eliminated two soldiers who assisted him and his friend to hide the said treasure (p. 47). Atalay, too, is shown working towards eliminating the colonel, who has recruited him as a dependable partner in the secret deal (p. 145). Atalay, whose name suggests this conduct of him, is the most scheming character and is repeatedly shown to contemplate betrayal and treachery. Among his other subjects- to- be are Atnasfeged, to whom the treasure would be transferred, and the squad boys who have been assigned to provide protection between the would-be sellers and receiver. Tafach also considers betraying Atalay, her betrothed, and instigates him to, meaning to get free access to Atnafseged, eliminate Hilina, the woman Atnafseged wants to marry (p. 306).

The slyness that is seen in Atalay and the others and the unscrupulousness accompanying it is regarded as the order of the day (p. 53). Generally believed

to be becoming of a person desirous of prospering in the shortest possible time, it is a conduct held in high regard. That the society is appreciative of such conduct is displayed in the commendations of Atalay as “a man of the day” (pp. 43, 45, 53).

Anafseged is the most successful “man of the day”. His wealth which he has amassed by what, as per the order of the day, is called “snatching away from each other”, has made him an envy of the others, almost an inspiration. In fact, this is only part of the moral milieu where wealth is envied and coveted by the common people. People generally do not seem to question how the rich get rich. They only aspire to be counted among them. Even getting closer to rich people is highly appreciated. Feleqe, his mother and his mistress (Fantish) are quite an illustration of people with such tendencies (pp. 110, 115, 192). To say the least, Feleqe’s mother being the poor woman she is, sees a glimmer of hope in the mere speculation that her son will be an associate of people like Colonel Zerfineh, a man who has lived in her neighborhood though he always pretends not to know her. In this connection, it is important to note that the narrator is rather critical about the common people while he can afford to sympathize with their condition.

The degree to which the narrator is critical of the whole scenario is demonstrated in the comic scenes where the major characters under consideration feature as people with what can be described as “absurd aspirations”. Because such aspirations constitute a major part of the narrative’s concern, namely the voice of conscience unheeded, we need to closely examine this aspect.

Having won himself the repute as “the lord of mercury”- a reference to his lucrative business involving secret dealings in the rare item- Anafseged wants to advance his interests, most prominent of which is entrapping Hilina. Anafseged is interested in Hilina not more because he is genuinely in love with

her than he desires to add to his reputation by marrying this woman of great prominence. For, on account of having won a beauty contest, she has earned herself the title “Miss Ethiopia”. In view of her sublime aspiration of establishing herself as a “mistress of morality”, one would think it to be far-fetched for this man to even venture to want to marry Hilina, though we see her ultimately accepting his offer for reasons commensurate with her lofty goal. What is worth noting here is, though, that Atnafseged believes, in a manner in keeping with the order of day, that he can get her just because he is a rich man; for, as it is commonly believed, there is nothing that money cannot do (pp. 5, 8, 13).

In a manner that represents a stark contrast with Atnafseged, we have Feleqe whose sole desire is to get rid of poverty for once and for all, and to help out his mother who has been catering for his needs by hiring herself out to make injera (Ethiopian bread) for others. He greatly counts on his possible share of the anticipated sale of the mercury, which he even thinks of maximizing by offering himself to be operated on so that the mercury could be transported in his belly to the lucrative market abroad.

Moreover, Feleqe views the “mercury business” as offering him the opportunity to fulfill his larger aspiration of being promoted to a position of a “big thief”. Apparently weary of the consequences of his routine criminal activities as a “small thief” (stealing, picking pockets, etc), and now that he has associated himself with people dealing at a higher level of “the business”, it has become a desire of his soul to be one of them. He is fully aware that it is theft all the same. Yet, he equally knows that “the business” at the higher level is much safer. That is to say, “the big thieves” are safer than the “small ones” in that the latter are easy targets for legal institutions such as the police while the former can manage to get away with whatever they have done. The irony of this situation should be noted. That is, in order to be safe from the consequences, one need not refrain from theft, but rather opt for promoting oneself into a

higher level of theft. This is vividly expressed in what Feleqe responds to Fantish's (his lover's) concern for him in case he gets caught because of his involvement in the mercury business:

*Don't worry Fantish. We will not get caught. This is not an ordinary theft but rather a sophisticated one. The focus of the police is on the small thieves like myself, not on the bigger ones. They chase only those of us who break into houses, dismember vehicles, unfasten wrist watches, break neck laces and pick pockets. They don't dare to touch those who are up there through mercury business, those who get rich by embezzling, by taking bribes... Rather, they would respect them, awe them and serve them. Or they would act as though they haven't seen, heard or known their activities.... (p. 115f).*

Part of Feleqe's desire to get money and to get rich in the manners shown above is to lead a settled life by marrying Fantish, a sex worker at Ghesho Hotel. Through what he, infatuated by the prospect of his possible share, tells Fantish about the mercury, he manages to get her fall in love with him. In deed, this is an aspect of the pattern in the novel where male characters use the mercury affair as a recipe for courting and captivating their female partners. Atnafseged's case shown above is an example of a lover who counts on his wealth to win the heart of his beloved. Those who do not have enough to measure up to the expectations of their loved ones will have to get it at any rate even if it takes inflicting pain on ones body as Feleke does.

As shown above Atalay's relentless effort to get money is largely motivated by his resolve to meet his fiancé's avarice. Tafach (his fiancé) has time and again told him that she can't afford to fall in love with men who do not make money (p. 60). Her consummate desire for wealth is symbolically expressed through her fetish for swimming in the pool at Hilton Hotel. To his query as to why she is so fond of swimming, this is what she tells him:

*Don't you ever think that it is only for reasons of health or for keeping fit and slim. When I enter the pool, I feel as though I am immersed in the sea of wealth. When I swim... it is as if I am swimming in wealth (itself). When I swing my hands in the water, it seems to me that I am as well (paddling in a pool of wealth). My senses go wild with ecstasy and my body refreshes. A sea of wealth, a sea of life... joy... bliss. La'La'La' (p. 62).*

In Tafach's conviction, it is only a man as rich as Atnafseged who can satiate her greed for money. That is why she, although betrothed to Atalay, earnestly seeks to approach and entrap Atnafseged. Attempting to exploit her knowledge of Hilna's lukewarm response to Atnafseged's offer of love and marriage, she stands as a potential rival to the former. Pursuing her aim to that end, she is shown to be in her ridiculous states on several occasions. On one occasion, for example, we see her attacking Worqe the colonel's wife, with an emotional outpouring when the latter inadvertently betrays her intent of summoning her daughter from U.S.A in a bid to marry her off to this great man of fortune (p. 159). On still another occasion Tafach is revealed making a blatant attempt to seduce Atnafseged and that at the very banquet he offers in honor of Hilina (Miss Ethiopia) (p. 163). The most ridiculous state of Tafach is shown in a dream she sees afterwards following what she hears about Atnafseged having gone mad on account of Hilina's rejection of him. In the dream, Tafach follows the naked figure of Atnafseged, who upon being told that she loves him, bids her to strip herself bare in public (p. 259).

From our discussions in this section, it is clear that sheer egoism, accompanied by extreme greed for money, is a typical feature of the society that *Reqiq Ashara* depicts. Indeed, the picture of the society is that of a grotesque one where people "commodify" each other unscrupulously. Money is generally regarded as omnipotent and avarice for it stems from one or another sort of absurd aspiration. Men's aspiration is by and large limited to winning women's hearts while that of women is at best to squander it on what can be described as

profligate spending such as building an expensive mansion on the surface of a sea, as in Tafach's case (pp. 142f, 150-153), and putting up a two-story building for a tomb, as in Worqe's case (p. 133f). Such being the ultimate purpose of life, thus enhancing and perpetuating "parasiticism" and opportunism, human conduct in general is considered to be immoral. Fundamentally, that is because people have abandoned their conscience. Finally, this presupposes that conscience is a repository of morality, another distinct aspect of *Reqiq Ashara* that the following section sets out to examine.

### **8.3. Conscience as a Repository of Morality in *Reqiq Ashara***

Hornby in his *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines "conscience" as "the part of your mind that tells you whether your actions are right or wrong" (p. 260f). Similarly, according to the school of "Ethics of Modern Aristotelianism", conscience is defined as "a disposition to apprehend what is right in particular", (Mothershead, 1955: 295). Clearly, the concept of conscience here is organically related to the dichotomous moral phenomena called "virtues" and "vices". According to the school of ethics just mentioned, "virtues" are habits of acting in accordance with Natural Law (i.e. God's plan as applied to man as a thinking being p. 288), whereas "vices" are habits of deciding and acting contrary to Natural Law (p. 295). It must be noted that "virtues" and "vices" are habits and as such are tendencies that can be acquired or cultivated.

