



**ADDIS
ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES LANGUAGE STUDIES,
JOURNALISM & COMMUNICATION
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND
LITERATURE
(School of Graduate Studies)**

*A Feminist Reading of Selected Novels by Ethiopian Diaspora Writers
in English: The Case of The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears
and The Shadow King:*

By: Bekelech Truye Gemed

A Research Submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages and
Literature in Partial Fulfillments of the Requirements for PhD in
English Literature

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
August, 2024**

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ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

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DECLARATION

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

Name: Bekelech Truye Gemedo

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Place: Addis Ababa

Date of submission: August 2024

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APPROVAL PAGE of Ph.D. DESERTATION

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Bekelech Truye Gemedo entitled: *A Feminist Reading of Selected Novels by Ethiopian Diaspora Writers in English: The Case of The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears and The Shadow King*: submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Literature complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the Examining Committee:

Examiner (External)	Signature	Date
Examiner (Internal)	Signature	Date
Advisor	Signature	Date

Chair of Department or Graduate Program Coordinator

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost may my great thanks and gratitude be to my Almighty God who helped me throughout all the hardships I passed through regarding this research. It is also my pleasure to express my heartfelt thanks to the following people for their assistance in the course of the research. To make this research, it was not easy for me but with the assistance of my beloved advisor, my children, and friends, I have reached at this level.

First of all, I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Olga Yazbec for her devotion, willingness to help me through reading and correcting my thesis, providing me with invaluable advice and encouraging me throughout the whole process. For all these, I do not have enough words to express my heartfelt thanks to her. Next to that, I would like to thank Dr. Abebe Damtew, Department Head of Foreign Languages and Literature, for he encouraged me in the course of my research. I would like to thank Senait Mengistu secretary of the Department for she has been providing me with necessary materials and pieces of information. I have also a great thanks to Dr. Melakneh Mengistu and Abiy Daniel for they showed me the direction of my research.

Additionally, I want to thank my friend Melkamu Tekle and Hise Teferi for they have helped me with editing. I would also like to extend my great thanks to my friend Birhanu Deboch for his financial support which made the research leap forward. Furthermore, it is my pleasure to thank my friend Metimiku Yohannes for sending me *The Shadow King* which this research dealt with. Besides, I would like to thank my friend Mulugeta Mamo for his great assistance to provide me with necessary materials from the library.

On top of all these, I would like to give a million thanks to my children Jedidiya Mekonnen, Peniel Mekonnen and Elroe Mekonnen for their all-round support. Especially, I would like to give special thanks to Peniel who stood by my side from the very beginning of the research up to the last minute. For all her commitment, I would like to say God bless her. Besides I have a great thanks to Dr. Girma Mengistu who paved the way for the publication of my articles. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Mesfin Gezahegn for he helped me to send articles to various journals. Generally, if it had not been for the help of these people, this research wouldn't have become successful.

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates feminist issues in Dinaw Mengestu's debut novel, The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears and Maaza Mengiste's second novel, The Shadow King. The researcher examines the representation of the female characters and the roles they play based on the paradigms drawn from poststructuralist feminism focusing on Julia Kristeva's point of view. The Ethiopian diaspora Dinaw Mengestu and Maaza Mengiste have attempted to portray model female characters to indicate the failure of patriarchal society at present. This research highlights the change of portrayal of female characters now-a-days.

The protagonist female character Judith in Dinaw Mengestu's The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears and Hirut as well as Aster who are the leading characters in Maaza Mengiste's The Shadow King reflect human characters who depict strengths and flaws simultaneously. This paper examines female characters from the perspective of Poststructuralist Feminism in general and Julia Kristeva's point of view in particular.

According to Julia Kristeva's promotion of a new generation, Judith from Dinaw's novel, Hirut and Aster from Maaza's novel play double roles in the private sphere as a mother, and they keep their dreams and desires in the public affairs. As it is investigated in this research, the authors attempt to portray the female characters as models for a new generation of women who struggle against a patriarchal approach who fight to be one-self and stand independently by leaving aside submissiveness and passivity though negative experiences in sexuality are perceived.

CHAPTER ONE

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In modern Ethiopian literature, some prominent writers from both genders have shown their potential skills of writing literary works, and they have proven themselves in portraying memorable characters and writing novels which are appreciated worldwide. This research which is entitled “A Feminist Reading of Selected novels by Ethiopian Diaspora Writers in English: The Case of *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *The Shadow King*” focuses on the analysis of selected diaspora literary texts. The researcher has chosen two Ethiopian diasporic narratives. One of them is written by a female writer. For the sake of comparison, a male author’s novel is also analyzed.

In fact, English novels written by Ethiopian writers are scant. The number of English writings of men in general and of women in particular is at the age of its bud; there are good reasons for this. The first one is English is learned as a foreign language in Ethiopia; therefore, English language command is under question. Another point is that Ethiopia has not been colonized by any colonizers. That is to say, no English speaking countries have colonized Ethiopia. Moreover, Ethiopia is the only African country that has its own alphabet. Hence, most Ethiopian writers stick to the local languages, predominantly Amharic, to produce their writings.

Even Ethiopian male writers who have written literary works in English are the ones who have been educated abroad. Daniachew Worku, Ashenafi Kebede, Sahile Selassie Birhanemariam are some authors that have written novels in English. Ethiopian female writers in English are fewer than males. Not only that, the type of genre they focus on also differs. Bilene Siyoum, Bekelech Truye, and so on have produced poems in English.

Another point for the lack of literary works in English is that there is no institution that encourages writers. Higher institutions teach English literature, but they do not have any journals in which they encourage their pupils to publish their works. If the ground is prepared, pupils will have a floor in which they can develop their skills of writing of various literary works. Teaching only does not make students future productive citizens. It is the practice that makes a person perfect. It was in the 1960s and beginning of 1970s that literary works began to be written by

university students, especially in Addis Ababa University. However, this practice did not continue. The researcher endeavored to conduct her research on Ethiopian diasporic novels in English. A novel by a female writer and one by a male diasporic writer have been selected for this study.

This research, which is entitled “A Feminist Reading of Selected Novels by Ethiopian Diaspora Writers in English: The Case of The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears and The Shadow King:”, focuses on The Shadow King of Maaza Mengiste and The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears of Dinaw Mengestu. It aims to provide a deeper understanding on portrayal of female characters. The reason why the researcher has selected the Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears and The Shadow King is because they are modern fictional works written by male and female Ethiopian diaspora authors which are published in 2007 and 2019, respectively. Besides, these novels are appreciable world widely and translated in to different languages and the novelists have been awarded for these novels. Dinaw Mengestu and Maaza Mengiste were interviewed by various journalists so the researcher has put their interviews in appendix one and two to give the readers further information about these selected texts.

In the past, female characters have been portrayed with a biased and stereotypical attitude, which is a reflection of patriarchal ideology that is implemented throughout the world. Besides, female writers’ participation was considered insignificant. The researcher attempts to use the Poststructuralist Feminism to investigate gender issues in these fictional works. These texts are going to be scrutinized through a feminist perspective.

The researcher has just been undertaking this study in the hope that a feminist reading of the selected texts can provide new insights in the interpretation of the selected narratives. The section below gives information about the novelists and their writings.

1.1.1 Historical background of the two Novelists

The author of The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears Dinaw Mengestu is an Ethiopian-American novelist and writer, who were born on June 30 1978 in Addis Ababa. That means four years later the Ethiopian Revolution when there was a scorching political turmoil shaking the country. His father, who was an executive lawyer in Ethiopian Airlines, used his chance to boycott his country. While he was on a business trip, he applied for political asylum in Italy. At that time, Dinaw’s mother was pregnant with him. In 1980, when Dinaw’s mother, along with Dinaw and his sister, moved to The United States of America to reunite with her husband, Dinaw

was a toddler, at the age of two. The brutality of the derg regime caused for the emigration of this family.

The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears (2007), To Read the Air (2010), All Our Names (2014) and Someone Like Us are the four novels that are authored by Dinaw. ‘Someone Like Us’ is selected as the best book of 2024 by the former President of USA Barak Obama. The topic of this discussion, ‘The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears’ was published in United Kingdom with the title of Children of the Revolution by the intention of the publishers. This novel is the blend of fact and fiction. One of the benchmarks of the Ethiopian history, 1974 of the Ethiopian Revolution was the cause for immigration of Dinaw’s family. One of his uncles was murdered by the military force; the other one fled to Sudan and migrated to the USA. All of them were victims of the military force; consequently, the facts were taken from such realities. That is to say, this novel is a work of fiction based on a true story.

Many Ethiopian scholars migrated because of cruelty and mass killings as Red Terror in the country. Dinaw reflected the miserable lives of the emigrants and the effects of harsh measures taken by the Derg Regime. Dinaw is a winner of many awards since his novels have power to draw attention of many journals, organizations and foundations.

Awards and honors

1. The New Yorker "20 Under 40", 2010^[5]
2. Los Angeles Times Book Prize, 2008
3. New York Public Library Young Lions Award Finalist 2008
4. Dylan Thomas Prize, Finalist 2008
5. Prix du Premier Meilleur Roman Etranger, 2007
6. Grand Prix de Lectrices de Elle, Finalist 2007
7. Prix Femina Etranger, Finalist, 2007
8. Guardian First Book Award, 2007
9. National Book Award Foundation, 5 Under 35 Award, 2007
10. Lannan Fiction Fellowship, 2007
11. New York Times Notable Book 2007

1. Dinaw is not only a novelist he is also a writer who is concerned with African issues. He writes for Rolling Stone about Darfur. Additionally, he writes for Jane Magazine on the conflict in Northern Uganda.
2. The other author whose novel is selected for this research is Maaza Mengiste. She wrote two novels *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and *The Shadow King*. Maaza was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1971. She is an Ethiopian-American novelist and essayist who focuses on her country of origin in her writings. Her family was affected by Ethiopian Revolution of 1974. Her three maternal uncles were victims of Red Terror. so her family migrated and started to live in Nigeria and in Kenya before going to the USA. (<https://www.maazamengiste.com/>)
3. Her second novel, *The Shadow King*, which was shortlisted for the 2020 Booker Prize, and was a 2020 LA Times Book Prize Fiction finalist. It was named best book of the year by the New York Times, NPR, Elle, Time, and more. *The Shadow King*, called “a brilliant novel...compulsively readable” by Salman Rushdie, is currently available in Spanish, Swedish, French, German, Italian, Romanian, Turkish, and Finnish, with more translations forthcoming. (<https://www.maazamengiste.com/>)

To sum up, since the historical context plays a great role in one's life, both Dinaw Mengestu and Maaza Mengiste including works have been influenced by the historical context they have been exposed to.

1.1.2 The Status of Ethiopian Women under Haile Selassie and the Derg Regimes

During the feudo-bourgeois administration of Haile Selassie the patriarchal attitude prevailed in the society. The place of women used to be confined to the private sphere; that is at home. Their social participation was limited to raising children and giving attention to the households. Even the ones who were educated were few in number; moreover, the type of professions women were dealing with used to be restricted such as nursing, teaching, secretary and so on. Women did not have any economic access. They were not allowed to inherit their parents' property.

However, in the revised Ethiopian Constitution of 1955, women were allowed to vote. This happened without any struggle. Sinidu Gebru became the first woman in the parliament in 1956. Though they were granted to vote, it never brought change. It is symbolic. Even Sinidu's idea was not acceptable in the parliament. As a result, she complained that her notion about women's right was ignored but she said that the number of women would increase in the parliament and women's right would deserve concentration sometime. (Assefa Gohalem 3

October 2015). The Derg regime also attempted to formulate the constitution in 1987 which did not bring any change, too.

During the Derg regime, in spite of amending the constitution, the government used to exploit women's labour organizing them under Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association. They were imposed to support the government with money and free labour force. Quotas and rations were mandatory for each member of the association. Therefore, it is possible to say women were private property of the state.

The Ministry Of Women Affairs (MoWA) has been given the power and mandates such as voicing the rights and interests of women at national level, following the implementation and designing strategies and preparation of policies, legislations, development programs and projects by Federal government organs give due consideration to gender issues; to pave the way for women to actively participate in political, economic, social activities; to identify discriminatory practices that affect women; to recommend the ways how to eliminate such practices; follow up the implementation of affirmative actions. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/14725840802417968>).

The 1987 constitution of the Derg was the first one to endorse the rights of women as part of the law. The affirmative action can be a remedy for injustice and inequality of women in the society. In spite of all these, the theory that were printed on paper were not put in to practice; hence it did not hit its target. But literature can also play a great role to bring attitudinal change. Maaza Mengiste and Dinaw Mengestu, for instance, have shown that one function of literature is to bring about attitudinal change in society. This is what makes *The Shadow King* and *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* significant. These novels do not only refer to the contemporary periods of a specific socio-economic society for that matter, but they are also the universal possibilities of the human beings' history. *The Shadow King*, for instance, spins around World War II. And the scenarios that were illuminated at that time. In this case, this research itself is a remark of the universal tendencies and situations.

1.1.3 Historical background of Diaspora

The term diaspora which is derived from the Greek word 'diaspieren', refers to an individual's or communities' displacement from their own country and settle in the host land. As Cohen (1997: 4) illustrates the word has a Biblical ground which traces back to ancient times, as it is mentioned in Old Testament 250 BC that describes scattering of Hebrews due to Divine punishment found from Deuteronomy to Psalms. Diaspieren is to mean 'sowing of seeds'; its

equivalent Hebrew word is 'galuth' means 'captivity or exile to indicate invasion of Jerusalem by Babylon and exile of Jerusalem elite to Babylon from 586—530 BC. This ancient uses of the word are associated to Jewish dispersion as a result, the Jewish experience has become a paradigmatic case of diaspora.

Tololyan (1991: 4--5) discusses that the term has a broader meaning. It is synonym with words such as immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community, ethnic community. In the previous years, scholars in the social sciences and humanities have commenced to employ the term 'diaspora' in their discourses for the purpose of reflecting experiences of displacement. Anthropologists, cultural critics and historians have taken in to account that culture and place are isomorphic categories. Some scholars say that nation is the same people living in the same place. However, this notion is never backed up by nationalists.

In the current ethnography, a more capacious notion of culture, that is multi-locale, is taken in to account (Clifford, 1992: 16). In this sense, multilocale ethnography has, consequently, substituted the village as a cultural whole, in general.

A historian Ernest Renan (1995: 25) puts saying that "A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle, based on the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories." By this idea what he intends to display is that 'nation' is deep-rooted in one's identity relying on what they have in common such as language, race, religion, or natural frontiers. For Benedict Anderson, a nation is an 'imagined community' Normally, nations consider themselves as one sovereign communities with confined and united boundary. Since each is not free from exploitation and inequality, it is impossible for them to think of Divinely ordained. When he shortens this notion "The nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." (Anderson, 1991: 6-7).

According to Hobsbawm, cultural differences which are based on language, customs and memories distinguish nations. Territorial lines are determined by cultural differences so to identify one nation from another, it is culture and its differences that is used as a springboard. (Hobsbawm, 1994:98). Ahmad Raina (2020: 69) on his part points out that the existence and promotion of various cultural traditions within a single rule is multiculturalism. It embraces the diaspora, cultural minorities and first-nation people. Mostly confusion arises among the immigrants because they are torn between two cultures: that is the culture of their original homeland and the culture of their host land. In this sense, a cultural transition from pure roots

to mixed customs in the adopted land is perceived.

As a result of this transition, the diaspora groups lose their cultural identity. That is when and where the world of confusion is reflected. As a consequence, nostalgia, alienation and longing have become headache of the diaspora which they experience in the alien country. When they face the hybrid scenario, they either end up in embracing cross-culturalism or encounter uninterrupted trauma in their lives. Therefore, the inner side of diasporic dialectics is founded on cultural identity, alienation and hybridity.

In fact, different notions have been set by various scholars about diaspora but Cohen (1997:5—6) generalizes putting emphasis on dispersal, collective memory, myth of original homeland, idealization of homeland, will to return, maintenance of homeland, and ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are features of diaspora.

1.1.4 Diaspora Literature and Related Issues

Diaspora literature is a type of post-colonial literature. It makes the post-colonial literature extend to a wider socio-cultural horizon. Diaspora writers, like Dinaw Mengestu, produce various literary works in which they express their feelings and experiences they have passed through. Such type of literature is called diaspora literature. (Pokharel 2020: 90). Ideas and methods are applied as theory to define such human experiences. Taking no notice of place difference and language, diaspora theory influences diaspora literature. (Rani 2018: 2).

It is obvious that each genre is characterized by certain specificities. Therefore, the authors and the themes of their writings make diaspora literature different from the others. To put it clearly, all literary works written by the authors outside their native country and if the works are associated with native culture as well as if the issues refer back to the background of the author it is called a diaspora literature.

Diaspora literature is examined to clearly perceive the lives of diaspora communities in the alien land. As Knott (2002: 145) puts “themes of diaspora literature as: ‘crisis of identity, rootlessness, the perennial mental ambivalence, a deep-rooted sense of belonging as well as return to the homeland.’” The text incorporates the social, economic, psychological and cultural situations. That is to say, the authors attempt to reflect the reality they face in the host land. Generally, there is a consent that diaspora literature is a literary work produced by a person living in a diaspora community for a long time.

Rani (2018: 4) explains saying that the investigation of diasporic text deals with 'location', 'dislocation' and 'relocation'. They stick between the past and the present and fall in to a dilemma; this situation creates a feeling of nervousness. This type of writing focuses on what the authors know in their homeland, i.e their background, and what they experience in the alien land. They neither ignore the past (old tradition) nor stick to the present life. They are torn between the two because they are unable to break the ties. They are always pulled back towards the old values they were originated from. As a matter of fact, diasporic literature plays a significant role in reflecting culture and history of nation's and displaying reality about people on diaspora; that is why it is considered as the extension of post-colonial literature in to wider sociocultural horizons. (Rani, 2018: 4).

The diasporic literature, as a whole, revolves around isolation or alienation, moving away from original place, nostalgia, existential rootlessness, quest of identity and disintegration from cultural identity. The diaspora community becomes alienated from three different perspectives. First they are detached from their old tradition and values they were accustomed to in their original country. Second, they are unable to assimilate themselves in to the new society and culture of the new land they are living at present.

Third, they are alienated from their own children who are the new generation with contemporary belief and attitude. As Hanif Kureishimi, a British-Asian author, says that "The only way I could make sense of my confused world was to write," (Knott 2002: 145). The diaspora lead their lives in the host land in confusion so it is through writing in which they become relieved.

1.1.5 Ethiopian Literature in English

Ethiopian literature in English has not yet flourished in Ethiopia comparing to other African countries. There are reasons for this. David F. Beer (1975: 47--54) states that Ethiopian writings in English can be divided into three categories. These are:

- A. Works of literary interest written in English by Ethiopians;
- B. English translations of works originally in an Ethiopian language;
- C. Criticism in English of written and oral Ethiopian literature. (Beer, 1975). The term "criticism" is used in its broadest sense here includes commentaries, reviews, histories and surveys, as well as critical evaluation and analysis. The role of language in Ethiopian literature is an interesting and complex one. (Beer, 1975).

When talking about Ethiopian literature, it is impossible to ignore “Geez” since it was the first language in which literary works were produced in Ethiopia. The Ge'ez language, which survives to this day only as a liturgical language in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, was until the latter part of the nineteenth century also the sole language used for literary purposes. Literature in Amharic, is by and large a product of the twentieth century, while literature in English emerged recently.

Ethiopian literature in English has been inspired partly by the fact that for some time English has been taught as a foreign language and used as a medium of instruction in secondary and higher education. As Endalkachew (2008, 5) explains, Ethiopia has not treated any foreign languages as official language. Furthermore, writers in Ethiopia are not bold enough to write in English, because they do not have good command of the language since English is not widely spoken in Ethiopia. It is taught in educational institutions as a foreign language. As a result, Ethiopian literature in English suffers from scarcity.

This becomes even more apparent when it comes to Ethiopian narratives in English. Ashenafi Kebede's *Confession* (1965), is often claimed to be the first Ethiopian English novel, which deals with the themes of “racial prejudices and conflicts” (Debebe Seifu, 1980). The impetus that has moved other African writers to use English or French as their medium in order to reach an international rather than only local audience has also been felt by Ethiopian authors.

Neither Ge'ez nor Amharic with their unique scripts are known to many people outside of Ethiopia, and Amharic itself is used by less than half of the population, more than ninety percent of whom are illiterate. Thus, an Ethiopian writer who wishes to communicate with an appreciable audience must translate his/her work or use a language of wider circulation. Although the quantity of literature in English by Ethiopians may seem limited in comparison to some other African countries, one must keep in mind its comparatively recent birth. Other factors have also affected the literary output either in English or Amharic, such as the small domestic market, the high cost of printing, stifling censorship and an almost complete lack of local publishing facilities. Lack of publication facilities has been a major hindrance for Ethiopians, who could have become prolific writers of narratives, plays and other types of literary works.

Ethiopian literature in English mainly concentrates on a socio-political and cultural thematic preoccupation of the country. Some of these writings written in English have been published

by international journals and publishers of journals and newspapers. Examples of such magazines and newspapers are: “Something” a university literary publication which flourished from 1963-1967, “Addis Reporter” a weekly review, the monthlies “Mennen”, the “Ethiopian Mirror”, the “Ethiopian Observer”. The Ethiopian Herald is Addis Ababa’s daily English language newspaper which has of late taken to printing the occasional story or poem. (Beer1975: 47-54).

Many Ethiopian authors are noted for their Amharic writings. That is to say, they have produced more literary works in Amharic than in English. But Ashenafi Kebede and Wolde Haile were, the two exceptional authors who have written a novel, in English only, not in Amharic. As Debebe (1980: p148) elucidates, Abbie Gubegna has written more than twenty Amharic works whereas he has only one book in English. Another famous writer is Daniachew Worku, who is known for many plays, poems and narratives in Amharic. He has produced only one novel in English, entitled *The Thirteenth Sun*. This novel used a sophisticated narrative technique. It tells the story of an educated son of a nobleman. It portrays his bondage to ignorance and superstition, which is abhorring. Another well-known writer is Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin who wrote many plays and poems in English; however, there was a vast gap in the time of production. Here, what Debebe wants to stress is that creative writing in English trickles into Ethiopian literature thinly and unevenly.

In fact, the only writer who persistently produced works in English is Sahle Selassie Birhane Mariam. He started writing in vernaculars and immediately switched to English. He is known for his narratives in English, *Afersata*, *Shinega’s Village*, *The Warrior King* and *Firebrands*. (Debebe Seifu 1980: 148—150).

1.1.6 Ethiopian Female Writers

Angela M. Mueller discussed the issue of Ethiopian women writers in her seminar presentation on *Women and Gender in the Horn of Africa*. The number of women writers in Ethiopia is rather small and they also started writing later than men. Most women began writing poems; as a matter of fact, the novel is neither popular for men nor for women writers in Ethiopia.

The practice of writing poetry seems to be anchored in Ethiopian culture. Poetry is one of the oldest art forms in Ethiopia. This applies not only to written literature but also to oral literature. Common people express their feelings in day-to-day life through special songs and poems. Their

likes and dislikes and critical views are expressed through poems. One can tell what there was at that time by examining poems; therefore, poems mirror society. Thus women who felt an urge to write and to express themselves, started to reflect their feelings and concerns through poems. This trend is still continuing; that is, the women writer's associations are publishing at least one book of poems every year. (Angela M. Mueller, Seminar Presentation (March, 2020).

Women's literature in Ethiopia emerged at the beginning of the 1950s. During these years, the publications of the two famous genres either theatre pieces or short stories flourished. Some writers also published guide books for the perfect housewife or the perfect mother. This moralistic genre of guide books was written by both male and female Ethiopian writers. So, it is possible to say that at the beginning, both male and female writers developed moralistic themes in their literary works.

Another feature which is very prominent in women's writings is social criticism. Most publications target social problems, women's problems or try to educate society to lead a moral life. The first real fictional works by authoresses were written and published much later at the end of 1960s. Even today, short stories are rather written by female authors than male authors. Before 1987, writings of Ethiopian female writers were very few. That is to say, female writers were not prolific. Sinidu Gebru was the first Ethiopian female writer who contributed a poem among 38 poems written and published by Yilma Deressa entitled "Yadis Zemen Mezmur Sile Netsanet Kibir" in 1941 (1933 EC) immediately after the restoration of Haile-Selassie's regime, following the expulsion of the Italian troops.

In 1942, Sara Workneh then translated one of Shakespeare's works. It was entitled Maebel. In 1949, Sinidu Gebru wrote another book entitled "Yelibe Metsihaf" which comprises two dramas, on Massacre of February and the other is a play on morality.

Until the downfall of Haile-Selassie's regime, much was not done to improve the Ethiopian female writers' situation. During the "Derg" regime, particularly between 1974 and 1980, it is possible to say that literary writings from both sexes were scanty due to the ideology of that period and censorship that followed it.

Famous authors, from both sides, have come forward with their indigenous literary works since 1980 EC. In 1985, (1978 EC) Yezina Worku in collaboration with Jemal Suleyman wrote a book entitled "Yeteshetew Seytan and Others" which is a collection of short stories. In 1989 (1982 EC) the first novel by an Ethiopian female writer, entitled "Kuasa", was written by

Tsehay Melaku. This novel focuses on male chauvinism and women's oppression. The protagonist character neglects and degrades women which shows the impact of patriarchal culture. Female characters, who are honest and innocent, are victimized by chauvinist behavior. "...all these happened as a result of intrigues and wickedness and shrewd behavior of men," (Tsehay Melaku, 1982:EC. 12). Tsehay wrote nine books seven of which are narratives and two are anthologies of poems, but all of them are written in Amharic.