It is precisely these concepts regarding conscience, together with the moral phenomena of vice and virtue that constitutes the subject matter artistically addressed in *Reqiq Ashara*. As shown in the preceding sections, the novel depicts a society undergoing degeneration and decadence due to vicious propensities that seem to prevail in conditions where the voice of conscience is generally muted.

It is this concern of the novel that we see illustrated through its accounts of features like crass egoism, greed for money and absurd aspirations. Manifestations of different forms of social evil as these features are, they are regarded as being responsible for the condition where society at large is subjected to deprivations of both material and spiritual wealth.

Viewed from the perspective of hedonism, then, humanity, in the context of the society thus depicted, is badly lacking in pleasure. Intent on showing how to maximize pleasure for members of the society, the novel sets itself a vision of changing the social condition stated above for the better. This is done by projecting an ideal of social salvation as embodied in the aspirations of Hilina the heroine.

Therefore, it is indispensable to explore Hilina's characterization. "Hilina" is an Amharic word for "conscience". Considering the fact that the person Hilina is a paragon of virtue and seeing the ideas of social salvation for which she stands, the novel can be taken as an allegorical work where conscience steadily features as a repository of morality. The image built around this fictional figure is one of excellence and perfection. It is not an erring soul that we have in Hilina, but that which, owing to her propensities exclusively to the good and right, imparts and dispenses moral guidance for others. That is precisely why she wants to open an institution, a moral college, where people can learn morality so that they can conduct themselves in such a manner that they can ensure pleasure for fellow men.

It would be important to consider the sources of such propensities. Again, as is the case with the vicious characters, environment is counted upon as a responsible factor. She is a product of three distinct environments. As a child she was given a proper schooling in an educational environment facilitated for her by her uncle, Mekbib the university lecturer. A self-made man himself, Mekbib plays the major role in shaping her right from her formative ages. He instilled love of books in her and gave her the discipline that has guided her for

the most part of her life. It is this role of her uncle that Hilina acknowledges when she reiterates that he “created her in his own image”. We are told that Mekbib gave Hilina her name to mark his disappointment at the state of morality that had prevailed in feudalism. Equally, it was meant to express his hope for the revival of conscience when socialism replaced feudalism as a social system. Besides, such implications are important in that they point to the significance of Hilina’s name to the allegorical concept of conscience that its bearer represents. Apart from this local background Hilina also has some touch of oriental and occidental influences. She stayed and received her education in various disciplines and countries in the west where she lived for eight years. Her oriental background takes the form of yoga discipline which greatly counts for her spiritual development (p. 27).

In the build up of Hilina’s image, our attention is steadily drawn to a moral agent perceptibly taking shape under our very eyes thus emerging as a dominant figure whose voice is the voice of conscience. The author artistically invests a lot in descriptive accounts of the protagonist’s feminine charm and grace apparently meaning to show that beauty is a “symbol of morality”. In other words, one can discern that there is a conscious effort on the part of the author to show that beauty and virtue are integral parts of Hilina’s personality. As a matter of fact, this is perfectly in keeping with her own conviction of beauty: a conviction which she finds not only shared but also expressly acknowledged by the organizers of the beauty contest in which she takes part and subsequently wins. In indeed, such is the very conviction that is given expression by one of the organizers who say the following to her in a bid to persuade her to take part in the contest:

*... In the 21<sup>st</sup> century beauty is not considered only on the basis of external merit. Rather aspects of external beauty are believed to be reflections of internal aspects such as maturity of mind and beliefs... Trust me my good lady. It’s not only your external beauty that will be considered but also the maturity of your mind, the horizon of your knowledge and your vision for the future (p. 29, also see p. 39).*

Briefly, Hilina has a personality which in a sum total of traits such as awesomeness, strictness, reserve, assiduity and extraordinary confidence. Not only because of but also in spite of these, Hilina is attractive, reassuring, commanding, obliging, understanding, sympathetic and above all amenably authoritative. While it is tedious to give examples of those several traits, suffice it to quote the following extract to illustrate Hilina's attractiveness and awesomeness in one:

*... Attracted by her beauty, many men approach her. But on seeing the maturity of her thinking and her moral strength they get awestruck upon which they blush and withdraw before they even have time to express their intent. Even those who wish to propose true love and marriage to her are dwarfed by her eminence when they get close to her. Such impressions (about her) are effected not only because she is an educated woman but also because of her full-heartedness and her strong personality. She is particularly a terror to those whose only desire is to 'pluck' beautiful young women (p. 30).*

Portrayal of a woman's caliber on par with that of Hilina is rather rare in the Amharic novel. In Hilina, we are offered a glaring contrast to the mediocre women represented in Tafach as indicated in the preceding section. What should be noted in this connection is, however, that such an idealized portrayal has a function of presenting the protagonist as representing an allegorical entity. And it is this function that we will be subjecting to a considerable scrutiny in the rest of this section.

This is a deeper level of Hilina's portrayal as a fictional incarnation of the abstract concept of conscience. Put differently, it is the concept of the human faculty of conscience as we know it that assumes a form of existence in the fictional world. Thus taking on a form of existence with consciousness breathed in, Hilina the allegorical entity acts in a wide ranging capacity from acting on the basis of an individual's will to wielding an immense power of influencing

people's moral thinking. It is in the latter capacity of this figure that the novel's concept of conscience as a repository of morality is illustrated.

Our immediate evidence to that effect comes from the manner in which the word "Hilina" is used. An Amharic word for "conscience", Hilina is the name of the protagonist who is also referred to by three other names: Woizerit Ethiopia (Miss Ethiopia), Ye'moral Emebet (Mistress of Morality) and Yiliqal Befirdu (Excels in judgment). The first name is the surface manifestation of the latter two both of which are related to the underlying allegory of conscience as a repository of morality. There is a clear pattern in which the narrative employs wordplay as a method of referring to what "conscience" can do while giving accounts of the protagonist's action. For example, in the scene where Atnafseged requests Mekbib, Hilina's uncle, to mediate for him, as he is in love with her, the latter says 'Yes my lord! The main thing is not to "lack in" Hilina. Unless you get Hilina, your life will be good for nothing...' (p. 23). Here Mekbib is in fact talking about the need for heeding one's conscience while seeming to refer to Hilina the person. Later in the course of the narrative Atnafseged manages to win Hilina's love following which he says: "So it is you the Hilina of my childhood." (p. 26). In uttering these words Atnafseged is addressing Hilina the person. At the same time a reference is made here to the conscience of his childhood which the reader deciphers in relation to what he already knows about the burden of guilt on Atnafseged's present conscience. The narrative is interspersed by many such deliberate ambiguities involving the word "Hilina" among which can be mentioned: "There is nothing that is impossible for her (Hilina) "(p. 283) and "No one can escape Hilina's judgment" (p. 340-344, 349). At one point we see Hilina equated even with God: "Yes, God is conscience and conscience is God, Whoever is faithful to Hilina is faithful to God" (p. 271).

Allegory of conscience as a repository of morality is markedly reflected in Hilina's domineering nature. On that account, she exerts influence and commands respect of other characters thus causing them to come to their

moral senses. This is to be seen, as pointed out earlier, from the perspective of her propensities towards the good and right. She is exacting in her attitude and unflinching in telling people where and when they have gone wrong. In assuming such a role she acts like one's conscience, albeit externalized. Precisely, this is what we see happening in the scene where she confronts Atnafseged for the first time. In the evening of the banquet he throws in honor of her, he offers to show her around in his magnificent compound and that meaning to get her impressed about the extent of his wealth. When they happen to be in his bedroom, he makes a fatuous blunder as he attempts to rape her. Thus being able to see the beast in his otherwise handsome and graceful (human) figure, Hilina gets determined to confront Atnafseged even physically. Contrary to his expectation of a timid woman who would readily succumb to the momentary flare of his carnal appetite, he meets in her (fiery eyes) a woman of no common breed. The stern look in her face gives him the message he should heed if he wanted to spare himself a shameful consequence. Thoroughly upset, Hilina leaves him, but not without telling him that he should rid himself of the dirt of his soul:

*"You're not yet, Atnafseged! You're not yet capable of love. You've not washed you lands, rinsed you body, and purified your soul. There is dirt in your hands and a blemish on your body." Atnafseged made as though to scream with his hands on his head.*

*"What dirt?... what blemish?"*

*"A dirt of the conscience!... a blemish of the soul!"*

*"What?:... What... what have done to you?!"*

*"You're not yet. You should wash yourself with a moral soap. You should get baptized in the holy water of morality."*

*"Please wait!"*

*"It's enough. I'm going. We will meet another time... If you really love me, throw your cloak, don't puff yourself up in it. Its mere pomp. Throw away your clothes, shoes and your mask and come to me stark naked... Come like yourself (p. 186).*

Those admonishing words have a lasting effect on Atnafseged as, starting from that moment, he ceases to be the usual himself. In fact, he is subsequently subjected to an ordeal which appears to be a psychological trauma seemingly

aimed at producing a therapeutic effect for him to regain his moral sense. It is all done in a manner of a man losing his sanity due to love ungraciously rejected. But the kind of love being depicted and the action and interaction of the lover and the beloved are all to be seen at such a higher level where we have a man trying to regain his conscience, the literal absence of which has reduced him to a man of little or no moral sense.

Clearly, this illustrates a typical case of Hilina, in her allegorical role as a repository of morality, exerting influence on others to heed their conscience. But heeding conscience takes a price. In other words, the novel recognizes that heeding conscience is not easy to attain. Like a newly embraced religion, it requires something akin to confession, conversion or a change of heart. The underlying concept in this connection seems to be that effecting such a change is difficult particularly if one has led an immoral life style. That is perhaps the reason why almost all the “bad guys” in *Reqiq Ashara* are subjected to the ritual of madness before they come to their long abandoned moral senses (p. 379-85).

To pursue Atnafseged’s case a bit further, he is the most vicious of all and the insanity he experiences becomes so severe as to make it an ordeal commensurate with the degree of his immorality. So, as he undergoes the ordeal, Atnafseged acts as though he performs a cleansing ritual prescribed by Hilina, stripping himself of his clothes and taking unduly long bath. His standing naked in the presence of someone (Colteneh) signifies his attending to Hilina’s words that night when she said “come to me stark naked” (p. 186), which is meant that he had to put a stop to his pompous and hypocritical bearings. The lengthy cold bath and shower he has taken (p. 220) indicates the ritualistic healing suggested in Hilina’s metaphorical admonition quoted above. Notably, this reminisces exorcism by holy water as commonly practiced among Orthodox believers in Ethiopia.

After the price he has paid in the form of the ordeal of madness, Atnafseged gets reconciled with his conscience long abandoned. This in fact is symbolically expressed as an outcome punctuated by what appears to be an instant healing effected by the mere sight of Hilina, who later on comes to visit him. For we are told;

*Athnafseged's face was lit up immediately he saw Hilina. Neither screaming nor depressed, he spoke to her like a sane and stable person. He was dressed up and ate properly.” (p. 261).*

What is more, the idea of the healing, or rather, the reconciliation is further reinforced by the discovery that both Atnafseged and Hilina later on make about the fact that they had been schoolmates in their childhood. As he now recognizes Hilina, he vividly recalls that she used to be a source of spiritual elation for him as she was leading morning prayers and spiritual songs in their school. Even long after he was transferred to another school, Hilina had always been in his heart. Now that she comes to visit him, Atnafseged declares: “So it is you, the Hilina of my childhood...” (p. 269). That the reference made to Hilina here is actually to the conscience of his childhood, with all its implications of purity and innocence, leaves no room for doubt. Apparently pleased at the fact that her influence (in her allegorical role as a repository of conscience) has produced the desired effect on Atnafseged, Hilina is revealed as giving expression to the very purpose of her role as such: “What I say is let’s do good; let’s live for God; let’s be faithful to our conscience” (p. 221). To this Mekbib, her uncle, adds: “Yes... God is conscience and conscience is God. Whoever is faithful to Hilina (Conscience) is faithful to God” (p. 271).

That Atnafseged is fully transformed in the narrative way charted for him and that his love for Hilina is not a mere love of a man for a woman but that of a genuine quest for conscience is tersely expressed in the following extract:

*While taking a mental note of what Mekbib has been saying, Atnafseged remained with his eyes fixed on Hilina. What he is seeing now is not her external form but her internal state. His appetite is no more sexual but (a desire) for platonic love. In the place of his sexual urge for her shapely body, the judicious part of his mind took the precedence. He worshiped her like the Virgin Mary. He recalled what she said to him the evening they quarreled at the banquet he offered: 'Stop looking at the lower feminine part of my body and look up'. 'She was right' he said to himself (p. 271).*