1.1.7 Ethiopian Diaspora and Their Writings

Ethiopian diasporic literature in English arose in reaction to domestic politics. It is held that the diasporic Ethiopian literature in English emerged following the mass migration of Ethiopians all over the world following the 1974 coup d'etat. Around 250 million people currently live outside their country of which three millions are Ethiopians. Most Ethiopian migrants fled from the military dictatorship of the Derg regime, which came to power in 1974.

Literary works in English were produced by persons who were educated abroad. After being educated in foreign countries, Ethiopians used to come back home, because they hit the target of obtaining good opportunities in their country. However, after the 1974 coup d'etat, the political situation of the country compelled them to leave their homeland. Solomon (2007) puts this incident saying: "Although Ethiopians continued to go abroad for further education, they always return to Ethiopia to take the excellent opportunities available to them throughout 1960s." The 1974 Ethiopian Revolution drastically forced the educated Ethiopians towards mass migration. After coming to power, the military force started to take harsh measures against those who raised rebellion against the government.

Through the slogan of "Red Terror", the dictator Derg regime took lives of so many Ethiopians. Many fled abroad and confined themselves overseas as Diasporas. These Diasporas started to express their feelings through various literary works.

Mesfin (2012: 12) states that the reactionary literary works of the Ethiopian diaspora have social, economic and political content matters which are mainly related to the condition of Ethiopia after 1974. Similarly, Endalkachew (2008: 1) states that the socio-political and historical contexts of 1974 are the main literary contexts of most of the diasporic texts.

As a matter of fact, Dinaw Mengistu's first novel which is selected for this research is written relying on the consequences of 1974 revolution. Because of its historical benchmark, this variant of Ethiopian literature is highly engaged in the political realm of the country from different ideological views. Hiwot Teffera's memoir "Tower in the Sky", Maaza Mengiste's "Beneath the Lion's Gaze", Dinaw Mengistu's "The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears" are some of the Ethiopians diasporic writings which react to the 1974's revolution. (Mesfin 2012: 12). Ethiopian diaspora writers started to voice their anguish through literary works to resist the Derg government of Ethiopia. Migrant scholars changed the direction of their struggle from confrontation to combating through literary works. Hence, paradigmatic shift has been perceived because whatever reforms the educated Ethiopian Diasporas suggested, their voices were not heard by the authorities at home.

Hiwot Teffera, an Ethiopian Diaspora writer, wrote two books in English, *Tower in the Sky* (2012) and *Mine to Win* (2016). Gelawdewos Araia (www.ethioreaders.com) wrote a review on *Tower in the Sky*. It is entitled, "Book Review on *Tower in the Sky* by Dr. Gelawdewos Araia". He states that, "Tower in the Sky is a captivating memoir which was written on the Ethiopian Revolution and the Ethiopian Revolutionary Party's struggle." He finds Hiwot's "creativity and craftsmanship" remarkable.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Literature is a reflection of reality. It displays the history and culture of a society. It is not only a mirror, it also is a map that shows direction of the mind. Our literature is as such is geographical map if we happen to learn to read it, as the project of who we are and where we have been.

Literary texts are the medium through which various issues are described. The power of these literary texts in the formation and perception of women's images is immense these perceptions change with time and ideology. The issue of women is widely studied today in all spheres of life. It is also held that women have been misrepresented in literature. The domination of patriarchal society pushes women downwards. Lillington and Ross (1979:15) consolidate this stand saying that one distinct quality of patriarchy as its intrinsic ideology that women should stay in the private sphere of life while men should engage themselves in public affairs. This

patriarchal ideology in a society predetermines their image and predestines the role of women only to be wife and mother devoted to the household chores.

Goofman, who was one of the first sociologists to analyze gender stereotypes in advertisements, argues that advertisements help to construct the ideals of masculinity and femininity. He found that women were often portrayed in very stereotyped ways like in submissive roles or family roles and in social positions than men (1979: 53)

As a result, to understand the change over time, it is essential to look into literary texts from the perspective of related literary theories. As Nagarajan [2006: 32] states, “Black women writers have now come forward to portray, avoiding all cultural stereotypes, their women characters as real people who have to face many complex problems.” Women are generally suffering from social, cultural, psychological and economic problems. This research examined how the female writers portray female characters and what they feel towards the characters in the creative works selected for this study.

Women from all over the world are victims because of their sex, though the degree differs from one country to the other. Truly speaking, images of women have been distorted in various literary works. In one of the selected texts, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, it is perceived that the protagonist female character Judith confronts challenges as a result of her sex. Her being white does not protect her from being mistreated. So, it is obviously seen that in any culture women are victimized globally irrespective of geography, status or color. This scenario becomes inevitable as far as the patriarchal society dominates the world. It is not the nature but it is the society that sets the stereotypical stands of women as inferior and irrational beings, unable to engage critically and often understood from their ascribed inert domestic or sexual roles. This is true for laws are set and formulated by men who rule the world.

Color or ethnicity and class discrimination aggravate the oppression. In Africa as well as Afro-Americans situation in general and in Ethiopia in particular, because of illiteracy and male dominance, women are suffering from lack of education. They have little access to political power and they can hardly take part in decision-making on economic matters. “The low status given to women in some countries is manifested through some discriminatory laws about inheritance, access of the ownership of the land credit affect the participation of girl in education, [Rose et. al. 1997:12].

In this research, female characters are examined from the perspective of Poststructuralist Feminism; especially, taking in to account Julia Kristeva's approach. Whether it is deliberately or not, writers are influenced by social or cultural phenomena. The portrayal of the female characters is affected by such phenomena. So, the researcher attempted to show the challenges that female characters confronted and their struggle to overcome the challenges from the selected novels.

In the past half century, there were few Ethiopian writers employing English medium, especially the number of female writers that did likewise was insignificant. Due to the unavailability of female writers in English, the researcher has concentrated on Ethiopian diasporic novels. As a matter of fact, Ethiopian female writers are few in number; these authoresses mostly employ Amharic as their medium and limit their writings on poems and short stories.

On top of that, issues they have been raising were confined. However, now a days, the writings of Ethiopian female writers have started to go beyond confinement; that is to say, even hard issues like politics, philosophy, ideas that include creativity are depicted. Hence, this research examines the portrayal of female characters in the selected works from a perspective of Post-structuralist Feminism with the emphasis of Julia Kristeva's point of view.

The researcher found out that the selected texts have not been exhaustively analyzed from feminist perspectives, particularly, Post-structuralist Feminist perspective. An attempt is made to examine whether the female characters in the selected works are able to voice their reactions towards female subjugation in the patriarchal world. An attempt is also made to explore whether the female characters are capable of performing independent action and decision-making, A comparative analysis of the selected texts is also done to find out how Maaza Mengiste and Dinaw Mengistu view female suppression in the diasporic world.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective of the Study

The study examines the representation of female characters in the selected Ethiopian

diaspora novels in English based on paradigms drawn from Post-structuralist Feminism and the roles they play.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

In light of this general objective, the following are the specific objectives of this study.

1. It examines how female characters are portrayed.
2. It explores how female characters tackle the dominant patriarchal problems in the selected novels based on paradigms from Post-structuralist Feminism focusing on Kristeva's approach.
3. It also investigates whether the authors of the selected works portray the female characters as submissive to patriarchal norms, or as persons who are capable to voice their criticism of patriarchal norms which subjugate women. The selected novels are examined based on their social contexts.

1.4 Significance of the Study

An analysis of the selected novels from the perspective of Post-structuralist Feminism can contribute new insights as far as the analysis of the selected texts is concerned. This research can also be used as a reference for further study in Ethiopian diasporic literature.

Gender is increasingly becoming important today. The researcher believes that this study can show the changing perceptions of writers towards women. Maaza attempts to portray women who were not praised though they did heroic deeds at war. In *The Shadow King*, she displays women as benefactors of Ethiopia at the battlefield at the place where men are the only ones to be praised.

Similarly, Dinaw puts a female character as a symbol who confronts the challenges of the community. Dinaw in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, depicts female characters who stand in front of men as leaders. Especially, we see Judith does what men haven't tried.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This Feminist Reading of Selected novels by Ethiopian Diaspora Writers in English focuses on characterization. So, issues related to themes and styles are dealt with only if they help to show

how female characters are portrayed in the selected texts.

The research is meant to analyze how female writers and their male counterparts portray female characters. An attempt is also made to show the changes in the portrayal of female characters. The researcher intends to examine the changes in the portrayal of female characters that Maaza Mengiste and Dinaw Mengistu are exhibiting in their writings. The study examines how the female characters are portrayed in these texts based on their relations and interactions with other characters.

1.6 Methodology of the Study

This research is both descriptive and analytical. As Miles and Huberman (2007) put it clearly, “Instead of using numbers, a qualitative descriptive research expresses the results through series of words.” Close reading of the primary sources is significant for identifying the relevant passages in the selected texts; therefore, deep, intensive and close reading of *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *The Shadow King* is done before analyzing the female characters. The researcher has selected these texts to work on, because they are modern writings which have been produced after 2007. On top of this, these two authors are famous and they have been awarded for their literary works.

The following procedures are employed to conduct a critical analysis of the selected texts. The researcher collects secondary data and information through reading into Feminism and Feminist Literary Criticism from books and websites, and supplementing them by gathering and compiling relevant information by examining related Ethiopian researches. This is done with the belief that it helps with the interpretation of the two selected novels.

This research which is entitled as, “A Feminist Reading of Selected Novels by Ethiopian Diaspora Writers in English: The Case of *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *The Shadow King*” is based on paradigms developed from a perspective of Poststructuralist Feminism in general and Julia Kristeva’s point of view in particular. Though the focus is on post-structuralist feminism, it does not mean that other branches are untouched. To consolidate and magnify the essential points, it is significant to raise other approaches too.

The analysis of Dinaw Mengistu’s “*The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*” is also informed

by motherhood which is a significant aspect of Feminist Literary Criticism and is relevant to this novel. Generally, the research involves gathering information from various secondary sources such as books, journals and internet articles. Relevant passages from the selected novels are identified and analyzed based on paradigms developed from the selected feminist perspectives. Therefore, a textual descriptive and analytical approach of qualitative data is used to analyze the extracts from the selected narratives.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This research comprises seven chapters: of which the first chapter introduces what the whole research is about. It also discusses what diaspora is and its origin. Besides it illustrates diaspora writings and their issues. In addition to this,

Ethiopian writers and their writings in general and Ethiopian female writers and their writings in particular are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter two is A Review of Related Literature that revolves around various Addis Ababa University researches on feminism and what various journals and writers said about the texts under study. Additionally, it includes some researches on these selected novels are brought in to light.

Chapter three consists of conceptual framework that pinpoints of which angle of the study is taking place. Hence, it highlights about feminism and how its development occurs in general and Poststructuralist Feminism in particular. Besides Julia Kristeva's approach is highlighted as a springboard for this research.

Chapter four analyzes one of the selected texts *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* as it is mirrored through Poststructuralist Feminism. Especial attention is given for female characters and they are thoroughly examined relying on Julia Kristeva's point of view.

Chapter five is an analysis on *The Shadow King* by Maaza Mengiste. Passages are taken from the novel to perceive female characters through the lens of Julia Kristeva's way of perceiving.

Chapter six is a comparative analysis on the two selected texts and their writers. The differences and similarities between the texts will be brought in to light. Moreover, the two authors are compared and contrasted as well. How they have portrayed their female characters is put in to light. Chapter seven presents a summary and the findings of the research.

The appendices present information about the novels of Dinaw Mengistu and Maaza Mengiste

that do not appear in the analyses. It is hoped that the interviews the writers had can answer questions that readers of the selected novels may have. The researcher has employed interviews by other journalists because she could not find access to meet the authors.

CHAPTER TWO

2 A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 A Review of Research Related to Feminism

In many countries, society is said to have failed to provide a balanced picture of the diversity of women's lives and their contribution. A large body of research conducted on the images of women in various genres has echoed such idea. The socio-cultural sphere of dominant gender relations and gender inequalities, which can be manifested in terms of roles, social positions, behaviors, and other aspects of gender depiction, as Mblinyi and Omary (1996: 39) have noted, appear to be fulfilled often by portraying negative images of women. This also applies to Ethiopia.

Research on feminist reading of literary texts has been conducted in Addis Ababa University at post-graduate level. Fekade Azeze (1985) discusses four factors that determine the way an author or authoress portrays his or her women characters. These are: oral tradition which gives a writer a certain image of women; literature which contributes a lot in shaping the mind of the writer in portraying women characters; modern education and civilization that influences the way a writer portrays the characters; and the day-to-day activities of the writer which also affect his or her attitudes towards women. This shows that female or male writers are influenced by one, two or three or all of the above mentioned factors in portraying female characters in their writings. The author is brought up in the society so that society shapes her or him accordingly. The point here is which one of the four factors dominates the author's writings. Therefore, research plays a pivotal role in identifying social aspects a writer magnifies.

According to Mulumebet, the authoress has allotted much of the storyline to the inner feelings of the women characters (Mulumebet Zenebe 1996). In addition, in her thesis which is entitled "A Comparative Analysis of the Images of Men and Women in the Works of Some Ethiopian Women Writers", Mulumebet analyzes the images of both men and women characters in the works of five Ethiopian authoresses. She selected four narratives: Tsehay Melaku's "kuasa" and "Enguz", Elfinesh Bekure's "Tsilmet". She also focused on Mekdes Asnake Mehajeba'. Furthermore, she analyzed three short stories: Yezina Worku's "Yekirb Ruk" and "Senait" and

Yemiwodish Bekele's "Enegrewalehu". In her research, she has shown that women are oppressed by ignorant and cruel men. Besides, she highlights that culture is another factor that causes oppression of women. Mulumebet has also shown through discussion that the way out of the oppression is strong resistance. Here, what she wants to make clear is that women should struggle persistently to overcome domination of patriarchy. This research differs from that of Mulumebet in that both female and male writers' works are examined through the application of poststructuralist feminism. The female characters in the selected narratives this researcher analyzes women who are capable of decision-making and exercise agency.

Askale Lemma (1986), in her MA research, which is entitled "Images of Feudal Women in Seven narratives" states that that female characters are portrayed as cruel, shallow, and greedy. Her research shows how women are represented in the narratives; however, their struggle to overcome patriarchal oppression is not discussed. The current research, however, shows the changes in the portrayal of female characters in Ethiopian literature.

Thomas Abebe (2009) is another researcher who has written his MA thesis on Amharic narratives. In his MA thesis "Images of Women in Three Amharic novels: A Comparative Study", he argues that women are represented as wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, and mistresses. Therefore, women are associated only with domestic or private life. Social role of women is limited only to private sphere of life. Thomas did not apply critical theory in his analysis. The current research, however, uses poststructuralist feminism in which females' independent life, both in public and at home, is mirrored.

Another researcher, Mekonnen Zegeye wrote an MA thesis is entitled "Images of Women and Plot Structure in the First Four Narratives of FikreMarkos Desta "Behind the Buska", "Evangadi", "The Love of the Zersis" and "Achame". Mekonnen's research is similar to the current one in that he employs feminist theory. He classified female characters as victims and liberated ones. This research which is entitled "A Feminist Reading of Selected Narratives by Ethiopian Diaspora Writers in English: The Case of the Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears and The Shadow King" applies paradigms evolved from poststructuralist feminism. It differs from Mekonnen Zegeye's research since it does not only focus on Ethiopian female characters so the current research reflects that the issue is globalized unlike Mekonnen's study.

Yodit Admasu is a researcher who focused on foreign writers' works. Yodit (2004) deals with "The Portrayal of Women in Selected Narratives of Peter Abrahams". She analyzes the female

characters and figures out that the women are represented as cruel, shallow, and treated as only sexual objects. She reveals that the female characters are misrepresented. The current research is similar to Yodit's in that it also explores feminist issues in selected narratives. But the current Thesis applies poststructuralist feminist theories showing that the female characters themselves resist the challenges they have faced without expecting anything from men. In other words, they are independent and intelligent ones.

Mulualem Denbegna's (2006) research is entitled "Aspects of Feminism in Amadi's *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds* and Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen: A Post Structuralist Approach on African writers and their writings.*" He analyzes works by male and female writers. Mulualem, in his argument, notes that women toil hard at home and culture is also detrimental to them as it is depicted in the narratives; however, they do not express their feelings and burden. All these oppressions are implicitly put in the novels. As a solution, Mulualem recommends that every concerned body should cooperate and struggle for pro women's human and democratic rights. The current research differs from Mulualem's Thesis, in that, it highlights the agential acts of female characters. The women's beliefs are backed up by their actions. Hence, we see strong, outspoken and self-reliant female characters.

Yeshi Tadesse's research (1986), "Images of Women in Pre-Revolution Plays" indicates that the plays do not give a genuine representation of the problems of Ethiopian women of the period. The writers, according to Yeshi Tadesse, try to show that the culture is detrimental to women. Yeshi goes on saying that the misrepresentation of women is caused by culture from which the texts spring. There is no struggle to stamp out that harmful tradition. In the present research, however, the female characters resist against the patriarchal norms which suppress equal rights of women.

Jemanesh Selemon (1988) in her paper entitled "Images of Women in Ethiopian Plays" points out that in Ethiopian plays, the women are not depicted in their own nature, but they are shown by the relation they have to men. They are depicted from the perspective of male writers. Jemanesh intends to say that the female characters in plays written by male authors are misrepresented. The two pieces of research are similar in that they both explore feminist issues in selected works.

She analyzes plays, but the current research focuses on novels. Besides, the current research depicts that male authors have commenced to portray positive female characters who are self-

reliant and who confront and win the challenges. Hence this research reflects that progress is viewed from both authors and portrayal of female characters' angle.

According to Kenaw Gebreselassie's (2006), MA thesis entitled "The Portrayal of Women in Ethiopian Television Advertisement since 1970s", states that female characters in advertisements are depicted stereotypically. Not only the words, but even the ways in which they are represented reflect bias of the society against women. In the current thesis, however, the female characters struggle against patriarchal norms which confine women to the private sphere. Here is another article related to Feminism. Pierr Guidi (2020) wrote an article entitled, "Autobiographies and the Writing of Women's History". Guidi analyzes Hiwot Tefera's narrative, *Tower in the Sky*. Guidi categorizes this narrative as autobiographical writing. But it is better known as memoir. In the abstract of this article, he explains the significance of autobiographical writing saying, "Autobiographies allow analysis of reciprocal relations between individuals, broader social groups, social structures and contexts." (Guidi, 2020: 1). In his view, autobiographical writings "also served as valuable sources for feminist historians." From this, we can deduce the reason why he selected an autobiographical writing by a female writer. Guidi argues that autobiographies can give access to "voices often silenced or distorted in institutional archives and historical works." What induced Guidi to write this article is that he wants to know whether the student generation of the 1970s are committed as activists" (Guidi, 2020). Guidi also asserts that autobiography "is relevant for the analysis of intricate processes since it is multilayered archive" (Guidi, 2020).

This article is different from the present research because it focuses on autobiographical writing, or literary nonfiction. But it is also related to the present research in that the researcher explores the voice of Hiwot Tefera in her narrative. This is a feminist issue. Secondly, *Tower in the Sky* is written by Hiwot Tefera, a diaspora writer. The selected texts are also written by Ethiopian diaspora writers.

The research works this researcher has reviewed focus on various genres and indicate that the female characters are misrepresented in the literary texts due to patriarchal domination in society. All the pieces of research reviewed focus on feminist analysis of selected texts, like the present thesis. The present research, however, differs from these pieces of research in that the selected works are written by diaspora writers. Furthermore, the researcher analysed selected texts written in English at which there is scarcity in Ethiopian literature. Additionally, the

theoretical framework is poststructuralist feminism, which is a modern approach. Finally, the texts are of recent publications which illuminate progress and contemporary attitude.

2.2 A Review of Research Related to Ethiopian Writings in English

In the previous section, an attempt has been made to review researches conducted on Ethiopian literary works in Amharic. In the 1960s and 1970s, some Ethiopian writers, consecutively for two decades, produced their literary works in English though they were thinly and unevenly comparing to their Amharic texts.

Debebe (1980) analyzes *The Afersata* by Sahle- Selassie. He criticizes the author for failure to construct a well-structured plot and absence of central theme. On the other hand, he expresses his appreciation regarding clarity and simplicity of the English language usage (Debebe 1980: 17—21).

Debebe also analyzes *The Warrior King* by Sahle –Selassie which is a historical novel narrating about Atse Tewodros and how he reigned. The historical period represented in this novel is ‘Zemene Mesafint or The Era of Princes (1769- 1855)’. The central idea of the novel revolves around Kasa’s personality and unification of the disintegrated Ethiopian territory during nobles’ administration (Debebe, 1980: 25). Regarding this novel, Debebe comments that the writer only portrayed the positive aspects of King Tewodros’s personality. (Debebe, 1980: 25).

Taye Assefa (1980) has, however, a different stand concerning the portrayal of Kassa in *Warrior King* (1974). Taye argues that it is realistic as it shows Kassa’s claims of commitment to Ethiopia’s unity through his enthusiastic speeches and his lust for power through his unceremonious deeds (Taye, 1980: 33-35).

Firebrands (1969), the other novel by Sahle- Sellassie, has been mentioned for its thematic focus on corruption and disillusionment. But they are not equally depicted. According to Debebe (1980), even though the theme of corruption is well developed in the novel, the themes of change and disillusionment are not (38).

Debebe also analyzes Daniachew Worku's *Thirteenth Sun* in 1973 which is appreciated for both form and content. Many themes are rendered in this novel. These are: corruption, exploitation, degradation, despair and remorse in the feudo-bourgeoisie Ethiopia (Debebe 1980: 42).

Teklu Minas (1983) states that this novel reveals that the traditional forces which were in conflict with each other on the eve of 1974 Ethiopian Revolution also clashed with the modern influences (Teklu, 1983: 24). For Teklu, the whole novel starting from its title is symbolic. *Thirteenth Sun* satirically refers to "thirteen months of darkness in Ethiopia during the feudal system. Teklu, in his comments, goes on saying that all characters are symbolic. Fitawrari Woldu symbolizes Emperor Haile Selassie I, who resisted change. And the clergy of Zekuala represents the Orthodox Church.

The conjure woman symbolizes superstition or traditional beliefs and Goytom represents the conscious young Ethiopians who are progressive and radical. The peasant characters with their innocence and tendencies to worship authority represent the uneducated Ethiopian broad masses. Finally, Woynitu is a representation of the slightly educated Ethiopian girls who end up being co-wives of the haves. It is the conflict between these symbolic constituents of Ethiopia at the coming of modernization that is the overarching theme of the novel. To conclude Teklu says that the major theme of the novel is the disintegration of the old social system, (Teklu, 1983: 24-36). In fact, *Thirteenth Sun* has been written satirically, but the attitude of patriarchal society regarding women is reflected.

Debebe also makes a critical analysis of Abbie Gubegna's novel *Defiance* (1975) whose theme revolves around Ethiopians' resistance to Italian occupation. Debebe puts forward his criticism on Abbie's "Defiance" for the lack of language refinement and maturity (Debebe, 1980: 73). Debebe also analyzes Wolde Haile's novel, "Defend the Name" (1969). But Debebe comments this work does not have good organization as a work of art, (Debebe, 1980: 80). Additionally, Debebe studies a fictional work which is classified under diasporic literature is Ashenafi Kebede's "Confession" (1965) which revolves around the life of an Ethiopian young man who fell in love with a white American girl. (Debebe, 1980: 74). This young man does not have the faintest idea about the socio-historical background of black and white the American society. Consequently, he falls into humility, despair and identity crisis. The society to which his fiancé belongs is color conscious and where racial discrimination is widespread. As a result,

Confession shows how their life of love ends miserably due to discrimination and prejudice, (Debebe, 1980). So, racial prejudice, nostalgia and loneliness, which are themes in diasporic literature, are also developed in Confession. (Debebe, 1980: 76—77).

Debebe's Master's Thesis shares a similarity with the present research in that he makes a critical analysis of Confession written by an Ethiopian writer who reflects diasporic issues. The other pieces of research reviewed above differ from the current research in that they focus on fictional texts written in English by Ethiopian writers who lived in Ethiopia. Moreover, these researchers whose researches are reviewed did not focus on the depiction of female characters unlike the contemporary research.

2.3 A review of Studies Related to the Texts under Study

Dinaw Mengistu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King* have been analyzed by many scholars. Researchers, journalists and various magazine articles have analyzed and reviewed these texts. Much was said and written about the authors, for the issues they have raised are burning issues.

Bob Thompson is one of the commentators on *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*. He raises various issues: about the author and the themes, on *Washington Post* in an article. He has said that there are biographical similarities between the main character Sepha and the novelist Dinaw, who fled from the dictator military government of Ethiopia as immigrants though there is age difference between the writer and the protagonist character, two and seventeen, respectively. That is to say, the fictional character went to the United States of America in his adolescent age, but the writer fled to America in his childhood. (www.washingtonpost.com Thursday, March 25 2007: col).

First and foremost, Stephanos (the name of the protagonist character) is the same as Dinaw's grandfather. In reality, it was Dinaw's uncle who was murdered by the military government, whereas, it was Sepha's father who was killed. In the novel, various brutal acts took place at the site of the family.

Rob Nixon who is a professor of English at the University of Wisconsin is one of them who was concerned about Dinaw's book. Rob Nixon, (March 25, 2007) has written on The New York Times, that "The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears" has put emphasis on an Ethiopian immigrant's life, "the man who is struggling to find traction in his ostensibly current life as proprietor of an ailing Logan Circle grocery store." Nixon goes on saying, that "almost every page reminds us that 'departure' and 'arrival' are deceptively decisive words." Dinaw Mengistu's first novel, is a story of just such a shadowing of two cities: Washington, where the narrator and protagonist character Sepha Stephanos lives in exile, and Addis Ababa, his city of memory, and violent expulsion. In Nixon's writing the emphasis is given to the political aspect of the novel. The story swings to-and-fro between the two cities gripping the concentration of the reader.