To conclude, *Reqiq Ashara's* moral vision is that of promoting a morally sound society. The narrative recognizes that the society in which it is set is a grotesque one with negative values in the making leading it down the drain. Such a society badly needs to be salvaged if at all it should exist like one. As is demonstrated in Hilina's allegorical representation, conscience is the repository of morality. If salvation for the society is to be attained then, heeding conscience remains to be the necessary end. The kind of moral transformation that we are shown in Atnafseged, as well as in the other "bad guys", clearly suggests that our world will be a better place provided people heed their conscience. The narrative appears to have a vested interest in people's conscience being infallible, for we are told, "God is conscience and conscience is God" (p. 271). In some significant way, this reveals optimism for human capacity for morality. And it is basically on that account that the novel can be said to transcend moral provincialism.

*Reqiq Ashara* reminisces the early Amharic novels in both its subject matter and its technique of allegorization. To the degree that it is moralistic-didactic, the novel is pretty much in line with those written four to five decades earlier. This, however, is not to say that the novel is detached from the reality of the society it portrays. As indicated, the picture that the novel gives is that of a society undergoing moral decadence or degeneration and that owing to vices born of parasitic- opportunistic ways of getting wealth. "Commodification" of

people, which is a capitalist feature, being an inherent aspect of the way money is made, we are shown that this all is on account of the propensity of people to act unscrupulously. The idea of conscience being a repository of morality and the need for people to heed it fundamentally stems from such considerations. That is why *Reqiq Ashara* is predominantly preachy in mood and style though it is pretty well balanced out with the comic thus effectively sustaining the reader.

Sustained the reader may be, but by no means convinced and this is largely due to the technique of characterization. As it were, the characters are locked up in the limited role given them by their creator. That is, we don't see them having their own life apart from that given them. In her allegorical role that has been examined, Hilina's formidable influence is always irresistible for the other characters that are in effect reduced to a cowering bunch of people. Understandably, the narrative intent in this regard is to show that the judgment of conscience is irresistible. Nevertheless, this same intent could be served more logically and naturally if the other characters, particularly the "bad guys" were left to struggle with their own conscience rather than having them heed it as externalized in the person of Hilina.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **CONCLUSION**

In concluding this dissertation it would be important to first and foremost recall the basic concepts pertaining to morality and moral vision. Morality as the subject matter of ethics is all about what men ought to do by virtue of what they are. The assumption here is simply that men ought to do what is good, and what is good is that at which all things aim for fulfillment. This presupposes that any idea of attaining fulfillment at the expense of others must be ruled out. Particularly, when what we do directly or indirectly affects others, which is rather inevitable, we must realize that every other person is, as Caputo puts it, a bodily disclosure worthy of respect. That is to say, being an end in himself, every other person is “a being not to be reduced to the sphere of objects available for my use” (see chap. 2.1.1).

The concept of morality thus understood constitutes the core idea of “moral vision” as it applies to literature. The term here refers to the writer’s attempt at making moral meanings out of the moral gestures of the characters that he creates. In doing so, the writer tries to control his genius to some human end. As this entails creating or looking to ethical standards, the writer is supposed to achieve it by basing himself on his perception of what is normal and human. In his endeavor to that effect, the writer would do well to see life with imaginative wholeness rather than preach or agitate moral problems. If so, the writer would be in an ideal position to closely follow the truth of human experience and that is what is meant by fusing moralization with a mimesis of life.

Concern with morality has always been part of the tradition in Ethiopian literature, and this dates back to the period when Geez was the language of scholarship. In Geez literature we have one which is anthropocentric and which emphatically depicts man as a moral being. When it comes to the early Amharic literature, we have a literature where the author felt obliged to confirm to the

tradition of the pietistic-literature designed to save the erring soul by praising the good and censoring the bad. As such, the literature was predominantly moralistic-didactic or vehicular, serving as a tool for the betterment of the reader.

From the analysis of the novels selected for this study, one can realize that the literature has grown from stern didacticism to what can be described as moral or spiritual realism. Structured by the binary opposition of good and evil and ranging over a period of five decades these novels reflect altruism on the part of their authors. This is to be seen in terms of their shared desire to promote a society free from social evils. On the whole, they appear to commonly hold the view that all that detracts from fullness of being – be it at individual or social level – is evil thus driving the subjects to strive for what can make them full or whole. And this accords with the principle: “The well-being of the striving subject is the all-embracing goal of its appetitive activities” (see chap. 2.1).