According to Nixon, "The books molten core belongs to Sepha and his witty though elegiac voice. Seldom has a character emerged in a recent novel who is so compellingly dark but honest, hopeful but dismal, and able to turn his chronicle into a truly American tapestry racially fraught, culturally limited haunted by a dream of itself that has driven writers like Twain and other to make and remake it... Mengistu constantly parallels Ethiopia's failed revolution with life in the US and readers see in what happens in Logan Circle some proof that the alternative that America offers is failing and failing fast," (<https://bookmarks.reviews/reviews/the-beautiful-things-that-heaven-bears/>)

Abani is the other writer who discusses types of friendship in this novel. According to Abani, "the deeply felt pain in Mengestu's novel is offset by the solace of friendship whether it is a friendship that hovers on the verge of romance, a friendship between an adult and a child or, above all, the friendships that steady the daily lives of fellow immigrants ... It's rare that a novelist who can comfortably take on knotty political subjects like exile, memory and class conflict is also able to write with wisdom, wit and tenderness about the frisson of romance ... A great African novel, a great Washington novel and a great American novel." Abani magnifies this novel from three various angles: as an African novel because Sepha and his two African friends Kenneth of Kenya and Joseph of Congo are African immigrants who have sweet daydream about the life of America though it remains unsuccessful. As Washington novel, the story revolves around Logan Circle which is the suburb of Washington. As an American novel, these immigrants leave their home countries wishing America would be their "Heaven" but it is

in vain. (RavechrisAbani, The Los Angeles Times). As the characters are portrayed in both narratives. Black people are not offered the right position in the mentioned narratives. The researcher applies the postcolonial theory to examine race issues in the narratives.

Unlike the other researches, this study, which is entitled “A Feminist Reading of Selected Novels by Ethiopian Diaspora Writers in English: The Case of *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *The Shadow King*,” concentrates on female characters’ roles such as Judith who attempts to display her power against patriarchal stereotypical attitude. She is a prime symbol in the rising trend towards gentrification and an urban renewal. Judith is a prominent figure who transgresses the attitude of the patriarchal society that pushes women away from power and knowledge. Though there are many themes such as love, disillusionment, hopes, dreams, the focus of the previous researchers is mostly drawn to the aspect of politics and linguistic structures; however, the current study focuses on the portrayal of female characters from the perspective of Post structural Feminism in general and especially Julia Kristeva’s approach in particular.

The above researchers and commentators have all focused on themes like class conflict, exile, various types of friendship, nostalgia and homesickness.

The second narrative in the present research is “*The Shadow King*” of Maaza Mengiste which was written in 2019. Nawaid Anjum, an independent journalist, translator and poet, made an interview with Maaza Mengiste on her second novel which is the concern of this research. He describes in Hindustan Times, that memory and history are two favorite territories of Maaza Mengiste, the Ethiopian-American novelist and essayist whose second novel, “*The Shadow King*” has been shortlisted for the 2020 Booker Prize. According to Anjum, Maaza, who has mined Ethiopian historical memory in her works, is interested in the stories of ordinary people in the footnotes of history, those often omitted from official archival records. Maaza, in the interview, talks about her Booker- nominated novel, “*The Shadow King*’s” setting is at the time of Benito Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935; it is a story about women at the forefront of war yet their deeds as well as heroism was neither spoken nor written. (Nawaid Anjum Hindustan Times, October 16, 2020).

Another researcher, Michael Schaub writes about *The Shadow King*. It is mentioned that “the star of the novel is that Maaza’s gorgeous writing which grips the attention of readers tightly. The author has a real gift for language; her writing is powerful but never florid. And this combined with her excellent sense of pacing, makes the book one of the most beautiful narratives of the year. It is a brave, stunning call for the world to remember all who we have lost to senseless violence: “She can hear the dead growing louder: We must be heard; we must be remembered. We must be known. We will not rest until we have been mourned.” (<https://www.npr.org/2019/09/25/763907282/the-shadow-king-is-a-gorgeous-meditation-on-memory-war-and-violence>)

Alex Clark on *The Guardian* said of the novel that: "It is both a reasonably conventional narrative – there is plenty of action, detailed description and a focus spread between the principal characters – and a subtly unpredictable one. History and modernity are juxtaposed in the factual asymmetries of warfare (the Ethiopians must rely on outdated and often malfunctioning weapons and have no way of long-distance communication beyond running messengers)." They are also set side by side in the modes of consciousness that all the characters experience.

Michael Schaub of NPR wrote: "The importance of memory- of those that came before us, and of things we'd rather forget- is at the heart of *The Shadow King*.... The star of the novel, however, is Mengiste's gorgeous writing, which makes *The Shadow King* nearly impossible to put down."

In Dinaw’s novel, for example, the prominent theme is the rising trend towards gentrification and an urban renewal in which the female character Judith plays a key role. Although the community resists this urban renewal so fiercely, it is Judith who brings the trend. Likewise, in Maaza’s selected novel, Hirut and Aster are prominent figures and play a leading role. The research examines thoroughly how female characters are portrayed and it magnifies the roles they contribute to the society.

To put it in a nutshell, these novels have been studied from political perspective; however, in this research the selected novels are analyzed from a poststructuralist feminist perspective. This is what distinguishes the present research from the research studies that have been reviewed in

this thesis. The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework of analysis that is applied to the feminist reading of the selected works.

CHAPTER THREE

3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The conceptual framework for the analysis of the selected texts is developed from poststructuralist feminism. This research mainly focuses on some of the concepts of post-structuralist feminism. There are various strands of feminism. A post-structuralist reading of the texts under study can contribute new insights on the selected works. Research is not exhaustively done on this area. Something new can be added to the interpretation of literary texts through the application of contemporary literary theory. Although Feminism is not a new literary trend, it has continued to develop. It is also an eclectic field of literary study. This research is informed by paradigms from post-structuralist Feminism in general and Julia Kristeva's point of view in particular. African feminism is also applied to some extent.

3.2 Feminism

Feminist movement is a social movement that strives for raising the status of women which had the legal status similar to that of children. This happened due to economic dependency either on their fathers or their husbands. They were deprived of inheritance, education, opportunity of voting and the like. This strong segregation and inequality they were confronting initiated them to struggle. It was "once viewed as social history" and today, feminism "is studied through the lens of cultural history." In fact, the history of feminism is "political history that incorporates women and analyses gender politics." It has to do with "women's concerns, perspectives and efforts to be recognized as integral members of their respective societies." (Offen, 2011: 1).

History attests that women have been protesting against this inequality of their sexes portrayed in the society since long time ago although it is a tattered history. That is to say, the information about struggle of women was not put in an organized form. What we have is in a fragmented form. This protest has taken an established theoretical background in the form of feminism since the late 1960s.

Literary theory has been developing in the course of this century in branches of literary studies and taught as a distinct subject in its own right (Jefferson, 1982: 2-7). Here, it is possible to understand that the rise of feminism has played a key role in the development of literary

criticism. Feminist approaches have pushed forward both the theory of criticisms and the understanding of individual works of literature.

Concerning this concept Hoogan [2000:26] argues that feminism has exerted the most important influence on social and political literary study in the last half century. Feminist criticism is one of the new schools of theories and thoughts that have recently emerged and it dominates criticism at present.

The issue of women in literature is not a new phenomenon though the development of feminist theory or feminist literary criticism has been set or known as feminism, since recently. Consequently, there has lately been an increasing attention to the portrayal of female characters in various literary genres because the issue of gender is treated in almost all fields in general and literature in particular.

These theorists who began to focus on the question of feminist point of view carry out to apply their tools in building knowledge of women's oppressions and relying on that knowledge, they attempt to develop strategies for resisting subordination for the purpose of improving women's lives.

As Humm (1994: 54) clearly explains, "...throughout the world, feminist literary criticism has changed the way we teach, write and think about literature. ...feminist literary critics are concerned with the way in which literary texts have the power to produce gender representation odd with women's experience."

Feminism has plural nature with many different trends. According to Wooldridge (2015: 21) although many different types of feminisms are collected under the generalized heading of feminism, they can be divided loosely into broad trends with distinct philosophical approaches. Feminisms that primarily aim for women to achieve equal status with men within existing social structures; and Feminisms that reject the possibility of women's achieving total emancipation under existing social structures and, therefore, seek to dismantle and restructure the social system. Though Wooldridge (2015) tries to narrow the plural form of feminism into the above two types of feminisms, they don't contradict each other; rather they both try to expose and uncover the traditional and patriarchal oppression of women.

Women in traditional societies are often excluded from decision-making and are limited to stereotype roles as wives and mothers despite significant contributions in farming, housework, and child-rearing. But gradually, after 1960s, feminist movements and criticism have

been blooming and the question of women predominantly moves forward from culture to law. Cultural sentiments have been left aside and the campaigns start to revolve around rights of women. Women themselves began to struggle for themselves. They differ in their specific aims and strategies to show this gender hierarchy. Hogan (2000:170) says: “Virtually all feminists agree that women should not be underpaid relative to men, and thus they support equal pay for equal work. ”

Similarly, feminists universally or locally nearly universally oppose preferential hiring or promotion for men based on sex. They also oppose the unequal division of housework between men and women, at least when the spouses work the same amount of time outside of the home. Feminism is basically a political movement that includes the acting, speaking, writing and advocating on behalf of women’s issues. Everywhere and anywhere in the world, women have been considered second class to men. In most cultures men take pleasure in most or all positions of power. That is why those cultures are called patriarchies. These situations initiate women to fight for their rights under the shade of feminism that is against the domination of men.

The word patriarchy can be broadly defined as the superiority of men over women in a certain society. In this male oriented rule, women face diverse degrees of oppression depending on their race, customs, socio-economic class, religion and the country or region in which they live. Feminism, therefore, focuses on spotting prejudices against females and to at least lessening their problems with regard to repression. Similarly, Shukla puts that “Feminism is a concept emerging as a complaint in opposition to male control and marginalization of women (2006:1). This confirms the above definition.

Feminist Movement is a social movement which supports the rights of women in all social spheres, such as patriarchal, political, economic, educational, physical and psychological domains. In other words, feminism strives for the freedom of women and equal opportunity of sexes in all places. It has come a long way in realizing its chief purpose equalizing the position of women. In tracing the historical background of feminism, there are three crucial movements which had really contributed for the advancement of different feminist theories. All of the three types deal with different aspects of the same feminist issues.

What historians refer to as first-wave feminism arguably began in the late 18th century with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and ended with the approval of the Twentieth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which protected

a woman's right to vote. First-wave feminism was concerned primarily with establishing, as a point of policy, that women are human beings and should not be treated like possessions. The main concern of first wave feminism is that women fought for basic political and citizen rights for women such as for the general right to vote, to stand for election, and equality with men in working and educational settings (Peter, 2002:34). The first wave in feminist movement took place in the late 19th and early 20thcenturies.The principal concern of the movement was the right to vote.

European countries gave women the right to vote after World War I. in compensation to the contribution they did in the war. Similarly, the colonized states in Africa and Asia started to practice after independence that is after 2nd World War. In the case of Ethiopia, women were granted their right to vote and be elected for parliament in 1956 GC.

The second wave of feminism emerged from 1960s-1980s during which many women entered the labor force, and would have possibly ended with the verification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The second wave in feminist movement appeared after Simon de Beauvoir's book which is entitled "The Second Sex" was written in 1953. In her book Beauvoir raises a fundamental question: "What is a woman?" According to her argument, femininity which is being considered as the essence of a woman has to do nothing with nature. Values and standards are dictated by the dominant sex that is male. A woman is taken as the "other" or the second sex. For de Beauvoir, this hierarchy of male domination and women's subordination is not biological but a social creation. Beauvoir (1953: 35) states: One is not born but rather becomes a woman... it is civilization as a whole that produces creature... which is described as feminine). It was after this that feminist movement that takes "The Second Sex" as a theoretical backbone was set up as organized political force. "It mainly dealt with the inequality of laws, cultural inequalities and the role of women in society (Ruthven, 1984:9).

Both first-wave and second-wave feminism represent movements that existed alongside with civil rights movements for people of color, a slight majority of whom happen to be women. But the fight always seemed to be for the rights of white women, as represented by women's liberation movement, and Black men, as represented by the civil rights movement. Both movements could have been legally accused of downgrading women of color to lower status. They also tended to stress the rights and opportunities of middle- class women over poor and working-class women. And they were basically limited to developed nations.

The third one is considered as a response to the perceived failures of the so called remaining two waves of feminism. In a much reviewed and cited article on the relationship between first and third world feminisms, Mohanty (1991: 10) argues that women in the third world have been considered not agents of their own destiny, but victims. A strong image has been constructed, even in feminist scholarship of an average third world women who lead an essentially reduced life based on her feminine gender (sexually constrained) and her being third world (ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition- bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized). In simpler expression, the inability of white women to acknowledge and incorporate the issues of third-world women provoked the development of the third-wave feminism. This brand of feminism questions the essentialist view of the former two waves of feminisms.

Third-wave feminism takes a global perspective not by merely attempting to decolonize developing nations from Western practices, but by empowering women to actualize change, to gain power and equality, within their own cultures and their own communities and with their own voices. It is not restricted to a given ethnic group or region rather it stands against westerners' act of universalizing women issues.

3.3 Poststructuralist Feminism

Post structuralism is a term covering bunch of different approaches to language and literature. The French philosopher Jacques Derrida, the pioneer of post structuralism, is the one who challenged the notion of classical assumptions that says any organized thing must have a point that can be regarded as its center. Eagleton (1983: 143) explains that Derrida “had cast grave doubt upon the classical notions of truth, reality, meaning and knowledge all of which could be exposed as resting on a naively representational theory. According to Derrida, there is no definite center for meaning. Gray (1992: 229) states that the single most significant influence post structuralism development has on linguistic philosophy in the 1970s and 1980s is deconstruction, which is chiefly developed by Jacques Derrida and which has had a strong influence on literature and contemporary literary theories.

Post structuralism is not a school by itself; rather, it is a group of approaches taken from various schools which is motivated some common understandings. Gnanamony (2006: 153) clarifies Derrida's theoretical formulations saying that are derived from Western metaphysics, Marxism, psychoanalysis, structural anthropology, linguistics, feminism,

deconstruction and phenomenology. In this sense, poststructuralism embraces different notions from various fields to perceive the world including literary works.

According to Lather (1991:4) the concept of post structuralism refers to the working of cultural theory in a post-modern context. As Wooldridge (2015:12) elucidates to post structuralism, language is ontologically significant: it is only through construction in language that things or objects, subjects, states, living beings, and material structures are given meaning and endowed with an identity. It is through language in which one expresses herself or himself. In other words, it is to say that language is a field of social and political practice, in which there is no objective or true meaning beyond the linguistic representation to which one can refer.

Obviously, there is no relation between the word or name of something and the real object; it is conventional. It is the consensus among the society so as to communicate with each other. Many third-wave feminists share this stand.

Although different forms of post structuralism vary in both their practice and in their political implications, they share certain fundamental assumptions about language, meaning and subjectivity. Post-structuralists see no essential connection between the word and its meaning. Regarding literary works, they say that there is no central meaning of the text that is set by the author. That means there is no center for meaning. In other words, meanings do not exist prior to gender bias. Events, experiences or discourses exist when they are articulated in language, (Weedon, 1997:20).

Creation of a fiction is impossible without a language. One produces a fiction using a language we apply in our day-to-day activities. This fictional world is usually presented as real. The so called reality that is created in fiction is a type which is comfortable for us, or that we wish to live, (Gough, 1991: 56).

Davies (2000: 23) explains that fiction presents one of the most powerful possibilities of speaking which has not yet been available to us through live discourses. In other words, an author is a foreseer or foretells what will happen in the future. In addition to this Bell and Russell (2000: 17) suggest another advantage of a fiction saying that it may also be acknowledging and engaging non-language forms of communication often side lined by post structural emphasis on language.

Gray (1992: 229) states that the single most significant influence post structuralism development has on linguistic philosophy in the 1970s and 1980s is

deconstruction, which is chiefly developed by Jacques Derrida and which has had a strong influence on literature and contemporary literary theories. Lye in his internet article gives the following is a summary on some of the assumptions of poststructuralist thought:

1. Post structuralism is marked by rejection of totalizing, essentialism and foundationalism notions. Totalizing has a stand of putting all phenomena under one explanatory concept; essentialist also believes in existence of reality independent of language and ideology; and foundationalism which has a belief of signifying systems are unproblematic representations of a world of fact. All these three notions are rejected by poststructuralists.
2. Post structuralism perceives reality as being much more fragmented, diverse and culture specific. St. Pierre (2000:485) clarifies that language practices produce shared cultural narratives or discourses, which are “a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs” that organize the ways in which we can think and act.
3. According to poststructuralist critics, we live in a world of language discourse and ideology all which structure our sense of being and meaning. For poststructuralists, discourse is conceived as a set of beliefs and understandings reinforced through daily practices, which frame a particular understanding of the ways we are in the world, (Weedon, 2004:9).
4. Discourse is a material practice; the human life is rooted in historicity and lives through the body. Hence discourse is not specifically a language or text, but it is the effect of language practices.
5. Texts are marked by a surplus of meaning; the result of this is that differing readings are inevitable. After reading, each interprets in their own ways and understandings so there is no a definite center for meanings. That is to say, meaning is out of the author.(Lye, J. 11/26/2004. Some post-structuralism Assumptions.) (www.procku.ca.pnglish.course.4f/170/poststructhtml11/26/2004)

When the current situation is examined, the representation of the world is the work of men. They visualize everything including life and individuals in the way they like. In other words, they describe the world from their point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.

These descriptions do not include women's point of view. Everything is the reflection of masculine point of view, (Wooldridge, 2015:37).

What feminism brings to post-structuralism is the ability to address the question of how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed, (Weedon, 1997:20). Feminism struggles to bring fairness in all aspects of men's world. From 1980s onwards, feminism has shown progress by raising a question where the women are. We can perceive the world through an alternative gendered focus that facilitates the ability to see depictions of international politics different to those conventionally offered. In this case, what feminist perspectives do is that they insert gender as a framework for analytical study that deconstructs the masculinity that dominates the intrinsic assumptions of our intelligible reality, offering an understanding based on the experiences of all, instead of a few. (Wooldridge, 2015:37).

According to Hollingsworth (2006:29), "Feminist activist research consciously seeks to break up social silences to make spaces for fracturing the very ideologies that justify power inequalities – even feminist ideologies."

Jacques Derrida says that a woman's power lies in her ability to evade and infiltrate masculine constructions at will, yet never be subject to them, (Dely, 2008).

3.3.1 Julia Kristeva and her theories

This thesis which is entitled "A Feminist Reading of Selected Novels by Ethiopian Diaspora Writers in English: The Case of The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears and The Shadow King:" examines portrayal of female characters in The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears and The Shadow King from perspective of poststructuralist feminism focusing on Kristeva's point of view; therefore, it is better to look at Julia Kristeva and her theories because it is helpful to understand female characters in depth.

Julia Kristeva is a French-Bulgarian philosopher who is considered as a prominent figure in the development of poststructuralist literary theory. She pioneered new ideas in semiotics, psychoanalysis and feminism. Julia Kristeva, who was born in Bulgaria in 1941, moved to France in 1964 by the age of 23. She has produced more than thirty books. For her deeds, she was awarded a series of prestigious prizes such as the Holberg International Memorial Prize, the Hannah Arenet Prize and the Vision 97 Foundation Prize.

She was trained in linguistics at the University of Sofia when she was in Bulgaria; hence, this training helped her a lot to bring new ideas in semiotics which is a study of signs, symbols and language. Working in literary journal *Tel Quel*, she hit a target by producing two publications: *Semieotike* (1969) and *La Revolution du langage poetique* (*The Revolution of Poetic Language*) (1974) which are based on Freudian, Lacanian and Kleinian psychoanalysis. These two texts examine how language, culture and ideologies are constructed out of unconscious body and gender-based dimensions. On top of all these, various trainings on psychoanalysis in 1970s, broadened and deepened Julia Kristeva's belief that unconscious emotions and feelings are interwoven with the meaning invested in to our forms of communications.

Her other influential theory within feminist and literary scholarship is "abjection", in which she explored the power struggle between mother and child after her son's birth in 1970s. In this writing, she explains the semiotic link between mother and child. Kristeva calls "abjection" the rejection of a child's rejection of his mother for the purpose of finding himself. According to Julia Kristeva's belief, the notion of "abjection" would come to replay throughout the human's adult life in a variety of ways.

Kristeva is also well known as a leader in feminist theory. Her writing on women's bodies in relation to motherhood expresses the role that women's bodies play as a primary source of rhythm, tone and movement for every human being before it comes in to the real world.

In her well known essay which is entitled "Women's Time" which was written in 1979, she argues that there are three types of feminism. The first one is the one which claims universal equality taking no notice of sexual differences. The second type is which emphasizes feminine language but in Julia Kristeva's point of view which is impossible for gender is too diverse to categorize. The third type explores multiple identities. For Kristeva, there are many different kinds of sexualities, so are the people. This reflects the complexities of gender, sexuality and identity which is relevant for today's culture.

<https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/english-literature/literary-criticism-and-theory/julia-kristeva/#:~:text=Julia%20Kristeva%20is%20a%20French,within%20feminist%20and%20literary%20scholarship.>

3.3.2 Women's Identity

Julia Kristeva, like other French feminists, based her argument on Freud and Lacan's psychoanalytic approach. In her argument, Kristeva says that someone's identity starts to build up at its infancy stage when the child starts categorizing and understanding the patriarchal world, including the authority of father and patriarchy which makes the child suppresses lots of desires and ideas. Similarly, she rightly points out someone's identity using Lacan's mirror stage which is the state where a child recognizes himself as "I" which helps him to differentiate himself from others, (Kristeva,(n.d.)

Scholars assert that females are expected to be passive and submissive in the patriarchal culture. (Auerbach 1988; Volks 1994McDonough 1995;). It may be worth considering the socio-symbolic expectations of a society that stimulate these characteristics in women. These socio-symbolic expectations of a society in real life I are also reflected in fiction. Creative writers are consciously or unconsciously influenced by the belief of the society since they are part and parcel of the society they are living in.

Marcelin's (2012: 25) study relies on "Female Identity Development in a Cross-Cultural Context" first generation American and immigrant women, the standard beauty, identity and womanhood are defined by American standards. In fact, here, the standards differ from culture to culture. In the case of this research Naomi one of the female characters in Dinaw Mengestu's "The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears" was born from African father. The feeling of identity between two cultures can be envisaged.

Goodoow and Espin in Marcelin (2012, 42) describe that apart from the influence of ethnicity and immigration, gender is a crucial factor in the development of identity: sex roles have a pervasive influence on every aspect of adult life. They further add that the transition from childhood to adulthood in the context of gender roles is already a problematic rite of passage for females in general, but coupled with having to adjust to two contradicting cultural gender roles can be quite a daunting or desperate experience. Patriarchal subordination is widespread and our world is the world of men; consequently, women's identity is affected since they are viewed as inferior to men in the patriarchal culture.

Women's identity does not appear from somewhere in the blue; the family that a woman was brought up in is the context in which women develop identity. That is to say, the family in general, the mother in particular, plays a pertinent role for the development of identity. Hillary Halpern, in her study, notes that different views on gender from a child's parents can shape the child's understanding of gender as well as the child's awareness of gender. Many parents form gendered expectations for their child before it is even born, after determining the child's sex through technology such as ultrasound. The child thus is born to a gender-specific name, games, and even ambitions. Once the child's sex is determined, most children are raised in accordance with it to be a man or a woman, fitting a male or female gender role defined partly by the parents. Starting from the way they eat and what they eat, the parents put influence children to be masculine or feminine. In Ethiopia, for instance, boys are encouraged to eat well the types of food that gives them energy. This is because males are expected to be energetic and tough both physically and mentally, whereas females are expected anticipated to be soft and weak. As a result, females develop negative attitude towards their selfhood; society looks at them likewise. So, by hook or crook, their identity arises there in. In a study conducted by Halpern, it was hypothesized, and proven, that parents' behaviors, rather than parents' beliefs, regarding gender are better predictors for a child's attitude.

Therefore, environment and time are two significant aspects that influence the identity of women. In other words, the politics of women's bodies, sexuality, appearance and behavior all contribute to women's selfhood. Though, the standards vary from place to place, the society views women in terms of sexuality, behavior and appearance.

Women are what society expects them to be. Womanhood is an ever-changing conceptualization, but fluid idea defined by society and cultural biological fact that has created various implications for women all over the world. There is a constantly evolving effort to reconcile the dissimilarities of identity reflected through standards of beauty, sexuality and gender roles, (Marcelin2012: 12).

As Tyson (2006: 108) explains our gender plays a key role in forming our individual identity. That is to say, both our self-perception and the way we relate to others. Our gender strongly influences how we are treated by others and by society as a whole. Selfhood of a woman can be determined by various factors. First of all, a woman has her own perception of herself. Knowing

oneself starts from home. A mother or grandmother is the one who imprints a woman's identity from the very beginning during childhood. For instance, in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, it is Judith, who shapes her daughter's attitude, in the way she wants her to be. It is not in the way she is, but in the way she intends her to be. Therefore, Naomi is determined, bold, self-confident and intelligent. Beauty, sexuality and gender roles are the pillars through which identity is reflected.

According to Marcelin (2012, 23), ethnic identities are strongly influenced by cultural backgrounds and visibly defined by environmental surroundings... between the changing contexts of female identity inside the home and outside of the home. This adaptational trend is a reflection of how identity negotiation alternates between varying cultural dimensions; first generation women have to continuously adapt to different standards of self-actualization, body image, and beauty perceptions, says Marcelin. Post-structuralist feminism attributes significance to issues related to self and identity (Weedon, 1997, 20).