As is reflected in the order in which they are presented and examined, the novels represent distinct historical periods. By this virtue there is a continuum not only between and among all the novels under consideration but also between the novels and the discourses of the periods in which they were written. The sense in which human action in the novels is altruistic is, hence, to be seen in the light of the discourses that circulated in the specific historical periods that gave rise to the texts. When we speak of the changing face of moral vision, it is this aspect of the novels depicting the moral and spiritual realities of their respective periods that we are referring to.

As indicated in part one of this dissertation, the discourses of the period covered by Haddis’s and Daghachew’s novels were related to whether or not change was needed with respect to the feudal social system. The ideology of the system characteristically favored the feudal lords so that the disadvantaged social groups had to be treated with sheer authoritarianism and/or moral

provincialism, a scenario that accounted for the majority of moral and social problems of the country at large. This obviously meant that change and progress were needed and that was what the contemporary discourse was all about.

In his eponymous novel *Adefris*, Dagnachew leaves no room for doubt as to the need for change and progress and this is strongly evidenced by the universal state of stagnation that he portrays to have prevailed in the country. The real issue then is as to whom to entrust with the role of the change-agent. Contrary to what appeared was the consensus of the day among the educated people like himself, he does not seem to have faith in the educated youth, particularly the university students that the title character typifies. So by putting a problematic here in the centre of his narrative the author focuses on the dubious credentials of the said group for the said role.

If the vision for change and progress appears to be thus constrained in the novel, then it is because of this focus on the conduct of the educated youth which proves to be unreliable and untrustworthy. As indicated in the conclusion of the chapter on this novel, the vision of the novel is that of a desire to see a society where successive generations genuinely understand each other so that healthy transitions of constructive values are made possible. Clearly, this suggests a peaceful transition. But then, one would be tempted to ask if such a transition is possible in the face of the harsh reality of life of which the narrative is well aware. In the final analysis then, the novel leaves us in a state of limbo as to what its vision is for the people subjected to the kind of harsh reality of life reflected in it.

The discourse of change and progress in Haddis is more explicitly integrated with the truth of human experience closely followed. In their action his characters generally tend to assert themselves, seek justice for others and prevail over the evil. These being the specific moral visions of his novels *Fiqir*

*Eske Meqabir*, *Yelmzat* and *Wongelegnaw Dagna* respectively, it is important to note that they represent in their own right a continuum from concern for the self to concern for humanity in general. On the whole, Haddis's vision is unique in that he looks at life with that wholeness of imagination that allows him not only to clearly see the distinction between good and bad but also to, through his craftsmanship, chart a way out for the victims of what he believes is evil. Haddis takes unequivocal stand with the good and is characteristically compassionate with victims of evil. The feudal social system for him was evil and all that the system victimized constituted his world of good. As is revealed in his art, this is because victims of the system ardently seek wellbeing for themselves as well as for others. This one single objective of his major characters' appetitive activities consistently takes on the form of rebellion against the dehumanizing or degrading social system.

When it comes to the novels that depict Ethiopian life following the 1974 revolution, we again see altruism cast into relief and that in the light of the Marxist oriented discourse. As it were, this discourse promised to hold a bright future in store for the nation just emerging from the quagmires of feudalism. The first couple of years in particular witnessed the pick of the kind of altruism that Marxism so promised and this found expression in Bealu's first socialist oriented novel *Derasew*. This novel reflects the optimistic attitude of the revolutionary elite, through the consciousness of a committed writer, towards the revolution. The elite so portrayed is revealed as being determined to be selfless in its thought and action as it identifies itself with the cause of the common people. By virtue of the classist notion that Marxist ideology entails, the moral vision of the novel takes on a form of moral provincialism in favor of the masses as opposed to the ideology of feudalism which favored the ruling classes. The initial altruism, characterized by optimism, however, turned out to be constrained by egoism and this is the major preoccupation of Bealu's other novel *Ye'qey Kokeb Tiri*. With a little bit of psychoanalysis, the details of which can be left for another study, this novel can be interpreted as giving an account

of its protagonist acting egoistically as he is forced to do so by a combination of factors such as family background and social repressions. In other words, the point this novel drives home is that egoistic drive may stand in one's way however noble one's ideas may be, even in as utilitarian a cause one may have as does Deribe, the protagonist of that novel.