3.3.3 Female Sexuality

As Freud discussed, gender difference is a social construction that a child tries to enact in his sexual stages and his behavior towards his and others. Sexuality is, at most, influenced by our circumstances one is brought in, (Kristeva, *Literary Theory*).

Kristeva calls the pre-oedipal and pre-linguistic stage the time when the child has no the idea of sexuality, as "semiotic" and the latter stage when the child is influenced by society and language as symbolic. In this sense, it is the language that creates the awareness of the sexual difference in a child. The semiotic stage for Kristeva and the "unconscious" for Freud can never be eliminated rather it is only repressed (Kristeva, n.d. *Literary Theory*).

Beauvoir also argues that women are neither inferior to men, nor they are born with the so-called weak feminine characteristics, and all of this is a social construction imposed by male hegemony on women. Therefore, in both cases, social construction plays a significant role in identifying oneself. Like Lacan, Kristeva points out that it is the language that creates the awareness of the sexual difference in a child when the child starts categorizing and understanding the patriarchal world. (Kristeva n.d.: *Literary Theory English Summary*).

Gender and consciousness are two major factors from which one's sexuality is largely derived. On the one hand, by gender, it is to refer to one's being a male or a female. On the other hand,

consciousness refers to what characterizes that gender, how the society regards a male or a female, what the society expects from that gender and how that individual perceives herself or himself. Generally, maleness and femaleness are markedly different due to their expressions and the way the society perceives and treats. In fact, constituents of maleness and femaleness may vary from place to place due to specific cultural factors.

In most African cultures, for instance, maleness is regarded as superior to femaleness. As a result, males are respected and treated with dignity. Whereas females are considered as the second class and they are perceived with contempt. To ensure and keep on sustainability of men's superior status and women's inferior status in the society, several myths have been evolved which are blindly accepted and upheld. Prior to the twenty-first century, sexuality was often shrouded in customary beliefs and practices that sought to make women ashamed of their sexuality. That means female sexuality is dominated by customary beliefs and practices. Before 21st century, to talk about female sexuality was taken as a taboo. As a result, women are ashamed of their sexuality. Since it is considered as a societal taboo, it is not talked about. If it has to be discussed, it will be done secretly. The issue about sex is hushed up. If the discussion is obligatory, it will take place in hush tones or is whispers; it will mostly discussed at the absence of women.

Thus, female sexuality was something to be despised and condemned. If a woman has shown an interest in sexuality, she would be symbolically posing an affront to manhood. That is to say, she was considered as the woman who is altering her image and condemned by both sexes i.e. men and fellow women. Due to this condemnation and isolation, that woman starts to lose her confidence This influence directly pushes her from positive to negative that is, from self-conscious, sexually-active and vivacious person to the docile, passive and easily-manipulated one.(Marcelin, 2012).

In contemporary gender discourse, female sexuality has been discerned as a burning issue in which the widespread awareness of the century has forced women to establish and examine ethos which have credibility and validity in the society. Female sexuality, here, is conceived in terms of two points: first, woman's recognition of her sexual desire as well as her striving to satisfy it. In the second place being an active and self-reliant she is able to aware her potentialities and identify her selected sexual orientation.

According to Rachel Weitz's study, (in Marcelin 2012:445) the three themes, in which the society evaluate, female sexuality are appearance, behavior and practices. In the above mentioned study, it is illustrated that how women either stick to culture, that is themes of sexuality or they deviate from the social norms. The decision they make between these two: adhering to or deviating from the social norms, has a direct effect on women's lives. To put it in a nutshell, the consequences that these women's experience brings about change on their social, family and even professional relationships and environments positively or negatively.

A person's sexuality consists of behavior and desire. The motivation to engage in sexual acts is sexual desire, (Weitz in Marcelin, 2012: 448-449). Sexual behavior refers to the sexual acts that people engage in. These acts, according to Pepper Schwartz and Virginia Rutter (2004: 65) involve not only petting and intercourse but also seduction and courtship. Sexual behavior involves the things that people do alone for pleasure and stimulation.

Varies cultures initiate female stereotypes that make women believe they are not owners of their bodies. To put it conspicuously, before marriage they belong to their father's, as they belong to their husband at marriage; at widowhood, they are expected to be to designate male relations of their deceased husband's through levitation. Therefore, it is obvious that a woman at no cost possesses full right upon herself; be it her body or her mind. Due to the stereotypes, the society makes her feel ashamed of her body so that she should hide it; instead of admiring or loving it. Sexuality is, in general, rapidly becoming divorce from marriage, and it is used only for reproduction and perpetuation of the lineage. (Rachel Weitz "in Marcelin, 2012: 435").

Ada Azodo and Maureen Eke try to put the five historical stages of African literature that affect gender and sexuality in Africa. In fact, they argue that these five stages do not have a clear cut demarcation. So they roll one in to the other. The first stage is of tradition and colonization which lies in 1940s. The second one refers to the period of political independence since 1960s. The third phase consists of period of neocolonial, or post-independence or modern era since the 1970s including 1980s, here the third and the fourth overlap. The fifth stage is postmodern or global era of the 1990s up to the present.

These phases have put their fingerprints on female sexuality in African literary works of men and women African writers. These are the basic issues on the sexuality of women that are visible in much of African literature, especially in many writings by men and some women. It is

obvious that in contemporary Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular, though things are slightly changing in line with women's lives, portrayal of female characters is depicted as the sun that struggles to shine through a slit of clouds in the sky. For instance, in Aidoo's text entitled *Changes*, it is stated that now-a-days, it is possible to perceive "pulses with an irrepressible pioneering spirit, clearing the ground for a new tradition of women's writing in Africa. It is a record of the changing circumstances of women's lives in contemporary Africa, but more importantly it transcends realistic significance and constructs a psychological blueprint for female portraiture." (Aidoo: 179).

Hooks (1981: 86) further adds that female sexual freedom requires knowledge of one's body as well as understanding meaning of sexual integrity. At present, various African literary works portray women who are aware of what they want and identify what is good and bad for themselves regardless of what the society stipulates by making obvious in *Changes* that women's self-consciousness, which motivates self-assertiveness, also involves female sexuality, Ama Ata Aid is rewriting the woman's story, recreating womanhood and reinventing the female sex and beauty stereo types.

In the study which is entitled *A Feminist Reading of Selected Narratives by Ethiopian Diaspora Writers in English* analyses the portrayal of female characters based on parameters developed from post-structuralist feminist theory. Over all changes are now-a-days are perceived. The Ethiopian authoress Yordanos Guesh, for instance, portrays female characters who withstand stereotypes including female subjugation in her Amharic novel "Libuse-Tila".

3.3.4 Women's Voice

"It is not what he said but how he said it that made me angry:" This common saying emancipates that two solid points are significant in speech. The first one is "the message itself"; the second one is "the way the message is transmitted. Therefore, the message and the manner it is expressed are equally influential. To talk about "manner", high pitch, low pitch, more stressed, less stressed, repetition are some of the types of tone that play significant role to bring change in voice. Voice pitch may have something to do with how many men and women get heard. Some researches in the psychology literature suggest people find men and women with lower voices to be more authoritative and dominant. This could explain why at least according to

one journal on the study of voice, women's voices appear to have lowered over time, along with evolutions in their social roles. Famously, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher worked with a voice coach on lowering her pitch, in an effort to sound more authoritative.

Voice is not only related to speech, but it is also the way in which women writers combat stereotypes that exist in patriarchal society. Humm (1994: 3) denotes saying that, "Women become feminist by becoming conscious of and criticizing the power of symbolic misrepresentation of women." Not only the image of women in that problem is perceived but the less acceptance of women writings is also reflected; that is why some women writers use a pen name of a man instead of their real name. For instance, George Eliot, whose real name is Maria Anne Evans, has used a man's name as a camouflage to get acceptance. Maria Anne Evans is a British female writer who lived from 1819—1880 used a male's name "George Eliot" to pave the way for reaching as many readers as possible dissemination of her writings among people without any challenge so that she might deserve acceptance among the society. This is because of women's being "unheard voices". Today, modern African women writers are trying to voice their feelings in their writings. They feel that a woman should be seen as a full human being. "God when will You create a woman with little being in herself a full human being, not anybody's appendage," (Frank, 1987,44).

Moreover, female writers, nowadays, write on thought-provoking issues such as cultural conflict, gender issues, and changes without any fear. Some modern female writers are boldly trying to voice their feelings without any fear. Maaza Mengiste belongs to this group because she confidently voices the hidden side of the society.

There was a report and study conducted by seven researchers in April 2015 concerning the all-rounded women's progress. The report looks at whether women's capabilities and actions in different spheres lead them to have more presence and influence within private and public decision-making. Based on a review of over 400 sources, the report is on thematic chapters in women's literature.

Political participation, including in peace processes, constitutional reform, political parties and through quotas; social activism, through social mobilization and social accountability processes; and economic empowerment, through access to financial and productive assets and the labor market.

Overall, we know much more about women's exercise of voice, than about when and how they are effective leaders and influencers. A large number of researches clearly show that a woman's ownership of assets and employment can increase her power within the household, but little is known about how this affects her public power. Here, it is evidently possible to consider the Ethiopian case. From Over 2018–2019 period their gradual participation in state politics has been increasing pace. Though their contribution is less than they are expected to accomplish, in the political arena, changes are being viewed. For example, during 2015 election, in the House of Representatives, from 547 total seats, 212 or 38.76 per cent has been occupied by women. However, in 1995, the number of women in the House of Representatives was only eleven (2.01 per cent). On the contrary, at present 44.1 percent of the seats of the House of Representatives is occupied by women that means, political parties are giving women candidates more opportunities. But in reality, women have little opportunity to practice the rights they are given.

While increases in the number of women in leadership positions is itself a measure of gender equality, there is no automatic link between increases in the power of individual women and more equitable political settlements or improved outcomes for women more broadly. However, the evidence is unequivocal that women's collective action through social movements, political coalitions and economic associations has driven legal, policy and social norm change in many countries. What is less understood is how different political settlements shape women's power and influence, and how women in public navigate and reshape gendered institutions, relationships and networks, (Research Reports April 2015 by Pillar Domingo and et al.).

3.3.5 Women's Agency

Agency is the ability to identify goals or makes choices and then act upon them. Here, three issues can be raised: understanding goals, choosing the way how to apply and implementing them. Agency embraces these three steps. Women, who recognize their rights and duties, are able to pass through this agential acts. Women can exercise agency both individually and collectively. They can practice it individually in their day to day activities, in their family, in market places and so on. They apply collective agential acts through various social activities,

their participation in markets, politics, and other formal and informal networks. “Agency can take a number of forms; for example, “bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance as well as more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis” (Kabeer 1999: 438). Women, who exercise agency, should practice it everywhere and any time: at home, at workplace, in the market, at meetings, in policy making and so on.

First of all, to exercise agency, women should develop self-confidence. They should be aware of their rights and duties. But, here, the question is did the society shape women in such ways? Since patriarchal society has prevailed in the previous years all over the world, it has been unthinkable to have women who can stand, fight and speak for themselves. Though the Ethiopian Constitution, policies, rules and regulations initiate women’s progress, but actually it focuses on political organizations or collective changes. The individual’s progress is slow. The idea of self-efficacy is also linked to agency. Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s ability to do something. A woman has to first be aware of her capacity to decide on actions and then believe she is able to carry them out for her to act. Even when enough resources are available, a woman may not be able (or willing) to leverage these resources to fulfill her aspirations unless she has self-efficacy, a form of critical consciousness. This is the impact of patriarchal subjugation that widespread throughout the world for a long time; therefore, it cannot easily be stamped out within a short period of time.

The concept of critical consciousness was first formulated by the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire in relation to social oppression of illiterate peasants. After being aware of themselves, they start to recognize the position and status they deserve in the society. After that, they attempt to alter the unfair situations. Critical consciousness has various levels. The ones who are with a high level realize their ability to make choices for the purpose of changing their lives. The other level is the ones who have critical reflection includes taking actions against oppressive social and political structures. (O’Hara and Clement 2018, 45).

One can spiral up and down different levels of critical consciousness. To make agency understandable in traditional religion, four approaches are brought in to dialogue. The first is, the resistance agency approach that focuses on women who attempt to challenge or change some aspects of their religion.

religious doctrine or practices in ways that make them feel empowered in their everyday life. The third one is, the instrumental approach that concentrates on the non-religious positive outcomes of religious practice, and the fourth one which is called a compliant approach is concerned with the multiple and diverse ways in which women conform to gender-traditional religious teaching. (What Is Agency and Why Does It Matter for Women's Empowerment? October 17, 2019 Blog 2 in the series).

In a poststructuralist analysis, "the subject itself is the effect of a production, caught in the mutually constitutive web of social practices, discourses and subjectivity; its reality is the tissue of social relations" (Henriques et.1984: 11). Similarly, Barbara Johnson (1987, 37) consolidates this notion saying "The question of gender is a question of language". Here, what it means is, our existence as persons is deeply rooted in social relations, or it doesn't have any fundamental essence. In other words, we can only ever speak ourselves or be spoken in to existence within the terms of available discourses. The attitude we have to ourselves and the discourse we emancipate evolves from the society we are in. As Teshome (2013) PhD desertation puts "Deconstructing women's body is a discourse that studies how the woman's body is fragmented, for what purpose, and by whom: how such processes may obscure, valorize or alter constructions of womanhood and or the social worth of women bodies," (Teshome Egere, 2013: p. 63).

According to Walkerdine and Lucey (1989: 68) "Instead of 'unitary beings', human beings are 'multiple beings.' Even the ones we consider as basic indicators of selves such as freedom, moral rightness, autonomy and the like are not more than discourses so the subject positions are available within them. One speaks or writes arising from the experience they develop. That is why poststructuralist feminists take practice as fundamental which is deep-rooted in the society. Bakhtin (1981: 342) argues that "Language is spoken not only as if it were one's own, but in speaking it is taken on as one's own." In speech, one applies of previous usages of others. It does not mean that they recite; however, they do it in their own particular way. To put it in a nutshell, a woman neither creates nor produces new words in a discourse; she employs what is available in the language in her own way. "Women's body may be explained in terms of anatomical, and and mental functions. Based on these functions, a person is understood as a living being," (Teshome Egere, 2013: p. 63).

Ricoeur (1979: 98) makes analysis denoting that the dimensions of this world are properly opened up by the text. That is to say, the text speaks of the past and the coming of a possible world, of a possible way of orienting within it as well.

Trinh's removal of herself from the text can be read as a literary, poststructuralist argument. But it can also be read quite differently, that is, as her absence from the text displaying a correct level of self-effacement for a woman. Just as there are multiple readings of any text, so there are multiple readings of ourselves. (Trinh 1989: 35).

Post-structuralists believe that the desire of feminists to have access to storylines with female protagonists is relevant and acceptable. But it may be inevitable that we go on reading ourselves and being read within the terms of such outmoded discourses, at least to some extent, since access to a new discourse does not undo or out rule the other as we supposed it did when we were ruled by the principles of logo-centric thought. Not only will others continue to constitute us in terms of humanist discourse, but we cannot easily shed the patterns of desire, nor the interpretive frameworks that we took up as our own in learning to understand and use humanist discourses not just as social scientists, but as participants in the everyday world.

The co-existence of such contradictory discourses and the relevance of feminism in making sense of them is analyzed by de Lauretis thus: But why would feminists, even more than women ... want authority and authorship when these notions are admittedly outmoded, patriarchal and ethically compromised? Exactly ... What we have for an answer to this question, then, is a paradox which is not one - that is to say, we have a contradiction. Of that contradiction, only feminism provides a critical understanding: not femaleness (the fact of being female), not femininity (as a positionality of desire, a narrative trope, a figure of style), but feminism, which is a critical reading of culture, a political interpretation of the social text and of the social subject, and a rewriting of our culture's 'master narratives' (Lauretis, 1987:113).

As a whole, post structuralist feminists maintain stand beyond liberal feminists who focus on individual women's right and radical feminists that give attention to collective action for social justice, the end of patriarchy as well. As a result, post structuralists feminists ultimate

concern is non-unitary subjectivity; it is viewed as critically important in unmasking layers of power.

3.3.6 Motherhood in Literature

“The subject of motherhood has received little scholarly attention until recently, when the second wave feminism began to challenge some of the biologically determinist assumptions about it,” (Teshome Egere, 2013: p. 75). In African societies, a woman is expected to give birth to children. But in Western culture, a woman will not be looked down if she cannot bear children. In Africa, a woman is considered “ a mother figure, who is at the heart of the African family”. (Trishna, 2017: 38). The mother’s presence and her role in the family are, therefore, crucial. Furthermore, motherhood is one of the subjects that African Feminist writers treat in their literary works. In the texts selected for analysis, the female characters are wives and mothers. But their activities are also manifested in social spheres.

According to Trishna, motherhood is viewed in the following ways. Trishna points out that motherhood contributes to success of marriage in African culture. This means that the husband will divorce his wife if she fails to conceive. Trishna further adds that the situation differs in Western culture. That is, “In Western culture motherhood is not something that is mandatory. It is the couple’s choice whether they need a baby or not.” (Trishna, 2017: 38). Barrenness is , therefore, one factor which causes women’s suffering. Another cause of women’s suffering is the loss of a child. For example, in Maaza Mengiste’s novel, “The Shadow King”, loss of her son leads to Aster’s despair. Aster is one of the female characters in this novel.

But motherhood is also a source of joy for parents and even society. In this respect, Trishna (2017:38) states that, “The significance of mothering in Africa lies in this notion that motherhood binds women together in a collective experience of childbirth and nurturing the community itself”.

In Dinaw Mengistu’s novel, “The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears,” we witness a strong bond, attachment between the female protagonist Judith and her daughter Naomi.in spite of occasional conflicts.

Post-structuralist Feminist critics also attribute significance to the mother figure. Andriene Rich

(1977: p. 11) has put the following in line with the challenges of the biological determinist assumptions about motherhood: *The one unifying, incontrovertible experience shared by all women and men is that months-long period we spent unfolding inside a woman's body....most of us known both love and disappointment, power and tenderness, in the person of a woman...yet we know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about the nature and meaning of motherhood.*

According to Nesrullah (2020), "There has been a revalorization of the maternal body". This is unlike Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that motherhood is "an oppressive" institution. In other words, Kristeva views motherhood as an institution which causes suffering. On the other hand, Cixous and Irigaray consider the mother "an affirmative figure". Irigaray puts that, "When we are women,. we are always mothers". According to Teshome's thesis,"The discourse of motherhood contains within it both transformative and repressive potential," (Teshome Egere, 2013: p. 76).

In Lacan's theory, the father is the child's "rival" who competes for the "mother's love". But the father also represents "the social order." This makes it necessary for the child to identify with the father for "access to the social order". ("Father", n.d.).

To talk about maternity, two points are taken into account. These are: political concerns that is the way mothers are constructed; and theoretical commitment which refers to the wish to go beyond phallogocentric notions of a separate autonomous subject. Maternity lies between body and subjectivity, (Stone, November 2012). Society limits the definition of maternity and female subjectivity.

Maternal metaphor is discussed in this chapter because it is an important aspect of Dinaw's selected novel. Motherhood is also a prominent issue in Maaza's narrative. Kristeva comments on maternal metaphor saying that it is a thoroughfare between nature and culture which unsettles patriarchal constructions of subjectivity, representation and meaning. Being a thoroughfare, it links the semiotic and symbolic aspects. This scenario paves the way for a maternal metaphor which positions the mother at a pivotal site, (Bagworth 1993: 43)

The characteristics of maternity and subjectivity of women are stimulated in the society. The society has socio-symbolic expectations from women. (Pays July 2018). However, women are not credited for these characteristics. In a patriarchal society, mothers must fulfil all responsibilities regarding children but what they perform is not considered as something

valuable because they are out of money economy.

To make this issue clear, Alison Stone illustrates the primary influence of social condition. She briefly comments on the history of women being the primary maternal career, which all this is related to social division of labor. In fact, caring mothers are appreciable; however, it remains only on words. The position of that 'caring mother' is not altered. In other words, life improvement is not perceived. For instance, in a society where polygamy is permitted, all mothers are obliged to raise their children by themselves. In general, children are responsibilities of the mothers. The mistreatment of women from various aspects broadens the gap between masculine and feminine modes of identity. This gap difference results to the extent of negligence. In this case, the patriarchal societies' negligence of female subjectivity or sexuality causes problems for human beings. (Pays 2018).

For Stone, maternal subjectivity is a specific form of subjectivity that is continuous with the maternal body (Pays, 2018: 3). Her goal is to recover the intelligence and agency not of bodies but of early maternal body relations, (Stone, 2012: 5). The locus of a kind of pre subjectivity embodied between mother and child, (Stone, 2012: 6). She consistently problematizes the idea, which is dominant in Westerners that self has to be separated from mother, a paradigm based on an opposition between mothers and subjects, (Stone, 2012: 1). And the idea that separating from the mother is necessary to become an individual subject a self conscious and autonomous agent who is the source of normative authority and meaning, (Pays, 2018).

According Kristeva's clarification, the maternal body functions as a representation of the postmodern construction of the splitting process of signification and the split and fragmentary subject. Kristeva goes on saying that the split subjectivity that the mother represents interrogates traditional structures of language and society. Such situation creates a ground for a multiplicity of perspectives and positions. For Kristeva, a maternal body is a threshold causing threats for socio-symbolic structure.

As far as it is a threshold, it can be used as a filter for the repressed maternal or semiotic aspects of language and society. Kristeva also describes language as a birthing process, creating a split symbolization on the threshold of symbolic structures and bodily drives, (Bagworth 1993: 46—48).

As Lollway (2011) clarifies there are changes that women experience when they become mothers for the first time. According to Stone (2012), there are psychological reasons that make the

maternal figure to be the first orienting figure.

3.3.7 The Grief Metaphor

A discussion of grief metaphor is also relevant to this thesis because Maaza highlights the Aster's suffering in *The Shadow King* through grief metaphor to reflect her despair caused by motherhood. Some metaphors which people, poets and fiction writers use to express the effect of grief are mentioned By Haley (2017), in the article, "Grief Metaphors, Analogies and Similes: Understanding Grief". Here are some examples mentioned in the article:

1. "Grief is like a roller coaster that never stops without a seatbelt." As we can see here, it is the individual who can stop grief from ruining his/her life.
2. The following metaphor expresses the mixture of feeling that a person who grieves experiences: "Grief is like a mixture of recreating identity and a bittersweet processing of memory."
3. Here is another example which shows the negative effect of grief: "Grief is the walking through hip-high mud." This metaphor can show how difficult it can be for someone to overcome grief. (whatsyourgrief.com)

In another article entitled, "Coping with Grief: How the Ball and Box Analogy may help" Casablanca, (2021), psychcentral.com, suggests how grief can be overcome. Casablanca (2021: 1) states that grief is not permanent. It is transient. She states that "It is like a shrinking ball in a box" In other words, people can get over grief. She adds that the "pain" of grief can stay, " but it will likely change over time". In Casablanca's opinion, it is love which can help people overcome grief. This means that love and emotional support have the power to heal people.

The next chapter presents a feminist analysis of Dinaw Mengistu's novel, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*.

CHAPTER FOUR

4 A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS THAT HEAVEN BEARS

4.1 Synopsis

The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears is Dinaw Mengistu's first novel which was written in 2007. It is about an Ethiopian immigrant, Sepha Stephanos: the Protagonist character, who is in search of acceptance, peace and identity in a foreign country, America. He flees to America illegally at the age of seventeen as a result of harsh measure taken up on his father by the military government of Derg (1974-1991). When his father was murdered by the brutal military force, his mother feared that her eldest son might face the same chance as her husband so she urged him to leave for America. His mother gives him all her jewelry and money she has to help him cross from Ethiopia through the border to Kenya.

It is his maternal uncle Birhane-Selassie who hosts him in his country of exile and gets him a job as a bellboy in a well-known restaurant where he meets his immigrant friends Joseph of Congo and Kenneth of Kenya though Sepha leaves his uncle's apartment thinking that he would live by himself.

Leaving his uncle's apartment Sepha goes to Logan Circle being a proprietor of a small grocery store which remains unprofitable although he struggles for existence. Though he owns a small grocery store, he does not acquire profit from it. Sepha Stephanos is stuck between two identities- that of his Ethiopian roots, and that of his American immigrant status. As a result of these, he is in despair and feels isolated. However, when Judith, a white American professor comes to Logan Circle with her biracial, eleven-year-old child, Naomi, His hope revives. Naomi becomes his friend who pushes him towards bright life.

This is rather remarkable, considering Judith is the first white person to live there. She is a symbol of gentrification. She moves to Logan Circle to start urban renewal so the feeling of the city is changing fast. Although the community resists urban renewal so fiercely, it is Judith who brings the trend.

The novel is just such a shadowing of two cities: Washington where the narrator and protagonist character Sepha lives in exile and Addis Ababa, his city of bitter memory and violent expulsion

where his father was murdered. The narrator narrates vacillating between these two cities gripping the attention of the readers backward and forward.

The author parallels Ethiopia's failed revolution with life in the America. Taking in to account what happens in to Logan Circle, readers can understand that America is unable to provide enjoyable life for immigrants. Because of the dreadful events of his past and the melancholy status of his present, Stephanos is frozen in time, unable to make any progressive steps. He often plays a game with his friends, Joseph of Congo and Kenneth of Kenya, in which they name the many coups of Africa and when they reigned, which demonstrates an unrewarding nonsensical nostalgia for the place they once called home. Joe clarifies, "when the coup stops...so will the game" which, from what we see, is a long time coming.

His friends are just like a family for him. They drink, play and chat in the evenings. Stephanos's efforts to define himself are somewhat lackluster: although he has lived in America for 17 years, he has shown little growth or signs of assimilation besides his move from "Little Ethiopia", an apartment building in Silver Spring where Ethiopians maintain their lifestyle and culture, and the founding of his less-than-profitable business. Even in his relationship with Judith, he refuses to take action, besides a kiss that is less of a kiss and more of a "pressing", as he describes it. Although there are many rather substantial plot developments- from the eviction notice of the store to the escalation of violence against Judith- Stephanos stays resistant to change and growth throughout.

The immigrants hope for paradise in US. Unfortunately, it is in vain. Almost every page reminds the reader that departure and arrival are deceptively employed. In fact, identity and belonging, departure and arrival, friendship are themes that are developed in the novel. (<https://bookmarks.reviews/reviews/the--beautiful--things--that--heaven--bears/>).

Generally, the novel addresses political subjects like exile, memory, and class conflict. The purpose of this research is to analyse the portrayal of female characters in the novel from a feminist perspective.

4.2 Analysis of The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears

4.2.1 Female Characters' Identity

Identity refers to someone's awareness of selfhood. Judith, one of the female characters, in Dinaw Mengistu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, is like Sepha, a protagonist

character. She is confident in herself who is a "professor of American political history" (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p.54) who often finds herself moving around the country with Naomi.

An attempt has been made to show how the female character's subjectivity is represented in the context of Logan Circle. Judith's subjectivity also finds a fertile ground to further blossom in the context of motherhood. According to McMahon (1995: 1), "Motherhood," which is a potentially oppressive role, provides personal profound meaning that can expand women's subjective outlook of life. In Africa, especially, it is closely linked to women's identity. In the selected novel, Judith is a single mother of an eleven years old child. As indicated in the theoretical framework, motherhood is important for women.

having separated from Naomi's Mauritanian father, she has brought up her daughter in a proper way. Being a single mother, she has shaped her biracial daughter to have versatile knowledge. Judith, shouldering the full responsibility of her daughter, builds Naomi's all-round personality. In colour-sensitive American society, Judith has made her daughter full of confidence regarding who she is. That is to say, Judith is concerned about her daughter's proper up-bringing in a country where racial discrimination prevails.

It is clear that knowing oneself starts from home. A mother or the one who brings a child up is the one who imprints a child's identity from the very beginning during childhood. Likewise, Judith has played a significant role in Naomi's life. Raising a child alone has many challenges and responsibilities for a mother.

Naomi misses her father and she resents her mother's divorce. temper tantrums in the house are caused by this. Dinaw shows that divorce negatively affects children. Naomi often locks herself in one of the rooms and Judith has to search for her. This upsets Judith. She has to bear all this because bringing up a daughter who is growing into adolescence is not always easy. As a consequence, it is observed that Judith pays a great sacrifice to normalize her daughter's behavior. In spite of the fact that all such incidents happen, Judith reaps many blessings through motherhood.

Kristeva says that the mother "must turn away from her children to tend her own life so that she too can bloom." Judith blooms by always keeping an eye on her daughter. In Dinaw's novel, Judith blooms and shapes her identity by taking care of Naomi. She provides her daughter with proper education and her other needs.

Likewise, Naomi develops her identity through her interactions with her mother. It must be a pleasure for Judith to see her daughter grow into a girl who has self-confidence and understands the perspective of adults. This can be noticed in Naomi's conversations with Sepha. The eleven years old girl can discuss various issues with her friend Sepha.

The presence of her daughter Naomi in the house makes Judith's life meaningful. In her conversation with Sepha, Judith shows how important it is for a man to have a family. This is actually what she herself has experienced. She is divorced. But she has someone by her side. It gives her great joy to care for Naomi. It can be inferred from the story that Judith comes to live in Logan Circle for the sake of Naomi also.

Judith is not alone. Motherhood is the source of her joy. If this educated, divorced woman were alone, she might perhaps become hysterical in line with Kristeva's theory.

Post-structural feminism attributes significance to issues related to self and identity (Weedon, 1997: 20).

Judith is an educated well-to-do white woman. Judith McMasterson was author of one book and several dozen scholarly arguments that had titles. The protagonist, male character Sepha describes her as: "I had searched for her name at the local library and then again at the Library of Congress. Judith McMasterson. Author of one book, America's Repudiation of the Past, and several dozen scholarly arguments that had titles...I read fragments from each one, including several chapters from her book. She was a harsh, passion-filled academic," (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 214).

Here, as Kristeva (1986: 141) puts patriarchal society excludes women from knowledge and power but Judith is well-armed with knowledge to the extent of professorship and has produced various writings including a book. In her writings, she discusses hard issues like poetics and philosophy. She practices and applies her knowledge.

It can be perceived that education is a source of power and confidence for any one so the same is true for Judith. It has given her power to contribute to the welfare of society by renovating the demolished house in Logan Circle and has created good scenery. Judith also resists suppression of women's rights. However, the community of Logan Circle does not encourage her by showing support.

Another aspect in which Judith's confidence is observed is her decision to dwell in Logan Circle which has never been attempted by other white people. She moves to Logan Circle and renovates a rundown townhouse adjacent to Stephanos' apartment. Over the course of Judith's stay in Logan Circle, she finds herself in a tentative romantic relationship with Stephanos.

She also decides to live in Logan, although she has the economic means to inhabit a rich residential area. Logan Circle, the area where she has come to dwell, is a destitute place where poor black people live. The narrator Sepha Stephanos puts this saying:

“The woman was...with too much money on her hands.” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p.32). Another characteristic which highlights Judith's self-confidence is the fact that she does not expect anything from others. To put it conspicuously, she is a type of character who is self-reliant. In this sense, she is the one who practices and exercises decision-making ability.

Sepha clarifies that Judith identifies herself with the poorer section of society. She also has self-confidence. This is exhibited when she does what the others haven't done. The house she is now living in has been abandoned for a decade; it's been the house in which homeless, drug addicts, and anarchists live. She has made the renewal only by herself. The narrator describes the idea saying:

“Within a week of Judith's arrival an army of men descended on the house squad like formations. There were the plumbers, electricians, the heating guys, the painters, the roofers, and the architect who always came dressed in a well-tailored suit and stood leaning against the side of his silver Mercedes with a yellow hard hat on,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 32).

The group of workers are led by the architect. This reflects that Judith expends much amount of money not only on the materials but also for the workers who are led by the architect that are employed to renew the building. All these situations are evidences for Judith's being confident in herself and conscious of her selfhood. She resists suppression of women's rights.

Kristeva (1986, 141) puts that women are excluded from knowledge and power in the economy of patriarchal society. In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, the female character is portrayed as knowledgeable and powerful. Dinaw attempts to show the struggle that women do

against the patriarchal society. The author tries to create an authentic and stable identity in Judith.

Various professional workers like the plumbers, electricians, the heating guys, the painters, the roofers, and the architect are employed by Judith to renew the house. She has taken the initiative for gentrification. In fact, the community has not accepted the so-called urban renewal though they call it “development”. The people of Logan Circle call Judith and others as “developers” but they have opposed them saying:

“We, the long-time residents of Logan Circle, oppose the further exploitation of our community by developers.” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p.272).

Henceforth, it is possible to perceive that Judith is a prominent figure who plays a pivotal role to unite black and white through her deeds. Firstly, she has preferred to reside in Logan Circle where the black Americans dwell and has started gentrification which is followed by other white people. Secondly, her ex-husband is an African, a Mauritanian besides she wants a romantic affair with the Ethiopian gentleman, Sepha Stephanos. Consequently, Judith is interested in racial interrelationship.

Jacques Derrida says that a woman’s power lies in her ability to evade and infiltrate masculine construction at will, yet never be subject to them. Judith is attempting to show her economic and social power through the application of what others haven’t tried before. She is female so she has not got acceptance from the society. Though she is the one to start the change, there are others who have followed her footsteps but we do not perceive destruction of their properties. In the case of Judith, both her car and her building have been at risk and broken. Post-structuralism feminists including Julia Kristeva as well as Jacques Derrida, in his deconstruction, urges women to exercise social power which we see in Judith when she exercises her ability of decision-making, independence, social and economic power.

Judith’s subjectivity is made noticeable by her independence through economic independence. She is a university professor; so she has put herself beyond exclusion of knowledge. Kristeva attributes significance to knowledge. Knowledge opens women’s eyes to patriarchal subjugation. It is obvious that knowledge is power for women. It gives them the audacity to fight for their rights.

In addition, she has shown her economic power in the society through altering the scenery of Logan Circle. Writers usually emphasize submissiveness and passivity of female characters in

their writings; however, Dinaw portrays Judith as just the opposite. When she went to the community meeting, though she knew that they were condemning her and her likes, Judith showed no passivity. Here is evidence from the text:

“Finally Judith raised her hand to speak. It wouldn’t have been like her to sit passively through any debate. She stood up to address the crowd. “I’ve only lived in the neighborhood for less than half a year now,” she began. “But I share the same concerns as you” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 271).

She is a history professor who makes money of her own; hence, she renews the abandoned house. The house has been occupied by homeless men, drug addicts and a small band of anarchists. (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p.31).

In this case, she has shown an effort to bring about positive significant change in the society. When she renews the building, it is not only for her daughter and her comfort, but on the way, it also changes the scenery of the area. This means she indirectly plays a role for the beauty of the surrounding; therefore, it is possible to say she has employed her income for the welfare of the society. she takes pride in exercising her power. hence, She is proud of herself and with what she has done as well.

Judith tries to show her economic and social power through doing what others haven’t tried before. This makes her visible. But the community in Logan Circle looks down on her because she is female. For instance, Mrs. Davis, a stereotype female character and even Sepha himself thinks that Judith cannot get all the money she has through decent means. Mrs. Davis, in fact, cannot understand that an educated, independent woman like Judith can earn money, achieve financial success and transform the setting of Logan Circle. Sepha, at the very beginning, describes Judith to his friends Kenneth and Joseph saying:

“The woman was a lesbian bitch with too much money on her hands. There was no husband, boyfriend, or girlfriend, but she was a lesbian,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 33).

Though she is the one to start the change, there are others who have followed her footsteps but we do not perceive destruction of their properties. In the case of Judith, The mob broke her car and stoned her building. A man reported what he had seen saying: “A group of young men dressed entirely in black threw the brick through the car and house in broad day light... and walked away, cool as ever, ” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p.284).

Although Judith is a wealthy and well-educated lady, she likes simple and elegant life. That is why she identifies herself with ordinary people. She is also concerned about her self-esteem and believes that she is equal with men. She stands against women's subordination and subjugation in the patriarchal society. Though Judith is a scholar, she does not want to lead a luxurious life. Though she started the gentrification, at that time she was not the only white person who started to live there but when the Logan Circle community held the meeting, it was only Judith who participated in the meeting. She feels comfortable with identifying herself with ordinary people. She also confirms this saying: "...I share the same concerns as you," (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 271).

She tells Sepha that she likes simple and elegant things. She is humble. Even she does not tell him her position and that she is a writer; he himself has searched in two well known libraries: Local library and Library of Congress to know about her. As Julia Kristeva (1986, 141) put patriarchal system excludes women from knowledge and power; however, Judith outshines in both aspects. She is showing her economic power by reconstructing the almost demolished building. When she introduced herself to Sepha for the first time, she introduced herself by pointing to the house behind her. This is to inform him that she is the owner of that house. She did this instead of telling Sepha that she is a university professor, she showed him what she did that is she pointed at the house she renewed. This displays that she is proud of what she has done.

Judith does whatever she believes is right, without paying attention to what others say and do. That means she hasn't given any attention to what the community says. Regarding this, she overlooks that the community in her surrounding says and does; she only concentrates on her own job. She gives a deaf ear to the community's comments. Judith does not worry about the community's reactions. This is not her concern; she simply does what she believes is right from her point of view. She is leading her life calmly. What we see here is subjectivity. She is not disturbed by the community's attitude towards her. Sepha explains Judith's undisturbed manner as follows:

"I often saw her reading on one of the benches across from General Logan a late fall after noon, undisturbed by the drunk men sleeping or stumbling around her. ...Judith, however, looked as

indifferent to her surroundings as General Logan did on his horse,...I admire her from a distance; the way she sat, confident and oblivious to the world, ..” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, pp. 36-37).

Identity also refers to ethnic identity, which indicates grouping oneself to a certain ethnicity. Her ex-husband was an African, a Mauritanian. This can show that she has the audacity to start friendship with Africans. To back up this idea, she is the one who first takes the step to acquaint herself with Sepha. She starts friendship with Sepha only; not with someone else. Even Mrs. Davis asks Sepha about Judith. In fact, Mrs. Davis has spent twenty-three years in this area; however, she is not courageous enough to exchange a single word with Judith even if she is a permanent dweller of the area. Judith is seen building a strong friendship bond even up to the extent of seeking intimacy with Sepha. She takes the initiatives because she has confidence in herself.

Judith is more interested in African people. When Sepha tells her his cousin’s name is “Yodit” which has a similar meaning to hers, she shook her head and bit down on her lower lip. Not only her act, she also expressed her feeling in words. She shows her wish by saying:

“No, no. That’s much prettier than Judith. Much prettier.” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 35).

She is interested in Sepha’s way of clothing. She appreciates the way he wears and the brand of clothes. The manner in which she expresses the admiration displays her deep feeling. In this sense, cultural globalization which is noteworthy in the present era is Judith’s interest. When Sepha wears cultural wedding clothes, Judith has said in appreciation:

When she comments on Sepha’s cultural clothes, we see her displaying her conceived set of beliefs and understandings being reinforced through daily practices that is the type of clothes that Sepha has worn on that occasion. When she has perceived Ethiopian cultural clothes, she has been initiated to express her beliefs and understandings. She says,

“What a beautiful garment!”

Her use of the word ‘garment’ struck me most; it was polite, almost formal, as did the word had been inserted in to her sentence at the last possible moment out of an instinctive sense of cultural diplomacy.” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 34).

According to the post-structuralists clarification, language practices produce shared cultural

narratives or discourses. Judith has expressed her concern towards others' culture applying diplomatic discourse. Judith is implementing language discourse and ideology since we are living in such world at present.

In Logan Circle, Judith is also well-known because of her daughter. Naomi is made noticeable through her skin color. Secondly, she is a bi-racial daughter of Judith. Sepha, the male protagonist, says:

“I was not the only one in the neighborhood to notice her. Of all the white people who had moved in to Logan Circle over the past six months, she was the most visible, and not just because she spent her afternoons reading in the circle, or because she occasionally shopped in my store. It was Naomi, with her lighter than black but darker than white skin, sitting next to her on a bench, or walking with her hand in hand who made people notice,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, pp. 37—38).

It is also worth considering Naomi's identity in this novel. She is the daughter of Judith. Her father is African. We learn from the novel that he belongs to the same continent as Sepha. Like Judith, he is a university professor. Therefore, he is from a higher social standing than Sepha. Sepha is aware of this. When he sees the Christmas gifts from her father, he has measured his status. The Christmas gift they have offered magnifies their difference. Here is a passage from the text:

...under the tree there were three enormous boxes. Each was elegantly wrapped in green, white, and red, with a huge red bow tied to the top. ‘Those are all from Naomi's dad,’ Judith said, pointing toward the boxes. ‘He likes his presents to be ...ostentatious.’ I stared at the boxes and tried to guess their contents. It was obvious just from looking at them that whoever Naomi's father may have been and regardless of how far away he may have lived, he had me beat, (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 184).

When the two persons' Christmas gifts for Naomi are compared, Sepha's present is cheap and simple; it is a diary. Her father's presents, however, are three boxes. In one of the boxes, there is an expensive typewriter which a picture of an animal is drawn on each key. Hence, it is possible to understand how vast the gap is there in the status: both economically and educationally.

Naomi, the eleven-year-old child, does not act as a child of her age. Unlike Sepha, she is also very dynamic. She can be viewed from three different perspectives: as a friend, as a daughter and as an adult if we consider her relations with Sepha.

After school, Naomi goes nowhere, but to Sepha's grocery. She considers the store as a place where she can be seen off. Moreover, she takes Sepha as her friend. She doesn't have any friend except him. She tells him everything she has seen and done at school. She speaks to him not only about what she has encountered, but she also talks about various issues including politics. They read newspapers such as Washington Post and narratives as well. Sepha says: "When she told me what she had seen, she did so without fear or hesitation, as if she already knew that the only way to live was to take all of the things you saw at face value," (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 47).

Naomi desires to spend her spare times with Sepha. She enjoys talking, reading, discussing, cleaning and arranging the store with him. What she does with him is enjoyable for her. Generally, she likes his company as a friend. As already mentioned, Naomi resents her parents' divorce. It makes her feel good to be with Sepha.

Sepha is also a father figure for Naomi. Naomi craves for a father's love and care. She wants their relation to be that of a father and a daughter. She is fond of listening to his reading narratives. When she asks him to read the novel alternately that is turn by turn, it is for the purpose of convincing him. But after starting reading, she has left him by himself. Moreover, she begs him to read it for her. She has become only a listener. This action of hers sounds as if she wants her father to read stories for her and she enjoys listening to him. We can take passages from the text as evidence. Sepha says to her:

“Shouldn’t you be the one to start?” I asked her.

“That’s not the way it works,” she said.

“First you and then me.”

I read forty or fifty pages that first day. Naomi read none. After I read the first page I waited for her to pick up where I had left off, but she insisted, in a voice that bordered on pleading, that I continue...” “The scene that we’d created together. Here we were, an older man and a girl young enough to be the man’s daughter, sitting in a store on a winter morning reading a novel together,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, pp. 144—145).

Moreover, she repeatedly asks him to go home and join them for tea. This can show that she enjoys a family life. It also makes her happy to see Judith with Sepha. When they went to the National Christmas ceremony, Sepha picked Naomi up or lifted her up to let her have a good view. This displays that Sepha is caring and treating her as a father. That is why she doesn’t want to stay away from him even for a single day. We hear her telling him that she has stayed sitting by his store’s entrance on the days he was away. She complained that she has missed him so he has promised her not to do that next time.

Judith does not want Naomi to forget her African roots. Likewise, Naomi is conscious of her African roots. The conversations between Naomi and Sepha also reveal this. More importantly, Naomi’s relations with Sepha can indicate the feelings she has for her identity. Naomi is attracted to Sepha because he is Black like her father.

Since her father is an African, she considers herself African. When Sepha shows her a map of Africa, she tells him that she knows about Africa. Naomi acts as if she were an adult. She doesn’t want Sepha to treat her as a small child. To persuade him that she is a grown up girl, she does everything she can. Naomi considers Sepha’s grocery store as a place of her recreation. She likes to go there. Whenever the school is closed, she spends her time with Sepha. Not only that, even when she is upset, she goes to his store. Generally, Naomi is found in his store when she is in good or bad mood. That is to say, Sepha’s store is the place where she sees others and where she shows herself to others. Her interaction with Sepha is significant for the development of her identity and personality.

When he asked her about the African map, she acted contemptuously. She wondered why he should ask her about the African map given that she is an African like himself. Her keeping quiet, not answering his question, shows her contempt towards him. She did not expect that he would ask her a question about the map of Africa.

Moreover, when she entered his store, she directly walked to the map of Africa. This action of hers speaks louder than words. She is proud of being African though her father is not with her. This eleven year old girl does not crave for sweets. Her African identity matters more than sweets and candies that children of her age crave. After her negative reaction to his question, he knew that Naomi is aware of her African identity. He reproached himself for asking her a wrong question.

Here is evidence from the passage:

“The next time, Naomi came to the store; she walked straight over to the map of Africa I kept taped on the wall.”

‘Do you know what that is?’ I asked her. She shook her head in contempt and didn’t say a word. Of course she knew and I was made a fool for asking.” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, pp. 45-46).

Naomi’s skin color makes her noticeable. She is different from others. This scenario may push her to concentrate on her African identity.

The way Naomi acts, the way she speaks, above all, the issues she discusses and generally her personality, behavior and her cognitive skills are discerned in this store. So, both Sepha himself and his store are very important for Naomi. They are the contexts in which Naomi’s personality as an adult is manifested. She expects Sepha to consider her as an adult and appreciate the political issues she raises. She is eager to show that she is intelligent as much as possible. Moreover, Naomi is proud of her being an African.

She also criticizes Sepha for being negligent of his mother and brother. Family matters to Naomi. Her father left, but she has a caring mother, who has taught her to be proud of who she is and to have self-respect.

According to French feminism, gender difference is a social construction that a child tries to enact in his sexual stages and his behavior towards his and others sexuality is heavily influenced by our circumstances one is brought up in. So, Naomi is well shaped by her independent mother who sharpened her to be self-confident. Naomi acts as an adult as result of her strong proximity with her mother since childhood. The way she has been brought up influenced Naomi in every aspect.

Mrs. Davies is another female character in the novel. She is African American .She represents the community of Logan Circle. She is very observant. She is also self-conscious of her identity as an American. This is highlighted in the novel in her conversation with Sepha. She says to Sepha:

“What do you know about free countries? You didn’t even know what that was till you came here last week.” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 40).

Mrs. Davies implies that she is the person who can speak about America, not he, who is an immigrant who recently came to America.

4.2.2 Judith’s Agency

Judith is a model for women’s agency. As Kabeer (1999, 438) puts “Agency is the ability to identify goals, or make choices and then act upon them.... Agency can take a number of forms; for example bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance as well as more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis”.

This concept of agency is used to analyze how agency is exhibited in Judith. It is possible to see it in Judith’s life practically. To put it clearly, she has the ability to identify goals, or make choices, act upon them as well. That is to say, she pursues her goals in a determined manner. She does not want to depend on a man.

Judith has chosen the place where her daughter and she should live. Here, it is not only her choice that makes her visible but also it is rather her spirit of adventure that makes readers admire her. She has made up her mind to lead her life by settling in Logan Circle, where other White people do not choose to live. More importantly, she is playing a significant role in the trend of gentrification.

She has also worked on altering the scenery of the old house. She has drastically changed the

view of the tragic wreck of the four-story of the abandoned house in to the attractive building in which she takes pride. Judith is the symbol of gentrification. This is one of her roles which highlight her agency.

She hired many of workers with various skills so that they should renew the old building. The process of renewal incurred a lot of money. She made a bold decision to renew an old house. Squads of workers with great skills led by an engineer campaigned on the building to renew and ornament it.

Her role is not confined to the action of urban renewal in which she takes the first lead, but she is also courageous enough to exercise transformation of social relations which feminism brings to post-structuralism.

In the meeting of the Logan Circle's community to oppose what they call "landlords", she has attended the meeting without any fear and attempted to make a speech although they have included her in to the group of oppressors. Dinaw portrays Expressing her ideas anywhere and everywhere shows her agential acts. In spite of having the same concerns with the people of Logan Circle, the community denounces her.

Judith that she is an active speaker when ever she attends any meetings. Since she is a scholar and exercises agency, she does not keep quiet and listen to what others say. In other words, she is not a passive listener; she is an active participant and responds to what others say. This reflects her agential act. Judith knows well that she has been amongst the oppressors whom the people have come to the meeting to denounce. Taking no notice of everything, she boldly stood up to address the people. This is evidenced by the following passage from the novel:

"Judith raised her hand to speak. It wouldn't have been like her to sit passively through any debate," (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 271).

Judith has plunged into the process of gentrification. She has made up her mind to bring about social change in Logan Circle. She does every thing on her own. Therefore, she is a model for women's agency. In renovating the old building, Judith resisted the community's stand to preserve old ways and old values. Her firm stand to resist the attitude that prevails in the society about Logan Circle is magnified in Dinaw's novel. She paid a price for making the surrounding attractive despite the society's tendency to resist social change. It can be seen that Social change is an aspect of social development. The development of most cities has passed through such process in our continents. On top of that frictions between the old traditions and values and the

modern ones are inevitable; that is what is perceived in Logan Circle.

Logan Circle is inhabited by Black people, not White people. Normally, White people are either passers-by or controllers represented by the State but not dwellers of Logan Circle, for that matter. This issue is reflected by both Sepha and Mrs. Davis. The other White persons come to Logan Circle only for job purpose. Sepha, the narrator, puts his idea in this way:

“At first I had assumed that she was an agent of some city bureaucracy, assigned to the neighborhood to report on the condition of its aging buildings, to determine whether they were in need of repair or demolition. Before Judith, these were the only reasons white people had ever come into the neighborhood: to deliver official notices, investigate crimes, and check up on the children of negligent parents.” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 33).

Here, the point which is brought into light is that Judith is bold enough to do what others haven't done so far. Despite the fact that the community objects to what she has done, her stand is firm in line with her decision. Mrs. Davis, who represents the community, reflects the beliefs of the community around. She expresses the idea of the community saying:

“Why do you think a woman like that would want to live here? Doesn't seem right, does it?” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 39).

Mrs. Davis says this is because the dwellers of Logan Circle are African Americans who are poverty-stricken; they shouldn't be exploited and evicted by white new comers. Here is a passage from the novel:

“She always said the same thing every time. ‘It is not right. These people coming in like that and forcing us out.’” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 257).

So Judith is not expected to live there because of two reasons: as a white and as a wealthy lady. The community perceives coming of white people to dwell in Logan Circle causes eviction of blacks. They insist on keeping their old tradition and ways of living. Here, it is possible to look at the sentence Mrs. Davis has used; it is a tag question. She has expressed the community's beliefs in the main sentence to give information and used tag to urge Sepha to agree. It seems that Mrs. Davis reacts against gentrification. Though the community has such kind of sentiment, it is Judith who deviates from the community's opposition began to live in the abandoned house

renewing as well as improving its look. With a great effort, and expense, she has made the house elegantly beautiful and attractive.