Dealing with the issue of national question Tesfaye Gebreab's novel *Yeburqa Zimita* runs parallel to Bealu's novels, which are concerned with class-struggle. As can be seen from the 1974 and 1991 social upheavals in the recent history of Ethiopia, class-struggle and national question have been shown as the two fronts towards which human action is generally directed by way of resolving the long standing social and moral problems of this nation. *Yeburqa Zimita* is a historical novel depicting the EPRDF-led struggle to address the issue of national question. In view of the fact that Ethiopia is a nation comprising numerous ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, the issue of unity has always been a persistent source of concern. In its history, there is ample evidence that unity in the past was sought by successive rulers chiefly to maintain the country's territorial integrity. But such perception of unity, as well as the priority accorded it, has been undermined by absence of democratic and human values. As it attempts to cover the struggle waged by the EPRDF against the Derg regime, which culminated in the victory for the front in 1991, *Yeberqa Zimita* also focuses on how a form of ethnic chauvinism called "Neftegnahood" was largely responsible for the absence of those values. Employing a highly methodical craftsmanship, involving myth-making and symbolism, among others, the novel gives insight into how the stated kind of chauvinism wounded the pride of its subjects beyond remedy thus pushing them to the extreme edges of aggressiveness and vindictiveness. In my view, this novel should be accorded a special credit for it boldly enters ethnicity into dialogue with ethics. Surely, a discerning reader would not miss the point of the novel which calls for genuine unity in diversity.

Works by Fiqremarqos Desta and Sisay Nigusu mark a radical departure from the ones by their predecessors in the sense that they tend not to entertain any notion of moral provincialism. This has to do with the new trend in the making towards the socio-political thinking emphasizing democratic and human values.

After all the reactions, social movements and upheavals directed against such malpractices as are portrayed in *Yebarqa Zimita*, in the last few decades, the situation on the ground nowadays, appears favorable for such values to take hold in the fabrics of Ethiopian society. As they promote such values, these novels constitute part of the continuum with other texts such as the constitution of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia and the policies that proceed from it. This is very pertinent particularly in the case of Fiqremarqos's ethnographic novels such as *Ivangadi, Land of the Yellow Bull* and *Achame* that dwell on the moral basis of human relations as well as the concept of identity. These novels uphold the virtue of respect for others, both individuals and social groups, thus challenging his readers to be as broadminded as to accept and identify oneself with humanity, irrespective of their ethnic, national or otherwise affiliation. Sisay Nigusu's *Reqiq Ashara* operates at a more abstract level as it challenges us to heed our conscience, since the latter is a repository of morality. The point it seems to drive home is simply that all moral and, by extension, social problems will be done away with if we heed our conscience. For we told that "Conscience is God and God is conscience".

Ethiopia is a nation with a lustrous history of anticolonial resistance. Paradoxically, however, its people have had a sad history of ethnic and/or class based subjugation, oppression and marginalization inflicted upon them by their own nationals. By virtue of the fact that the novels examined map the discourses of the moral visions of the specific periods that they depict, they can be regarded as the landmarks on the literary landscape of this country. The gamut that runs through all the novels can be put down to something like the observation I have made in connection with Haddis's novels. That is, however

oppressive and suppressive the social conditions that the people have passed through may be, this could not bend the human spirit of freedom. The social upheavals, portrayed in Bealu's and Tesfaye's novels strongly attest to this fact. After all the people have survived and endured, it is redeeming to witness the kind of moral thinking that is reflected in the novels by Fiqremarqos where respect as a moral basis of human relation is underlined and by Sisay where each and every individual is challenged to heed their conscience, for conscience is infallible. While such strands of moral thinking are by no means exclusive to these two authors, the emphasis accorded them is of particular significance to the present day Ethiopia. That is, Ethiopia cannot afford to perpetually experience upheavals and revolutions like the ones it has survived in its past history. To ensure lasting hedonism and public good for its people it has to pay due attention to human and democratic values, which it should also adopt as corner stones for its future peace and security. Learning from the past to redress historical mistakes is extremely important and this requires genuine political will. Nevertheless, irrespective of whether or not such will exists, the demand on the Ethiopian novelist to be ever more concerned with moral visions of social concern appears to be ever indispensable; for there is always a need to tell the truth that matters most.

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## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my work and that I have duly acknowledged the sources of all the materials I have used.

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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 13, November, 2007

Place: Department of Foreign Languages and Literature (AAU).