Mrs. Davis is different from Judith in that, she reflects stereotype ideas of the community towards women. In her view, a woman is not bold. She is rather timid, and tries to live up to the expectations of the patriarchal society. She is also submissive and seeks the help of the opposite sex.

Judith is assertive, which is one quality of agency. She has demonstrated that she is capable of decision-making.

Divorce can be a blow for a woman, but Judith is not beaten by that. Her being self-sufficient is not only geared towards obtaining personal benefits. She has further worked for the betterment of the society. She has ameliorated the rundown house and beautified its view. The more attractive houses built in the town, the more glamorous scenery the town has. Above all, the building has not only become attractive, but she has also made it a comfortable place to live in. The house that she renewed was used by drug addicts, homeless men, and a band of anarchists from Portland. These people who used to dwell in that abandoned house are the threats of the area as well as community. Now, Judith inhabits the house and she has changed both the view and atmosphere of the surrounding. The community is now free from the threats.

A peaceful atmosphere now prevails in this residential area. Both the physical and psychological benefits that the community enjoys now are the contribution of Judith's agential acts. The narrator comments:

“The house was beautiful now, especially at night with the single porch bulb shining down on the steps, which had also been smoothed out and worked over,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 38).

Judith tries to win the community's love and understanding despite her agential acts. Although she is criticized for her positive move towards gentrification and the promotion of social well-being, she has a firm stand to accomplish her decision.

She yearns that Sepha would become a father for her daughter. She believes that the three of them can form a unified, happy family. Therefore she tries to lay the foundation time and again. That is, she strives to have intimacy with Sepha. This is the path for a happy family life. She repeatedly takes the initiative be it in words as well as in actions.

Judith reflects her belief in words saying that if they do it, they should do it properly. By saying so, she is pushing him to come to the right path. When Sepha and Naomi read narratives she comes to Sepha's store with a surprise. Judith brings what they should drink and she joins them with reading. It can be understood that she has the intention of forming a family with Sepha.

In both directions it is Judith who takes the initiatives. Sepha and Judith have continued reading alternately in which Naomi takes pleasure. To put it in a nutshell, Judith creates a conducive atmosphere for the family attachment. She brings smoothies and drinks such as chocolate, honey and the like to make the three of them joyful while they are reading a novel. The following is evidence from the novel:

“When Judith finally arrived prompt as usual at five minutes before five, she came bearing tea and hot chocolate.” When Sepha asked her what the occasion was, she responded: “No occasion, but I figured if we were going to read, there was no reason why we couldn't do it properly,” Sepha has also noticed the pronoun she has used. He says: “I noted the word ‘we’ in her last sentence,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, pp. 155-156).

She feels that Sepha, herself and Naomi are one family. That is why she has used the plural pronoun ‘we’. Judith yearns that her friendship with Sepha grows to another level. She desires intimacy with Sepha. She also expects him to act as Naomi's father. Judith's agential acts are also manifested in her efforts to create a happy family. That is why she treats Sepha and Naomi with tea, hot chocolates and other things while they are reading a novel. She feels that this can develop into family bond.

Judith says:

“But I figured if we were going to read, there was no reason why we couldn't do it properly,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, 156).

In fact, she is attempting to actualize change but she is struggling with the inner side of herself. As it is put in Freud's psychoanalysis, the unconscious or as Kristeva explains the repressed part of hers has never dominated. She is in assault between two ideas: shall I do it or not? She always vacillates between two stands: this is the reflection of semiotic stage that Kristeva illustrates.

Judith fulfils her responsibility as a mother consistently; starting from thinking and worrying about Naomi. She is committed to her daughter to the extent of having many bathrooms built on one floor to satisfy her daughter's habit of using different bedrooms and bathrooms in the building

In this case, Judith is a problem-solver. To give solution to the problem that her daughter faces is her serious concern. She attempts to give remedy by taking measures up to the last expense. Building as many bathrooms as possible in the house is one of Naomi's interest so Judith has implemented accordingly.

Whenever Naomi, Judith's only child, feels unhappy, or quarrels with her mother, she has a habit of alienating herself from Judith and locks herself into one of the rooms. To put it clearly, Naomi avoids her mother when she is in bad mood. Then, Judith becomes stressful in this scenario. Judith falls into psychological and mental stress. Her actions are also guided by her great concern for Naomi. She desires her daughter to have proper upbringing.

Judith has to search for her child many times. She runs here and there looking for Naomi. She is worried that Naomi might fall into an unpleasant situation. She is psychologically disturbed because she fears that Naomi might face sexual harassment like herself. Let alone this eleven-year-old kid, she herself, who is an adult with a high social status, has confronted sexual harassment; therefore, her worries and fear that her child might face a similar problem is credible and she has good grounds for that since she has experienced it herself.

As it is stated in Stone's writing, conflict is one of the three issues in mother and daughter relations. One day, Naomi came to Sepha's store full of anger. She said nothing to Sepha, but the way she acted shows that she was in anger. The ways she looked and walked were different. The following instance shows this:

“...her gaze firmly fixed on the floor, her feet clomping heavily with each step as if she were determined to crush the tile beneath her. ...Had she not left a trail of muddy footprints down the aisle, I might not have believed she'd ever been there, so quickly and resolutely did she pass through,” Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, pp. 42—43).

Judith's reaction to the conflict is rather different from that of Naomi. That is the second issue in mother-daughter relations according to Stone is loss. Judith's actions and feelings are reflected

through loss. After some minutes, Judith came to the store running panickly in search of her daughter. Her hair was tousled though she was well-dressed like her daughter. She searched the aisles of the store with her eyes and yelled to Sepha whether he saw Naomi. Before he finished his explanation how Naomi came and disappeared, Judith ran away. In fact, she worries a lot about her daughter. Judith says:

“We’d fight and she’d lock herself in one of the bedrooms for hours at a time. There was nothing I could do to get her out.” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. , 85).

Judith further adds that Naomi becomes uncontrollable. She expresses her dismay saying:

“I always went mad trying to find her. I pictured her hurt or kidnapped or some other awful thought that I couldn’t fight back...” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 86).

Judith, a loving mother, becomes obsessed with the thought that Naomi might be kidnapped. The pictures of horrifying incidents that her daughter may fall in to come to Judith’s mind and she becomes sullen.

Judith is a loving mother. But her divorce caused her a great price. Her daughter became aggressive because of that. Besides, Naomi’s father does not share parental responsibility. The burden of raising Naomi falls on her, but Naomi cannot understand that. Judith has shouldered parental responsibility alone. Whatever trouble comes, she is the one to suffer. Even Naomi does not understand the sacrifice Judith is paying. Naomi’s anger is repeatedly kindled upon her mother. Naomi projects her anger upon her mother. The fire that burns Judith does not affect Naomi’s father. Naomi’s rage kindles up and turns to ash only upon Judith.

Naomi’s manners have tangibly altered after her parents’ divorce. She has become furious upon her mother. Similarly, the frequency of fights has accelerated and the degree and extent of sulkiness has sped up. She often becomes moody. Generally Naomi has become more and more notorious; all these behavioral changes have been aggravated after her father left. It is Judith who is burdened with Naomi’s ill-manner. Fights between Judith and Naomi occur frequently. The more Judith tries to solve the problem, the more Naomi hates her. This happened because Naomi resents her parents’ divorce. Judith has resolutely decided to face all the family problems by herself. She often becomes the target of Naomi’s anger. Judith says:

“We used to have these terrible fights. They only got worse after her father left. She hated both of us for that, but I was the only one around for her to take it out on, which made her

hate me even more,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. , 85).

As we can see, one way through which Judith’s agential acts are reflected is through her role as a single mother. We have seen all her attempts to make her daughter happy by providing her basic and emotional needs in spite the fact that Judith cannot heal her daughter’s emotional wound. Judith’s agency is also manifested through her skills at problem-solving. She does everything to please her daughter to the best of her ability. One problem that Judith had to put up with is that. As already mentioned, Naomi may lock herself on any floor and in any room. To solve this problem, Judith put a bathroom on each floor since it is unknown in which room she is going to lock herself. Logan Circle is their third place to reside. When they came to Logan Circle, it is with the consent of having many bathrooms built on each floor as usual. As a result, Judith kept her promise by doing so. If facilities are fulfilled, Judith thinks that Naomi will not be out of the building. At least this is what she expects from her daughter in return. Though Judith knows it is ridiculous, she makes it practical for the sake of her daughter. In this regard, Judith says:

“I made a promise to her when we moved here. I told her she could have all the space she wanted. In return, she had to promise to stop running out of the house when she got upset. Now, when she gets mad, she can lock herself on any floor of the house and never have to worry about seeing me, or anyone else,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. , 86).

Judith is concerned about her daughter’s emotional and physical needs. In other words, wherever Judith is found, so is Naomi. Anyone who sees Judith expects Naomi by her side. They are known for this. So it is possible to say that they are connected. This is one of the ways in which Judith tries her best to fill the gap of Naomi missing her father. Here it can be seen that Judith is playing the role from both a father and a mother.

Judith’s agency is also exhibited through her endeavor to protect Naomi from any danger. She also insisted that Naomi should come home early; otherwise, she herself comes and picks her up. Judith knows her daughter’s abilities also. For instance, whenever she confronts anything bad, it is Naomi who comes to her mind. She trusts Naomi’s skills in helping her solve a challenge. She believes that Naomi handles things in a better way than herself, because she has shaped Naomi in a way that she could cope up challenges. To illustrate this, let us take the following sentences from what Judith says:

“If Naomi had been there when that kid came up to me, I keep thinking that she would have handled it better than I did,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 53).

Judith is determined to protect her daughter from any attack or violence. She is more concerned about her daughter’s well-being than her own. If Naomi isn’t home by 4:30, Judith goes to the store to pick her up. She does this in order to protect her from sexual or other types of harassment. She feels that a girl is prone to unforeseen attack.

Judith has come to Logan Circle lately, however, she is the person who is trying to treat and entertain Sepha as though she were a host. Generally, Judith is an independent, self-confident person, who is also a devoted mother. Furthermore, she is a modern woman who respects the culture of other people.

4.2.3 Judith’s Sexuality

Literary texts are the medium through which various issues are dealt with artistically. The power of these literary texts in the formation and perception of women’s images is immense although these perceptions change with time and ideology and the contexts of the literary works.

women have been victims because of their sex all over the world though the degree differs from one country to another. Images of women have been distorted in various literary works. In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, it can be perceived that the protagonist female character Judith confronts challenges she faces because of her sex. Her being white does not protect her from being mistreated. So it can be seen that women have been victimized globally irrespective of geography, status or color. It is not nature but it is the society that sets the stereotypical stands of women as inferior and irrational beings, unable to engage critically and often understood from their ascribed shadowy domestic or sexual roles. This is because laws are set and formulated by men who dominate the world. Color or ethnicity and class discrimination aggravate the oppression.

In Africa as well as Afro-Americans countries in general and in Ethiopia in particular, because of illiteracy and male dominance, women are suffering from lack of education. They have little access to political power and they can hardly take part in decision-making on economic matters.” The low status given to women in some countries is some discriminatory laws about inheritance, access of the ownership of the land credit affect the participation of girl in education, [Rose 1997].

Today, African feminists have come to the fore to eliminate the barrier of gender inequality and establish a society in which mutual understanding and cooperation reign. In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, Dinaw portrays a female character, who unlike the stereotype female character, is conscious of selfhood and fights for gender equality. Here is a novel, which shows that today we witness changing images of women in literary texts, in spite of the fact that there is still a long way to go to see the realization of equal rights for women. Gender and consciousness are two major factors which influence a person's sexuality. On the one hand, by gender, it is to refer to one's being a male or a female. On the other hand, consciousness refers to what characterizes that gender, how the society regards a male or a female, what the society expects from that gender and how that individual perceives herself or himself. Generally, maleness and femaleness are markedly different due to their expressions and the way the society perceives and treats. In fact, constituents of maleness and femaleness may vary from place to place due to specific cultural factors.

Kristeva divides the stage of infancy into two: the pre-oedipal or pre-linguistic stage which she calls semiotic stage and the latter stage when the child is influenced by society and language as symbolic. The semiotic represents the irrational, illogical, and the desires as well as drives of the subject. This aspect is the instinctual drives which is organized within the body that is always latent in the psyche. To put it in a nutshell, the semiotic is that part of language that reveals inner desires and impulses of the speaker. Tones of characters, rhythm, anger, ambitions are manifestations of these unconscious desires; As a result, this instinctual operation becomes a practice. She argues just like the unconscious can only be repressed and never be eliminated as explained by Freud, semiotic too can be repressed only and never be completely eliminated. For Kristeva, social is always oppressive; that is to say, the symbolic is the part of language that tries to suppress the desires and impulses of the semiotic aspect of a language, (Kristeva 1984: pp. 17—29).

When Judith, the female protagonist in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* was harassed by a young man, she becomes upset. She is controlled by emotions. At this juncture, she is not the self-confident character who withstands patriarchal resistance. resistant Judith, a strong woman is overcome by emotions and frustration. Kristeva agrees with Freud that the unconscious can only be repressed and never be eliminated. Normally, Judith does not let fear and emotions take control of her.; however, the unconscious instantly takes over. So, trembling

and crying were her reactions to the harassment instead of confronting the young man who mocked her in front of his friends.

Judith expresses her anger towards herself saying:

“I told myself that if I looked determined enough, he could not touch me,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 53)

Kristeva denotes that silencing and oppressing women in a patriarchal society is one weapon used to harm women. In this particular instance, we can see that the traditionally oppressive female sexuality resurfaces in the character of Judith.

Judith had been exchanging kisses with Sepha. These were kisses that showed that each of them yearned for intimacy. The writer of the novel describes this moment as follows:

“This time instead of covering her mouth with her hand, she stretched out her fingers and without thinking took two of mine. She leaned in just far enough for me to meet her face less than halfway. It wasn’t a kiss so much as it was a gentle press, or an extended graze of lips, full of a sudden, almost crushing tenderness. We held it for as long as we could, three maybe four seconds at most, and then the moment passed,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 87).

The narrator states that “it wasn’t a kiss, but a gentle press of lips.” Sepha was not motivated to have an intimate relationship with Judith. Many of Judith’s acts on a number of occasions revealed that she wanted Sepha to be her lover. But intimacy should be expressed through acts of love.

As Debra Mollen and Sally D. Stabb (Oct. 2010) put in their article entitled *Women Sexuality and Meaning Making* metaphors for sexuality provided a creative and integrative way for women to express the complexity of their sexuality. Here, Judith does not show any active reaction in which she expresses her sexuality. She is not an active participant in this moment of intimacy. She wants deep intimacy with Sepha. But she could not dramatize her sexuality. In other words, though she paves the way, she makes no meaningful acts. Paradoxically, she expects Sepha to make the first move at this moment of intimacy. The introvert Sepha is not

motivated for intimacy.

As Bancroft, Loftus, and Long (2003) explain several researchers have found that sexual dysfunction and distress are widespread among women. Similarly, Hyde and Delamater (2008: P. 324) noted, “Our culture has traditionally placed tighter restrictions on women’s sexuality than on men’s and vestiges of these restrictions linger today. It seems likely that these restrictions have acted as a damper on female sexuality”.

Judith expects that Sepha will be the one who will dominate in their intimacy. Gender equality, however, demands that both men and women should have equal share in making their intimate relationship functional. We can witness here the psychological impact of patriarchy on Judith. In line with Kristeva’s theory, this can show the psychological impact that the patriarchal culture imprinted into her mind during the latter stage of infancy. The unconscious is seen operating on Judith, an admirable self-reliant woman.

4.2.4 Representation of Judith as a Mother

Motherhood is a significant issue in African Feminism. Feminists view motherhood, or giving birth as “one of the dimensions of being feminine” (Trishna, 2017:37). Trishna further states that motherhood “gives a woman her identity”. The birth of a child is a source of joy for the mother and for a family as a whole. Barrenness, on the other hand has led to failure of marriage and divorce for many people. However, Trishna explains that “in western culture, motherhood is not something mandatory” if the couple accept the fact that they will not have children.

Trishna also explains another importance of motherhood in African culture is that it binds women together. This reminds of the concept of sisterhood among African women. In this respect, Trishna comments that, childbirth “means nurturing the community itself” (Trishna, 2017: 38).

According to Stone maternity lies between body and subjectivity, (Stone, 2012). In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, Sepha appreciates Judith’s dedication for her daughter. She tries to fulfill Naomi’s physical and psychological needs.. Their attachment is strong and deep. Here is an evidence from the text in which Sepha expresses his appreciation:

“I couldn’t help but admire Judith’s devotion to her daughter, precisely because of its excesses,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, 86).

Motherhood can also be a source of disappointment and suffering for women. One cause of suffering is barrenness ; the other is loss of a child. In the short story entitled, “The Fly”, for example, Katherine Mansfield shows how a father is deeply affected by loss of his son who died fighting in the war.

The characteristics of maternity and the roles of mothers are set in the society. The society has socio-symbolic expectations from women. (Pays July 2018). However, women are not credited for these characteristics. In a patriarchal society, mothers must fulfill all responsibilities regarding children and family but what they perform is not considered as something valuable because they are out of money economy.

In other words, Alison Stone discusses the primary influence of social condition. She briefly comments on the history of women being the primary maternal carers. This is all related to social division of labor. In fact, caring mothers are appreciable; however, it remains only in words. Patriarchy undermines the role of mothers in society. The position of that ‘caring mother’ is not altered. In other words, women do not have the same privilege and respect as men in society.. For instance, in a society where polygamy is permitted, all mothers are obliged to raise their children by themselves. In general, children are responsibilities of the mothers. The subjugation of women from various aspects broadens the gap between masculine and feminine modes of identity. This gap difference has been to the extent of negligence. In this case, the patriarchal society’s negligence of female subjectivity or sexuality has led to gender inequality. (Pays 2018).

For Stone, “Maternal subjectivity is a specific form of subjectivity that is continuous with the maternal body. Her goal is to recover the intelligence and agency not of bodies but of early maternal body relations. The locus of a kind of pre-subjectivity embodied between mother and child,” (Stone, 2012, pp. 3--6). She consistently problematizes the idea, which is dominant in Westerners, that self has to be separated from mother, a paradigm based on an opposition between mothers and subjects, (Stone, 2012, p. 1). And the idea that separating from the mother is necessary to become an individual subject a self-conscious and autonomous agent who is the source of normative authority and meaning, (Pays, 2018). As Lollway (2011) clarifies there are changes that women experience when they become mothers for the first time. According to Stone (2012), there are psychical reasons that make the maternal figure to be the first orienting figure.

Another well-known critic, Kristeva (1986) promotes a new generation of women who want to be mothers. As mothers, women's role is to fulfill the child's needs and to love. Judith fulfills both successfully. Judith is the provider of the family. She makes sure that Naomi grows well by getting proper nourishment and other basic necessities. Generally, this role is met by both parents. But Judith is a single parent.

Judith is also the educator of her daughter. So, she makes sure that Naomi attends school every day. Besides, as a modern mother, Judith shapes her daughter in a better way than she herself behaves. Naomi becomes a strong, self-confident and determined daughter as a result of her single mother. When a young man harassed Judith, she witnessed that Naomi would respond in a better way. Here is a passage from the story:

“You know, I keep wondering what I would have done if Naomi had been there when that kid came up to me. I keep thinking that she would have handled it better than I did,”
(Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, pp. 52—53).

The above passage shows that Naomi, who has been brought up well by her mother, would not have been frustrated because of the young man's lack of decency and impoliteness. Judith knows her input into the upbringing of her daughter.

Judith is a caring mother in every aspect physically, psychologically, educationally and by giving love too. She has brought up a well-mannered daughter alone. As it is described by Kristeva (1986) women, mothers, in particular, attempt to construct a new self, either by leaving their homes or violent husbands or by redefining their identities. Judith has left her violent husband and started to bring up Naomi alone. She has chosen one of the three ways to construct a new self.

Alison Stone (2012) points out in the Article entitled *Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Maternal Subjectivity* that there are three relations between mother and daughter: conflicts, loss and pleasure. When Judith and Naomi's relations are examined in line with such idea, we can see how these relations are reflected. When Naomi hides herself from her mother's sight, there is a conflict between them. Naomi shows hatred to her parents, because of their separation, but more hatred towards Judith; conflict is reflected. At this juncture it is worth mentioning that metaphorically speaking, Judith is also Naomi's protector. She worries because she does not want her daughter to be exposed to danger.

During Naomi's absence, Judith feels disturbed and worries. She panics that something must have happened to Naomi. At this time, feeling of loss takes over. Generally, however, Judith experiences the pleasure of motherhood. She is happy to have Naomi. She feels delighted because of her daughter. We can perceive this when Judith reproaches Sepha for not having a family of his own. The presence of Naomi in the house has made her life meaningful.

Judith is also the educator of her daughter. Symbolically speaking, she is the guide, the light of Naomi. She does not only provide her daughter with appropriate schooling, but she wants to make sure that her daughter is well-mannered and understands other people's perspectives. Naomi's conversation with Sepha, an adult can show that this girl has a sharp mind and can engage in conversation with adults. Judith is of course behind such upbringing.

Motherhood is another context through which Judith's agency is revealed. She wants her daughter, Naomi to be well-educated. That is why she has made Naomi to join a boarding school at last. Her devotion for her child always surprises Sepha. He expresses his astonishment saying:

“I couldn't help but admire Judith's devotion to her daughter, precisely, because of its excesses. Who didn't want to be loved like that? She didn't apologize for anything,”
(Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, pp. 86-87).

A mother's love is significant for a child's emotional and physical health and overall happiness. Judith tries to make Naomi happy by all means. She built many bathrooms in the building she renovated because Naomi has the habit of locking herself in one of the rooms in the bathrooms in the house. She spent extra money to include extra rooms for this purpose. She did it because Naomi is everything to her and she loves her.

Judith is parent who tries to fill in the gap left by the father's absence. The father buys expensive gifts for his daughter at Christmas but he cannot fill the void left by his absence. Naomi resents her parents' separation. The occasional temper tantrums are caused by this resentment. Judith does her best to make daughter happy, but there is always something missing in Naomi's life. Both parents have to be there to make their child happy. Judith is the rock that Naomi needs to live well, but she cannot fulfill this emotional need of her daughter. The father figure is absent in Naomi's life. Judith, who understands Naomi very well desires to establish a happy family with Sepha, who can be the father figure. But her desire has not materialized.

Judith is also concerned about the image her daughter has about her. She has raised Naomi to be knowledgeable, intelligent and self-confident. She wants her to be a good decision-maker also like herself. On the day when the young man harassed Judith, she failed to courageously confront him. Instead, she sat down on a bench and cried.

Judith was very upset and frustrated at that moment. If Naomi were there, Judith would not know what to do. Naomi knows her mother as a person who has self-composure and is not easily overcome by unexpected circumstances that would make her lose self-confidence. Naomi has a positive image of her mother. So, had she been there at that moment, she would have known the weaker side of her mother's self. This is something that Judith would not be able to bear.

In this fictional work, the Ethiopian Diaspora writer Dinaw Mengestu has brought about literary innovation, in that, the major female character is different from stereotype characters, who resist and find change threatening. Such stereotypical attitude can be noticed in the Black American character, Mrs. Davies, who found Judith bold, which from her point of view is negative. She also felt that Judith cannot have obtained all that money all by herself.

Judith is portrayed as a character who has knowledge and power which she has employed for the betterment of her living condition. She is neither docile nor submissive to patriarchal norms. She is an educated, decent woman, who does not suppress her actual feelings towards Sepha.

4.2.5 The Female Characters' Voice

Judith is a newcomer to Logan Circle, but she is the one to break the silence and start to communicate with Sepha. Conventionally, it is the man who takes the initiative. His responses to her questions are very short comparing to hers. In the discourse, she exhibits more confidence than he does. She expresses herself in a polite way. The following is a case in point:

“...as I turned to lock the door behind me, I heard her saying, “What a beautiful garment!” her use of the word ‘garment’ struck me most- it was polite, almost formal, as if the word had been inserted in to her sentence at the last possible moment out of an instinctive sense of cultural diplomacy.” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 34).

As we can see, Judith is courteous and diplomatic when she speaks out about the cultural clothes and her interest in Sepha's personal life. Her voice is friendly. She is also polite. Her voice can indicate that she is keen to know about Sepha.

She came to his grocery in the evening and asked him why he didn't ask about her absence. We also perceive her whispering into his ear words of thank for his being so sweet. On the other hand, the word sweet is used ironically. She is actually reproaching him for not reacting to her absence. Furthermore, whispering in his ears is an action which shows familiarity.

Judith's voice is also manifested in her relationship with Sepha is through suggesting that Naomi, Sepha and herself should go the mall on Christmas Eve to visit the National Christmas Tree. On this occasion, Judith's desire to have an intimate relationship with Sepha becomes evident when she slipped her arm into the crook of Sepha's elbow.

Judith wants to lead simple life. On the other hand, she does not like to live in a drab environment. Her efforts to renew and ornament the old house show this. She says to Sepha that she appreciates simple and elegant things. When Sepha asks her the type of presents she likes, she responds saying:

"I prefer simple and elegant things," (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p.184).

On top of that She brought dinner to Sepha's grocery and they enjoyed eating on paper plates with their hands. This also shows simplicity. Here is evidence from the text: "The day after our evening session, Judith brought dinner to the store, a rosemary lamb, roast with baby potatoes that we ate on paper plates with our hands, and a bottle of red wine that we drank out of six ounces clear plastic cups," (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 180). She expresses her interest in Sepha through action as we can see.

Another thing about voice is that we hear Judith's voice in Naomi. When Naomi discusses America's foreign policy on Middle-East is unfair and it is wrong, she is reflecting Judith's point of view on that subject. Here is a passage from the text:

"We read the newspaper together, which was her way of showing me how smart she was. Naomi...took pride in being able to shake her head at the world. She was convinced that American foreign policy in the Middle East was a failure, that a two-state solution in Israel was inevitable ... even the way she leaned against the counter, her head resting on her chin as she thumbed her way through the articles, spoke of a wisdom that seemed to belong more to her mother than to her," (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 48).

Naomi, additionally, raises about AIDS which is a global issue. As of her age, these are hard issues; consequently, her ideas are copied from an adult that is her mother. The narrator

describes such idea saying that she speaks “that enough wasn’t being done about the global AIDS crisis. She tucked and folded the creases in the Washington Post with an agility fitting an old man,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 48).

Sepha also indicates that the speech must be her mother’s. Sepha advises her to be of her age saying: “You know, kids shouldn’t talk like that,” Sepha told Naomi, She shrugged her shoulders again, letting her eyes drop to the floor in a way that seemed rehearsed.

“I know,” she said, “but I’m not a kid.”

“What are you, then?”

“I’m an adult.”

“You’re eleven.” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, pp. 48-49).

From this dialogue, it is clear that the issues she raises as well as her acts are beyond her scope. Judith’s daughter Naomi also has a voice in this novel. As already indicated, when Sepha asked her whether she knew about the African map, she reacted with contempt to his question. This is how she voiced her pride in being an African.

The community of Logan Circle’s reaction to Judith’s decision to come and live in Logan Circle is expressed through Mrs. Davis. A White woman is not welcomed in Logan Circle. This is because the community believes that White people come to this area for punishment and criticism.

Mrs. Davis tells Sepha that Judith should not live there. She is suspicious of White people. She objects to their coming to Logan Circle. The community of Logan Circle does not like immigrants, either. Mrs. Davis’ comments in this respect have deeply affected Sepha. He says: “I was in no position, though, to say what was right or wrong. I was not one of “these people” as Mrs. Davis had just made clear to me. I hadn’t forced anyone out, but I had never really been a part of Logan Circle, either” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 257).

Sepha is appalled by Mrs. Davis’ attitude towards immigrants. Therefore, when she has invited him to the community’s meeting, he has never accepted her full-heartedly. Even he has thrown the fliers that she has given him to distribute in to the dust bin.

Mrs. Davis also looks down on immigrants. She considers them backward. It is possible to understand from her comment, "This is not like living in a hut" This saying of hers illustrates her attitude. A hut is not built in modern cities, except in recreational areas. Mrs. Davis compares immigrants to nomads, who have to move from place to place and have no permanent residence. The following comment reveals this. She says, "People around here can't just put their houses on their backs and move on," (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 39). Mrs. Davis is referring to immigrants' poverty.

Mrs. Davis is a character who voices the interests of the community. She resists social change. She organizes the community of Logan Circle against evictions of the dwellers. She prepares fliers and distributes them to the people. She also delivers a speech in meetings. The narrator describes Mrs. Davies' role saying:

"The bottom of the flier was signed-The Logan Circle Community Association-I had never heard of it before. Perhaps, it had always existed, but more likely than not, it had been created on the spur of the moment by Mrs. Davis and the other widows of the neighborhood." (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 264).

As we can see, Sepha doubts whether there is a Logan Circle Community's association. One thing we know is that class differences have affected the American society.

4.3 Chapter Conclusion

Many critics have analysed Dinaw's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* from different perspectives and contributed a lot to our understanding of this interesting novel. The researcher used a Feminist approach to examine the portrayal of female characters. Focus has been on the identity, agency, sexuality and voice of the female characters. Here is a summary of the analysis of Dinaw Mengestu's novel based on a perspective of post-structuralist feminism.

In the novel *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* both Sepha and Judith are protagonist characters. The female character Judith is portrayed as a confident, educated character, who stands for gender equality and mutual cooperation between man and woman for a happy and stable life. But the male character, Sepha is depicted as unsuccessful, introvert character.

Judith plays a prominent role in gentrification and urban renewal though the community withstands her deed. Judith, however, resists the negative reactions of the community. Her aim is to show that a woman is equal to man and can stand on her own without the support of the man. She also deviates from conventional norms by being the one to encourage Sepha to have an intimate relationship with her.

Being a university professor, she has a prominent position. But Sepha has not even succeeded as owner of Logan Circle Grocery; he struggles without profit. He expected paradise in the United States, but it did not materialize. Sepha upholds patriarchal norms as far as relationship between man and woman is concerned as indicated in the analysis. Judith, however, is a female character who stands for change and gender equality.

Generally, life for Judith is to some extent bright compared to Sepha. His future seems to be rather gloomy. Besides Sepha has no one to live for so he does not have any responsibility. Furthermore, he is not ready to handle any responsibility by marrying Judith and being a father for her daughter. On the contrary, Judith, a single mother, is a self-reliant character. In addition to that she has been working for social change.

Judith is portrayed as a woman conscious of her selfhood, not as an object who depends on a man to make important decisions in her life. Compared to Sepha, she is a dynamic character capable of independent action. Sepha, on the other hand, is passive and rather introvert. Because of this, Judith's hope for a happy future has been shattered.

Mrs. Davis is made conspicuous through her skeptical attitude to social change. She is afraid that the traditional values which the community cherishes will crumble. Like the community, she believes that change can threaten the community's existence.

CHAPTER FIVE

5 ANALYSIS OF THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE SHADOW KING

5.1 Synopsis of the Shadow King

The second book of Maaza Mengiste *The Shadow King* was published in 2019. The story revolves around Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 focusing on Ethiopian female warriors. It magnifies what it looks like to be a woman at war. The story begins in 1974 almost forty years after the war had ended.

Hirut, a former soldier, waits on Addis Ababa train platform with a box of Jew photographer Ettore Navarra's letters and photographs spanning from 1935—1941. Recalling the letter, Ettore sent contacting her; Herut, is eager to see Ettore Navarra, the Jewith-Italian army photographer, who was forced to document the horrific atrocities at the battle. Holding the box, she starts to memorize everything happened during the war. At this very junction, a crowd of students including soldiers protests the Emperor's rule. To calm her nerves, Hirut commences to concentrate on her past history. She hears voices of the dead calling to her; opening the box, she starts to look the horrifying images on the photographs. At this time, she muses over the past memories. So the novel shifts back to 1935—1941 Ethio-Italian conflict.

As young orphaned woman, Hirut serves as a maid in Kidane and Aster's house. She hopes that Kidane will protect her from everything due to the affection he had to her mother; however, Aster grows jealous of Kidane's interest in Hirut, and begins abusing her as much as she can. Aster discovers Hirut's rifle, a gift from her father and Kidane confiscates the gun. As a result, Hirut wants to revenge and steals Aster's precious necklace, a wedding gift. When Aster finds out Hirut's theft, she whips her brutally which left a scar on Hirut's body.

Kidane "a Dejazmach", a military officer in the Emperor's army, starts to organize and train his men before Italians' invasion. When the Ethiopians have realized the arrival of Italians army to Port Massawa, Immediately, Kidane gathers his men and becomes ready for the battle. Though Kidane has become reluctant, Aster gathering many women determines to join the battle.

In all these circumstances, the Emperor Haile Selassie, whose young daughter Princess Zenebwork died, has been unable to defend his country so he prefers to go to exile. Hirut notices

that a peasant soldier, Minim, is alike Haile Selassie. Therefore, Hirut and Kidane begin crafting Minim in to their shadow king to act as an emperor who will mobilize and encourage the troops. Then, Hirut appoints herself as the protector of the shadow king.

Kidane repeatedly rapes Hirut during the war. Together, they train and craft themselves in to fierce soldiers. During their work, Hirut decides to kill Kidane as soon as she gets the chance, as a means of avenging all his abuses against her and her family. During their first encounter, Kidane and his men succeed in ambushing the Italians. As a consequence, the Italians quickly massacre the Ethiopians using gas and tanks. The Colonel of the Italian army Carlo Fucelli has built a prison in which he designs a series of disturbing deaths for Ethiopian captives that he demands Ettore to take pictures. In one of the battles, Fucelli and his men arrest Hirut and Aster. The women have refused to tell where Kidane and his men are. As a result, Fucelli orders his soldiers to strip, taunt and rape them and distribute their pictures. There after, Kidane and his men have freed them.

Shortly thereafter, Kidane and his men ambush Fucelli and his troops and succeed in killing him. Kidane is also killed in the battle.

Forty years after the war, Ettore remains in Addis Ababa, having taken his father's advice and stayed in Africa in order to protect himself from Mussolini. Through one of Kidane's former soldiers, Ettore gets word to Hirut, asking her to meet him with his box of photographs. When Ettore arrives at the station, he begs for Hirut's forgiveness. Hirut ignores his pleas, and demands him to leave her country and never to return.

5.2 Analysis of Female characters in *The Shadow King* (2019)

5.2.1 Female's Subjectivity in *The Shadow King*

Hirut, one of the major characters struggles for her identity up to the end. Her father has given her a gun before he died. Weapon, a rifle in this sense, is a symbol of power. Patriarchal society excludes women from knowledge and power. According to Kristeva (1986: 141) the economy of the patriarchal system requires that women be excluded from knowledge and power. When Kidane snatches Hirut's rifle, he deprives her of power. This is a great abuse for Hirut. This is paradoxical because it is her father who gave her a gun as an inheritance. He also taught her how to use it just as he taught her brothers. Hirut conceived vengeance upon Kidane because he confiscated her 'ujigra' and disempowered. Here is a passage from the novel:

“...when Hirut rams her forehead against Kidane’s, she is uncertain and unsure what she is doing. ‘Wujigra’” she whispers. “I will kill him,” says Hirut softly. (Maaza Mengiste, 2019: p. 188).

Her father has not been partial to Hirut though he lives in the patriarchal society. He gave her a gun as inheritance. He did not give it to her brothers. When he armed her, he did it with advice saying: “Never leave your enemy alive,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019: 10).

Hirut considers Kidane her enemy since he made her powerless. So, she wants to retaliate against him by killing him for abusing her and her family. Kidane disarmed Hirut and attempted to put her under his control. Be it in peace or at war, it is shown in this novel that women are always in war with men who want to subjugate and control them. Maaza portrays men from two different perspectives. We can see balance here. Hirut’s father is a role model for the new generation because he upholds gender equality. On the contrary, Kidane and other men have androcentric intent. The latter desire to suppress women’s rights.

Hirut learnt from her father how to use a gun. Hirut insisted that Wujigra be given back to her; however, Kidane refused to do so. She reclaimed her inheritance. She thought that this gift from her father is her identity. When she decided to kill Kidane, it was because he had dispossessed her of her inheritance. She said to him:

“I want only my rifle,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019: p. 65).

Hirut’s Wujigra is not only a gift from her father but it is a gift from her late father because Kidane says that it is forty or fifty years old. It is not an ordinary gun; it symbolizes heritage. Therefore, it is Hirut’s most prized possession, the only object she has that shows bondage to her deceased parents. That is why Hirut repeatedly demanded her rifle to be given to her. Even at war, she tried to snatch it from Kidane. Let us take an evidence from the text:

“Hirut turns to watch Kidane come inside, his head lowered. That is when she sees it: her ‘Wujigra’, her father’s gun. There it is, leaning against the wall, tucked into the cave’s dark shadows like a thief. Her stomach clenches, her forehead moistens with sweat.....It was mine,” Hirut says quietly. ...She waits until she hears Kidane walk away. Then Hirut reaches for her Wujigra. She clasps it tight and drags it out with her.” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019: p. 138).

She starts taking measure by stealing things from Kidane and Aster's house. The following quotation can show this:

“There are many secrets in my house,” says Aster, (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 66).

Hirut is a character from the lower social status, unlike her mistress, Aster. She struggles to lead her life as a maid in Kidane's household since she is an orphaned girl; however, she outshines Aster; she is a brave soldier and perpetuator of The Shadow King later on. Hirut symbolizes women from the lower stratum of the society who are dedicated and sacrificed their lives for their country. Here, as Kristeva (1986: 143) puts it, writers have started to create dynamic female characters who strive towards constructing a new self. Likewise, we perceive Hirut constructing a new self. She is proud of herself and her parents, of what she was and what she is. Here is an evidence from the text. She said:

“I am Hirut,”.

She reminds herself that she is the “daughter of Getey and Fasil, born on a blessed day of harvest, beloved wife and loving mother, a soldier,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019: 5).

Hirut has never surrendered to the patriarchal society's oppressive norms because her father inculcated in her mind the thought that she is equal to her brothers. Before his death, he gave her a piece of advice to be serious and to confront her enemies. He said to her: “

My child, you hold it like I taught you and you aim it at the heart like I have shown you and you must fear nothing except leaving your enemy alive,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019:p. 10).

“Fear nothing” is advice she has to follow to achieve her goal. It is fear which paralyses human faculties and prevents people from succeeding in their endeavors. From her father, Hirut also inherited priceless values like courage, heroism and determination. She also believes in gender equality. She became a brave soldier although in the past the military career was embraced by men. Nowadays, of course, women have proven that they can do anything. Heroism and bravery are values she learnt from her father.

5.2.2 Female's Sexuality

Aster admirably plays leadership role. She does not allow men to come to women's tent. So, men in Kidane's army talk repeatedly that they have lost the chance to exercise their manhood

as in their fathers' time.

As Hooks (1981: 86) clarifies that female sexual freedom requires knowledge of one's body as well as understanding meaning of sexual integrity. Aster is a character who understands sexual freedom and integrity. She believes that women are not sex objects. Here is a passage from the narrative:

“Aster has been sleeping with her women in their area, as if it is an unspoken agreement between them. He has started to suspect that she is not allowing those with spouses or lovers in his army to share tents. Aster has told several of Kidane's men to stay out of the section she has claimed for her women, and that has separated ‘who had met and begun to stay together in the tradition of’ and women who march toward war:... this woman, his wife, has come in and changed the way things have always been done when men go to war,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 65).

Women's body is a battlefield at any time and at any cost. The women who are in the battlefield are fighting from two different angles. On the one hand, they are fighting as normal soldiers. On the other hand, they become vigilant protectors of their body. Women are vulnerable and they should also be concerned with self-respect. They should not be victims of men who do not observe moral values. Hirut attaches great importance to morality. This is deeply engrained in her mind.

Aster is another visible female character in this fictional work. Aster represents women from the higher class of the society. She is the person who strives to bring about change in the patriarchal society. Women are not only mothers, wives, and sisters; they are more than this. This saying is her motto and that of her counterparts whom she has influenced. The women who were at war have sung a song together. Even after the song, the women whisper amongst themselves this phrase:

“We are more than this!.

In this novel , Maaza portrays the role of women in Ethio-Italian war and also points to the ways in which the woman's body itself is a battlefield, subjected to continual abuse and violence in both peace and war times. Hirut has been raped by Kidane multiple times in the military camp. She has confronted many battlefields and Kidane is another battlefield. Kidane fights

against Italians to free Ethiopia. Similarly, Hirut fights against the invaders also. However, Hirut's situation differs, in that, she also fights against Kidane to free herself from his power over her. Here is an evidence from the text:

“...Kidane's rough hand are forcing her flat on his stomach and then Kidane is on top, his breath at her ear, his chest moving against her back, flesh expanding, in to the dips and curves of her figure, grinding her in to the dirt until she can feel her ribs bend.....His flesh hardens in the crevice between her legs and he pushes in,..." (Maaza Mengiste, 2019: p. 141).

Surprisingly, in this novel, Kidane disempowers Hirut by taking her inherited rifle. At the same time, he complains about his father's cape mentioning that his father bled on that for his country. Here is an evidence from the novel:

“My father bled on that cape and you are mocking his sacrifice for this country,” Kidane speaks to Aster; (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 44).

Here, Kidane reflects hegemony of men. He implies that things that are under men's possession should be respected. Kidane complains that Aster has ruined his father's belongings though Aster has worn his father's clothes when she goes to agitate people to be ready for war.

Both Kidane and Hirut's feelings towards those things they inherited from their father are similar; however, Kidane does not respect Hirut's feelings. Ignoring hers, he regards his own. This action of Kidane shows men's hegemony. Hence, not only men but also their property is considered more precious than women's property. Women's selfhood is also suppressed in the patriarchal society. Furthermore, they are considered objects of male's gaze.

Earlier in the story when Kidane brought the orphan Hirut to his house, he intended to care for her like a father. He exhibited paternal affection towards Hirut. He acted like her protector. For example, when Aster's necklace was lost, he took the blame upon himself saying that he himself had misplaced it a long time ago. Kidane was metaphorically a shed for Hirut.

Later, however, his attitude has changed. He has repeatedly raped and abused Hirut. Aster was also abused as a women because she was forced into marriage at a young age.

In this novel, we also see a similarity between female's body and battlefield. Being on her marital bed, Aster begged Kidane to let her go home. But the chorus told her that she cannot escape from the tradition. The role of the chorus, therefore, is to enforce the traditional norms.

This is expressed as follows:

“There is no way out but through it. There is no escape but what you make from the inside.” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 67).

Similarly, the Italian Colonel Fuceli encouraged his troops saying:

“There is no way but through. There is no escape but forward.”

The advice given to a young girl about to be raped is the same as the battle cry in the battlefield. Hence, a similarity is drawn between a woman’s body and a battlefield. Both Fucelli and the chorus emphasized this fact.

Aster herself analogically expresses her experience on the day she got married in terms of blood that is shed at a battlefield. She compares her experience as a new bride to that of Kidane’s father at the battlefield. For Kidane, this is a joke So, he furiously responds saying:

“My father bled on that cape and you are mocking his sacrifice for this country,”

Kidane shoots to his feet and points in her face. He is furious and dangerously close to lunging at her. Aster painfully remembers the first day of her wedding. So, she tells Kidane:

“I have bled when I shouldn’t,”

Here, Aster implies that Kidane cannot forget the blood that his father shed to save his country from the invaders. But the painful bleeding that Aster had when they first met together as husband and wife is nothing for Kidane. His being partiality irritated her. In her view, he acted as if there were blood difference between his father and Aster. Maza implicitly reveals here gender inequality.

5.2.3 Aster, a Grieving Mother

As already discussed in Section 3.3.6, motherhood offers social and psychological advantages for women, especially in African cultures although this is not always the case. In *The Shadow King*, Maaza artistically shows Aster’s suffering and despair through grief metaphors Aster and Kidane’s only son, Tesfaye, is unseen in the narrative; however, his mother, Aster shows her grief wherever and whenever she gets the chance. As it is reflected in the conceptual framework, mother’s and children’s relationship is depicted in three different ways: conflict, pleasure and loss.

1. Here, we perceive Aster's deep grief through loss. She is always grieving her infant son. Lye in his internet summary puts discourse is a material practice; the human life is rooted in historicity and lives through the body. Hence discourse is not specifically a language or text, but it is the effect of language practices. In this case, Aster reflects the deep grief she is in employing discourse: it is more than language.

She expresses her grief metaphorically in three different ways: through her speech, by wearing her black clothes day and night and by burning all her precious possessions. Aster repeatedly raises her deceased infant. She never forgets her only son, Tesfaye. Here is an evidence from the text that shows bitterness in her grief through speech:

“You think I don't realize you brought her here exactly one year after our son died?” Her voice is low but it holds bitterness....Aster stares down at her hands, uncharacteristically hesitant” She came exactly one year after Tesfaye died,” she says. Aster lifts her head and repeats it more confident. “You brought her here after the mourning period,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 16)

Here, it is possible to perceive that repetitions of one sentence and the same idea in a dialogue. Aster grieves because of two reasons: one her son's death; two Hirut's coming. She feels that Hirut is a substitution. She reproaches Kidane because he brought Hirut to their home. Hirut's coming does not give Aster comfort. Because she thinks that Kidane has interest in Hirut. Aster considers Hirut's coming as an insult for her. Let us have a look at her saying:

“You brought her here to insult me,...You brought her here to try to teach me my place,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 17)

The repetition reflects the degree of grief. The more the sentence is repeated, the more it is emphasized. Aster blames Kidane because he has substituted his son by Hirut. Aster's speech indicates that she is without any substitute. As Casablanca puts, “People can get over grief through love” but Aster has never got another child that makes her forget her deceased son. If she gets a substitute, it becomes easier for her to overcome grief. Through the love of someone or the newly born child Aster may revive from the grief she is in; unfortunately, it happens not. Kidane has brought Hirut to their home after one year of their son's death; however, instead of love, Aster hates her due to jealousy. Aster thinks that Kidane has interest in Hirut.

The second point in which we see Aster's maternal grief is the clothes she wears. Black clothes are symbols of mourning. Her black clothes and her decision, not to take them off, show her grief and her decision not to come out of such emotional state. She doesn't take off her black clothes even at night. Aster wears her black dress day and night. She never takes it off when she sleeps. This action of hers reflects that her deep sorrow is without time-bound. In spite of the fact that Tesfaye died years ago, but she acts as if her mourning is recent. This can show that motherhood can also be a source of pain and grief for women when they experience the loss of a child.

She takes off other clothes whenever necessary but she doesn't take off those black ones. Here is an evidence from the novel: "She has worn those clothes the last five days, removing them only at night when she returned from where ever she went, keeping the cape at her feet while she slept in her black dress," (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 43).

She even burned her beautiful dresses, capes and her precious jewelry and the like to express her deep melancholy for her deceased son. This action metaphorically reflects that Aster's despair to continue her life. Burning symbolizes destruction. Her beauty is meaningless to her now. She does not need to wear jewelry now. She wails beating her chest for lost her son who was the light of her life.. From her action, we can understand her feeling; She speaks through action saying: my possessions are not more important than my son. Action speaks louder than words. So by burning precious possession of hers, she shows the deep grief she is in. Here is a passage from the text:

"...in the early days of mourning for their only son, Aster threw away many things. She made a heap of her dresses and capes and even jewelry and set them on fire in the compound, pounding her chest as flames began to chew in the items," (Maaza Mengiste 2019, p. 16.)

According to Kristeva's explanation about maternal metaphor "The maternal body functions as a threshold maintaining and threatening socio-symbolic structure," (Kristeva, 1986: 200). Aster expresses her deep feeling about her son in any speech. She has suffered a lot from her son's death.

Kidane does not share Aster's feelings though he is the father. He shows sympathy for Aster because she deeply suffers from their infant's death. He tries to treat her in a different way.

Normally, men, in Ethiopian culture, do not expose themselves by showing their grievance. They hide their sorrow to be considered as brave. They are expected to suppress sorrow in order not to be insulted.

Kidane conceals his grief because of the cultural belief. Since he is a father, it is not possible to say that he does not grieve but it is a matter of controlling oneself. Here is an evidence from the text:

“Kidane didn’t know what to do,” the cook adds, “when their little boy died, he became a broken man, you wouldn’t believe it,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 24).

The ones who cry and show their grief are taken as a ‘woman’. Consequently, Kidane never shows his grief but he attempts to sympathize his wife. Here is a passage from the text:

“He wants to reach out and strike her....He has not done this in a long, long time. He has not turned his wrist and brought it down on his wife’s forehead in this same way since Tesfaye died. He has felt some unspoken allegiance to her grief, an understanding of all the ways that loss can warm the spirit,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 82).

The difference takes place because of maternal body relations. As Stone’s discussion (2011: 147), “The mother is a relational subject but doubly so:” This relation is perceived forward and backward; that is to say, the forward can be reflected by a mother’s relation to her child; in the same token the backward relation is perceived through a mother’s relation to her own mother.

In this novel, for instance, it is possible to see backward relation. When Aster punishes and strikes Hirut for her theft, Hirut cries calling her mother saying:

“Emama, Emaye! Why didn’t you tell me it would be like this.” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 55).

Aster displays the depth of her relation to her son, Tesfaye, symbolically. While she is showing her distress to Kidane, she holds her stomach. Here is a passage from the text as an evidence:

“You think I don’t realize one year after our son died?” Her voice is low but it holds bitterness that makes Kidane step back, “.... You brought her here to insult me,” Aster places her hand very quickly on her stomach and drops,” (Maaza Mengiste 2019, p. 17).

Aster raises her son's death to reproach Kidane. It is not the right place to talk about their son. However, the subject of their discussion is Hirut's rifle. At every circumstance Aster's idea sticks to their only son. When she talks about Hirut's coming and their son's death, her voice is low at the same time it has bitterness in it. Besides, she holds her stomach.

These three actions have their own messages: 'low voice' signifies how far sympathetic she is. 'Bitterness' shows the degree of loss she is suffering from. The last one is 'holding her stomach very quickly' is an indicator of maternal metaphor that starts from semiotic stage as Kristeva describes. At the same time, Aster expresses her deep sorrow and the tight relation she has with her son through discourse.

On the contrary, at that very junction, Kidane's reaction has been cool. He speaks slowly rather he wants to go away; the emotions that are revealed in Aster are nonexistent. His feeling is not hurt as the mother. All these happen by the consequence of maternal relation. The following passage depicts Kidane's act: "Kidane places a hand on the door frame and speaks slowly:" (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 17).

Kidane's action speaks that he does not want to talk about his deceased son as well as Hirut's coming. Both issues hurt Aster deeply although they never pinch Kidane's feelings; he seems tired of them.

5.2.4 Female Characters' Agency

The three female characters Aster, Hirut and the cook are the ones who mainly the story revolves around though they are from various social status. That means, they shoulder the narrative. Aster belongs to a higher level of the society that is, symbolizing women from nobility; whereas Hirut and the cook represent the lower status of the society. Especially, the cook symbolizes the anonymous women who have a part in the war. The cook who was bought by Aster's father does not have even a name; she is named by her job description in the house but we see her participation in her country's issues. This indicates that women, just like men, without any class difference, sacrifice their lives for their motherland.

In spite of varying their social status, all of them confront disgrace and challenge; that is to say, they are all in the battle with men or with patriarchal society. Aster, as is reflected in the flashback, refuses her early marriage and attempts to escape though her attempt was in vain. Unsuccessful though her attempt to escape from her marital home was, it sounds appreciable because she was too young to object the wrongdoing of the patriarchal society.

Aster pleads with her father despite his rigidity to change his mind. Let alone to listen his daughter's plea, he punished the cook for she tried to help Aster escape; She was whipped to teach others what they would face whenever they break the patriarchal society's will. Here is an evidence from the novel:

'The chorus: "They dragged the cook by the hair down the dirt road....they dragged her by the hair while young Aster sobbed on her knees and begged her father to stop, 'Please stop, it is not her fault, it was my idea, please stop," (Maaza Mengiste, 2019: p. 56).

In other words, the cook's body was inflicted violently to show the price of rebellion. Young Aster was the daughter of the man who bought the cook who helped Aster to escape from the marriage. It was the cook whose body was folding in to the soil. When the two are in the wrong, it is sometimes only one who is punished. So it was the cook who was punished Aster's father, who represents many, wants to teach Aster. Let us take an evidence from the text:

"Aster chose to wait and witness how a grown man's fist drove in to a woman's soft stomach. She wanted to understand the breaking point of a strong woman's will. She wanted to learn what it took to splinter a woman's pride with one's own hands. She wanted to calculate the price of rebellion," (Maaza Mengiste, 2019: p. 57). Neither her refusal nor her begging helped Aster to stop early marriage because it is what the tradition imposes up on her. Here is an evidence from the narrative:

"Go on Aster to your new band; go on Aster walk to your husband, what can Aster do but walk...Was it for nothing," chorus, "we see the young Aster. We see the way she creeps up the stairs with a chorus of women ululating at her back," (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 36).

Aster boldly tells Kidane that she has a right upon his properties. This saying of Aster takes Kidane to surprise because he does not hear women complaining about men's properties. In the patriarchal society, men are owners and possessors of properties. That is what Dejazmach

Kidane knows but Aster rejects such stand and tries to convince Kidane by pointing out the reality. “I am keeping it. I have earned the right,” Aster says. Kidane’s laugh is knocking. “The right? Who gives you the right to take what is mine?”.....”I have a right, Kidane, Aster looks down at him. “Who do you think has been getting these supplies ready for your men? Whose getting the scarves and blankets and water for you?” She stops and swallows, “I have been earning this for a long, long time.” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 43).

Aster mobilizes women to participate in the battle. She is not fulfilling her duty only as an individual but she also encourages other women. This action of Aster reveals that she is a decision-maker and leader which are qualities of agency as Kabeer (1999) puts.

Kidane considers Aster’s deed as ‘foolish’. Instead of regarding her determination and gut, he suggests that she has done something unnecessary and which is dangerous. For Kidane, a woman is unable to perform something without being appendage of a man according to Frank. Here is an evidence from the text: Kidane shakes his head and says, “They say you were in the mountains with ‘buna’ that you are trying to mobilize on your own.” He bends so their face are close. “You can’t be that foolish, can you?” Aster finally speaks “I’ve been doing what Empress Menen asked of me and every other woman in this country. Shouldn’t we be doing something too? Or is this only your country? I got two new guns for you.” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 44).

As we discern from the novel, Aster mobilizes women for the battle and collects weapons to arm the warriors. Equipping the warriors with food supplies is also one of Aster’s targets.

On top of that, Aster has another quality that makes her classified in women’s agency. That is her being resourceful. She prepares gunpowder and fills the used casings of bullets. Not only for herself, she shoulders the responsibility of teaching other women how to make gunpowder ready and how they should shoot. Here is a passage for evidence: “Aster says, “We just need the casings. We’ll give them back their killings.” Aster shakes her head and continues:

“I’ll teach every woman how to make gunpowder. I’wana teach all of you how to shoot a gun. You have to know how to run toward them unafraid.” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 111).

In fact, Aster has a strong determination to fight enemies of her country and she urges other women to have the same stand. She says to the cook:

“We women won’t sit by while they march in to our homes,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 10).

Aster fights for the right to take up arms during the invasion. Even she has moved to the extent of wandering around mountains, villages and the surrounding areas to collect weapons for Kidane’s army. She exhorts the women of Ethiopia to do the same, eventually leading them in to battle. Aster advises women as a leader. Here is an evidence from the narrative:

“Aster becomes determined to join the fight herself. She mobilizes dozens of women and encourages them to meet Kidane and his men on the battleground,” (Maaza Mengiste 2019, p. 15).

Here, Aster is more visible than Kidane as a leader. She is also a trainer because she trains women or her followers how to shoot and how to use weapons.

Aster and her women were backbones for Kidane’s army. What they were doing was more than fighting. They supplied the army with fresh food. Not only that, they made the men stay strong and brave. In Ethiopian culture, men do not retreat while women are around; they move only forward. Unless and otherwise, they are considered as weak and coward; therefore, men do not turn back at the sight of women. There is a saying: ‘A man who is sent by a woman does not fear a death’. The women pick up the ones who fall down; drag away the body of the dead; and Aster advises them to use every part of their body to help the army including their voices. Let us take evidence from the text:

Aster gathers the women around her and says: “Kidane’s counting on us to help them stay strong and brave. Let no man retreat, run behind him and turn him around with mockery and song. Pick him up if he falls, drag his body away if he dies. Use your voice, use your arms and legs, turn your body in to a weapon the Italians will never forget. It will not be the same as fighting,” she repeats to them again and again. (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 81).

After Kidane’s death in the battle, it was Aster who led the army substituting her husband. Aster has used the war as the opportunity to be free. It was a means for her to escape from private sphere and enter in to the public affairs. As a result, she has started to think, act and decide by herself.

When Emperor Haile Selassie goes in to exile, Ethiopia has been on the verge of losing hope; however, Hirut offers a plan to maintain morale of the army. She helps disguise a gentle peasant as the Emperor and soon becomes his guard, inspiring other women to take up arms against the Italians.

Hirut's reaction as a protector of The Shadow King reveals her confidence. A peasant by the name of Minim, resembles King Haile Selassie who fled abroad during Italian invasion; therefore, Hirut and Kidane have designed a plan to give courage to the warriors. In fact, there is a great difference between where there is a leader and fighting without a leader. Haile Selassie is an emperor who should lead the battle but he has fled abroad.

There must be something that should be done to keep the warriors with their courage. Hirut and Kidane have prepared someone who looks like Haile Selassie to safeguard the warriors courage. Hirut starts to protect the Shadow King being a guard. Additionally, it is Hirut who has kept the documents that Ettore photographed, the letters and diaries. It is not a simple thing to store the documents; it is a matter of being an active historiographer. We see Hirut passing over the past history to the present in full. Hence it is Hirut who transfers the history; even the one who photographed all those documents, Ettore has not done so; he couldn't keep his documents. Rather we perceive him sending a messenger to Hirut to get the documents. Therefore, her roles are immense and more visible than the male characters.

5.3 Chapter Conclusion

In *The Shadow King* of Maaza Mengiste, the female characters: Hirut, Aster and the cook symbolizing various classes are the ones around whom the story revolves. In other words they shoulder the narrative. The cook representing conscience, she reveals the truth implementing literary devices such as flashback, foreshadowing, etc. Assisting poor Aster to escape and for the freedom of both, she confronted physical abuse that left a scar on her body. The cook, who symbolizes the anonymous women from a lower class character was severely beaten for transgressing a norm. In the same token, Hirut also who is from the lower stratum of the society plays a significant role in the war. She represents women whose patriotic contribution will not be

acknowledged in past history of Ethiopia.

Aster, who is from the upper class, portrays maternal metaphor because she reflects mother-child relation. In spite of her jealousy of Hirut she is courageous enough to stand against the patriarchal attitude that Kidane reflects. She claims that she has equal rights to her husband on property and her country. Though she suffers from the grief of loss of her son, she is determined to defend her country leading and encouraging other women.

Through her novel, Maaza is saying that those women in the war front, who shed their blood and saved their country through their heroic accomplishments, intelligence and creativity should be remembered. This novel is, therefore, written to show that behind the victory of Ethiopia in the war, there were great women, who like Hirut, could avert the disintegration of the army through their ingenious ideas, heroism and intelligence.

In a nutshell, female characters in the novel *The Shadow King* outshine their male counterparts. They are wives, mothers, leaders and more than these. Ethiopia got victory over the war because there were women who could make decisions at the right time and at the right place. There were women who did not shun their duty. In other words, Ethiopia would not have won victory over the Italian Fascist regime without the cooperation and devotion of Ethiopian women. Through her novel, Maaza also intends to show that men alone cannot make the history of their country. Maaza Mengiste tries to glorify the deeds of Ethiopian women in this novel. They played the roles of a mother, a wife and fighter. Maaza breathes life into the complex male and female characters in the story.

There were women at the war front who are devoted just like Hirut, Aster and other women longed to do more than care for the wounded and bury the dead. The female characters in Maaza's novel are the ones who know that their country needs them in the same way that it needs men. Men sacrificed themselves by shedding their blood, by crushing their bones, by cutting their flesh, so did women. According to Maaza, their sex did not hinder women from doing what men did for their country.

Maaza says: 'We're more than a wife, or a sister or a mother; we are more than all these.' Indeed, the female characters portrayed in the novel are more than these. Hence, women of the past, who shed their blood for their country, deserve recognition. History did not remember them

because they are women, who have been suppressed in the patriarchal culture. Ethiopian women of the past who, like the soldier Hirut, could safeguard Ethiopia's sovereignty with their ingenious idea of a shadow king in order to prevent the disintegration of the army should be honored. Maaza craftily shows that at the war front, there were lower class people, like Hirut, who deserved women's and men's sympathy and encouragement, but this could not take effect because class difference was another enemy that Ethiopians should have combatted for the sake of Ethiopia and the general welfare of Ethiopian people. Fact and fiction have been combined by Maaza to reflect the Ethiopian reality of the past.

CHAPTER SIX

6 A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE SELECTED TEXTS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher did a comparative analysis of the female characters in the selected narratives. A comparative analysis helps us to better understand the female characters and to probe deeply into their motivations. A comparative analysis is also used to undertake an in-depth analysis of the female characters in the narratives. It can also provide new insights about the characters and the narratives in general.

The female characters in the selected narratives live in different time periods and cultural settings. In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, the story begins in Washington D.C. That is in the 1990s. Then, the author takes readers back to events happening in Addis Ababa through flashback.

The Shadow King is about the war between Ethiopia and Italy, the invader. The war started in 1935 and ended in 1941. The novel opens with the date 1974 and the war time events are linked to the present through flashback.

6.2 Differences between the Female Characters in the Selected Texts

To begin with, the female characters in Dinaw's and Maaza's novels have different economic status. Judith in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* is economically independent because she makes her own money as an educated individual. She is a wealthy, well-educated university professor. Money has given her the power to live well.

Mrs. Davis is also another female character who is economically independent and single. Despite being a widow, she could cover all her expenses. Besides she is a representative of the Logan Circle community. She is the one who has led the opposition against so-called developers or corrupt landlords.

On the contrary, in *The Shadow King*, Aster is a married woman who depends on her husband for her living. When the cook asks Aster if he gave her money, Aster says that Kidane should come because she has nothing of her own. The cook also expresses that there is no that much difference between them. It can be evidenced from the passage like this:

“You could have left, I gave you the chance,” says Aster to the cook.

The cook looks more tired than she has in the last seven days of Aster’s absence “I’ve had enough,” the cook says...”Just give me money and let me go.”

“When we came to this house,” Aster begins, “we came here In different ways,”

The cook says, “Not so different,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 39).

Hirut was a lower class character whose priceless possession that she had inherited from her father is a rifle, which she hid under her mattress, wrapping it with sheets and blanket. However, it was snatched by Kidane. She had no power to take it back.

In the selected novels, the female characters’ reactions to men’s hegemony vary. Naomi’s father was rough so he was not in good terms with Judith. Because of his manner, Judith could not continue living with him under the same roof. So, she opted for divorce. Judith says that he is ‘a terrible husband,’ (Dinaw Mengestu 2007, p. 275). Aster, on the other hand, is a diplomat as far as her relations with her husband are concerned. Even if she does not like some of the things he is doing, she is able to convince him because she knows what to say to him and what to do. For instance, she diplomatically asks Kidane to give her the permission to go to the war front saying

“Let me go with you,” she says, “Most of us are ready, we will be your reinforcements,” she takes his hand and does not let him put it away. She presses her lips to his palm, the pressure gentle and soft. So tender he feels his heart lean toward her, remembering those days when she was someone else, someone he could comprehend. He stiffens and steps back.

“You will meet us in the valley with fresh supplies,” he responds.(Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 65).

Furthermore, Kidane has brought Hirut to their house without Aster’s consent. That is his own decision, a decision that can disrupt his relations with Aster. Although Aster never urges Kidane to send her away, she couldn’t help expressing her dissatisfaction saying:

“You brought her here after the mourning. So you could do what you pleased without gossip,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 11).

Aster does not like what Kidane does regarding Hirut. But she let it go. She has to compromise for the sake of her marriage. Compromise is a strategy that African Feminists advocate in order to bring about gender equality and harmony in marriage. Aster, in fact, is not pleased with Hirut's coming to her house. We observe this from the very beginning. Let us take an evidence from the text:

Hirut remembers something else: the day she arrived Aster met her on the veranda dressed in black. "Get her out of my house," She said to Berhe

"This is Getey and Fasil's daughter," Berhe said, "she buried both of them today, she ha no one, Kidane brought her."

"Berhe," Aster said, "is this how he intends to do things?" (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 22).

Before moving on to another issue, let us discuss what domestic violence or corporal punishment is. It affects the relations between Aster and Hirut in *The Shadow King*. Domestic violence " is a pattern of behavior in any relationship used to gain or maintain power or control over an intimate partner." It can consist of "physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person". It can be manifested through intimidation, attack or verbal abuse directed to another person. A child can also be a victim of verbal abuse. "What Is Domestic Abuse?" (n.d. : 1).

Today, there are men who believe that they should beat their wife to discipline her. Others claim that beating a wife is a sign of love ("Women's Rights and Gender Equality", (n.d. The Guardian: 1).

This article asserts that domestic violence is a global concern. It mentions the city of Kampala as an example for such type of violence. It mentions that in Kampala, "almost half of women" have experienced domestic violence directed against them by their partner. However, the community took measures to alleviate the problem of domestic violence. For this purpose, a mobilization process known as "Sasa" was implemented. This brought about "reduced levels of partner violence". The mobilization aimed at frightening men who practice domestic abuse against women.

Another article states that "spousal abuse" is common in Africa. It argues that "From Sudan to South Africa, from Mali to Mozambique, spousal abuse is among Sub-Saharan Africa's best-known and least-discussed secrets." (Buckley, n.d., : 1).

In *The Shadow King*, Aster applied domestic violence against Hirut when she realized that the girl stole her necklace. This is actually a woman physically abusing another woman. Maaza is exposing a truth that many people may not be aware of today. Aster whipped Hirut for the theft she committed. She kicked her up to the verge of death. Even the cook told her that Hirut was about to die because of the kick. Here is evidence from the novel:

“Aster has unhooked the horse whip, the one that Kidane rarely uses on the horses, Buna and Adua....Now it is in Aster’s hand and it is not the wind but this wind but this whip slicing through her.

“Please,” Hirut says. She turns over to shield her back from another blow. The tip of the whip catches her on her shoulder and grates the skin on her collarbone. The cut is a split wound filling with blood arching down on one side of her throat like a broken necklace...A warm, wet shield spread across her dress and she knows she is bleeding badly. .Aster kicks Hirut in the stomach. Hirut rolls in to her back. Coughing to breath.

‘Help me.’ The punch lands in the center of her chest and Hirut curls breathless around the new pain.”

The cook felt that beating the girl in this way is atrocious. So, she begged Aster to stop hitting. She pleads:

“Please stop, she will leave, she will go and die and never come back,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, pp. 44---45).

On the contrary, in Dinaw’s novel, we do not find any instance in which a woman abuses another woman by beating her, by inflicting corporal punishment. Aster ill-treated Hirut in many ways. She kicked her in her stomach, which made the girl miserable. She also punched her. She even employed horse whip with which she whipped her brutally. This corporal punishment left a big scar on Hirut’s body. Here is a passage from the text:

“She has been careful to hide the long scar that puckers at the base of her neck and trails over her shoulder like a broken necklace,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 8).

In *The Shadow King*, husbands also practise domestic violence on their wives. In fact, Kidane abuses Aster physically. Although Aster belongs to a higher class, she is unable to escape from

domestic violence because she is a woman. Her social class does not protect her from being victim. She has been beaten by Kidane. The following lines show this:

“He wants to reach out and strike her...It will leave her dizzy and awkward and send her to the ground in an ungainly heap.” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 82).

Though he starts to sympathize with her after their son’s death, Kidane believed that corporal punishment is right for women. Beating wives is one of harmful customs in our society. The above example can show that domestic violence which is a crime, is practiced against females in Ethiopia. It is believed that corporal punishment is one way through which unacceptable behavior is corrected. In other words, it is a way to keep females under control. Domestic violence is also practiced by women in Ethiopia. Aster applies corporal punishment up on the young girl Hirut when she has discovered that she stole her necklace.

On the contrary, in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, Judith never hits Naomi even though Naomi has the habit of running away whenever she gets hot-tempered. Judith, never thinks of applying corporal punishment to correct her daughter. Instead of punishment, Judith is trying to solve the problem in another way. She has promised her daughter to have as large space as she likes. In return, Naomi is expected not to run out of their house. Sepha, on his part, suggests ways of stopping Naomi from running away. His idea is completely different from that of Judith. He believes that a parent should chastise a child. We perceive a difference between Judith and Sepha as far their outlook is concerned. This is caused by cultural difference. Here is evidence from the text:

Judith says: “Every once in a while she manages to escape before I can stop her.”

“Have you thought of chains?” Sepha asks.

Illegal,” Judith answers.

Sepha tried another way saying: “How about a cage?”

Judith does not agree on this one, too, saying: “Still illegal.”

Sepha suggested another way:

“Sleeping pills, Tylenol PM count?”

Judith shows a slight disagreement to this one saying:

“Close enough,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 44).

Sepha's solutions are all crimes. In Judith's view, they are forms of child abuse. These are considered crimes in the American society. In Ethiopia, strict measures including corporal punishment are applied to correct a child who disobeys.

Furthermore, duality is another feature perceived in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*. It is manifested through the female character Naomi, who is biracial. She was born from a White mother and a Black father. Harmony of black and white is exhibited in Naomi, who was yearning to see good relations between the Black Sepha and the White Judith.

Both Naomi's actions and her skin color make Naomi an attractive girl. This is symbolic of the beauty of harmony. Through Naomi, Dinaw shows the effect of harmony in this story.

Naomi herself is getting on very well with Sepha. This brightened his monotonous life. She is his friend and like a daughter to him. Naomi represents duality. Dinaw himself believes in the benefits of duality. In his interview, he says that he is both an Ethiopian and an American. Duality introduces cultural diversity. It also helps to accept other people's perspectives. Naomi has learnt about duality from her mother, Judith.

6.3 Similarities between the Female Characters of the Selected texts

In both novels, the female characters have good self-esteem. Judith, Aster and Hirut are proud of who they are. Mrs. Davies and Naomi are proud of their Black identity.

In both novels, women are victims of sexual abuse and harassment. Aster has been forced to get married against her will. This is what the tradition imposes upon women. Hirut is also raped repeatedly by Kidane at the war front. Besides, both Aster and Hirut have been raped by Fuceli's soldiers. With Fuceli's command, Ettore has taken their pictures. Then these pictures have been distributed among Fuceli's men. A picture reaches Kidane and they have been freed. Sexual abuse is employed as a weapon in the battlefield. Italian soldiers have used sexual abuse in order to humiliate and frustrate Ethiopian soldiers.

In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, Judith also faces sexual harassment in spite of her status. Even her daughter, Naomi is prone to sexual harassment. To avert this threat, Judith had to accompany her daughter to Sepha's shop. Here, the point is that wherever there are women and whoever they are, sexual harassment is inevitable.

In both novels, the female characters are known for determination and decision-making. They perform agential acts. Judith, Aster and Hirut have a firm stand with regard to the goal they intend to achieve. Gentrification and patriotism require courage, bravery and devotion.

Mobilizing the community is perceived in both narratives. Mrs. Davis, in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* mobilizes the Logan Circle community to stand against eviction of the permanent residents. She is the leader and organizer of the meeting in which the community demands the city council to investigate the illegal evictions by developers. Let us consider the following evidence:

“Mrs. Davis opened the meeting to anyone who wanted to speak,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 270).

Similarly, Aster mobilizes women to actively participate in the war. She is a good and resourceful leader who has taught the women how to shoot and how to reuse the bullets that Italians had already used. She organizes the women to be supporters and warriors too. Here is a passage from the novel:

“Now Aster who will hurry toward the back of the line as she’s done for the last two days of their march. She will encourage the women carrying water supply with food. The women are the ones who will carry the wounded, bury the dead, and feed Kidane’s army,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 47).

As far as women’s agency is concerned, it is worth examining the female characters’ roles in history. In *The Shadow King*, Hirut, the former maid and the latter soldier, keeps the documents that Ettore collected during the war. She puts away the letters, diaries and photographs almost for four decades. She keeps all these in the metal box. She, therefore, plays the role of a histographer. Similarly, Judith in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* is a political history professor of the 19th century. Since she is at the status of professorship, she carries out research on 19th century American political history. Sepha has searched for her name in both local and Congress Libraries and given his testimony about Judith saying:

“Judith McMasterson. Author of one book *America’s Repudiation of the past*, and several dozen scholarly arguments that had titles such as ‘Tocqueville’s Legacy on American Poetics, Writing Against History, Nineteenth Century American Writers Search for Place, Silencing America’s Poets, The Grammar of Poetic History.’ I read fragments from each one, including several

chapters from her book. She was a harsh, passion-filled academic,” (Dinaw Mengestu, 2007, p. 214.)

In this case in both narratives, the women have a direct connection with history. Hirut and Judith do significant contribution in transferring historical knowledge to the next generation.

The female characters in both narratives have interest in social change. That is, Judith reflects in her writing and arguments; moreover, she attempts to change Logan Circle through gentrification. Similarly, Aster strives for gender equality although society resists. Aster believes that women should have equal rights with men. She demonstrates that a woman is more than a wife. She is a mother, a friend and a helpmeet. Even Kidane witnesses that Aster has been changed through times. Aster whom Kidane knows before is completely different from Aster whom he knows at present. Even he does not understand her because she is different with different attitude. She is a type of character who struggles for her right. Let us look at his expression from the passage:

“So tender he feels his heart lean toward her, remembering those days when she was someone else, someone he could comprehend,” (Maaza Mengiste, 2019, p. 65).

Both Dinaw and Maaza deal with motherhood in their novels. We see Sepha’s mother and Aster sacrificing their precious possessions for their children though there is a difference in line with purpose. Aster has burned every jewelry and clothes to show her despair whereas Sepha’s mother has given all her jewelry to help Sepha escape from the brutal military force. Sepha describes his mother while she has handed him her jewelry and sending him away in grief like this:

“I can see all of that just as clearly as I can still see the look on my mother’s face as she handed me all of her jewelry in a red cloth sack and begged me to leave. There she is with deep bags under her eyes, her long black hair tied in a loose bun, the white blanket she’s wrapped herself in rising up and down with her deep breaths,” (Dinaw Mengestu 2007, P. 237.)

Judith also spends the money she has to please her daughter. She gives her daughter as large space as she wants in their renewed building. For the sake of her daughter, she sacrifices not only her money but also her time and knowledge. However, motherhood for Judith is a source of satisfaction and happiness. But for Sepha’s mother and Aster, it is a painful experience. Judith sees the fruit of trying to please Naomi as Naomi has been growing into a smart girl, who can understand adults’ perspective even though she is eleven years old.

6.4 Chapter Conclusion

The female characters in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *The Shadow King* exhibit differences and similarities. The female characters belong to different cultural backgrounds. Yet, in both novels, they are conscious of their selfhood.

In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, *Judith* is a proud mother, who is devoted to her daughter. However, motherhood acquires a different picture when it comes to Sepha's mother and Aster. Motherhood is a cause of incurable grief for Aster Sepha's mother fate is similar to Aster's. She sacrificed precious jewels to give Sepha a future. In both narratives, we have determined women, who know what they are doing. In *The Shadow King*, the female characters do not have the educational opportunity as *Judith*, but they are intelligent and creative like her.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary

This chapter presents a summary and discusses the findings of the study. *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *The Shadow King* are written by Ethiopian diaspora writers who recreate past history by blending fiction and reality. *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* links two worlds through portraying the socio-political problems of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, and the problems immigrants face in the United States. To their dismay, immigrants experience alienation, racism and nostalgia in a foreign country. Maaza's *The Shadow King* focuses on Mussolini's war waged against Ethiopia. Maaza celebrates the forgotten deeds and valor of Ethiopian women warriors, which history failed to record. Both novelists champion the rights of women.

7.2 Findings

The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears and *The Shadow King* have been examined from the perspective of poststructuralist feminism. Both writers portray female characters that are audacious and intelligent. In both novels, the female characters object to oppression of women in the patriarchal culture. Dinaw's and Maaza's female characters are more visible than their counter part male characters.

However, Dinaw's female characters Judith and her daughter Naomi are not Ethiopians; therefore, Dinaw has made the feminist issue global. In Maaza's text, all the female characters are Ethiopians and they also perform agential acts. Similarly, in Dinaw's novel, Judith exercises agency. The findings also reveal that the female protagonists in the selected novels are developing, dynamic, changing characters rather than stereotypes in spite of the fact that the novels are set in the patriarchal society. Smart and sharp-minded female characters have come forward in contemporary works by African writers. As Nagarajan (2006: 21) puts it Black women writers are nowadays portraying female characters capable of independent action. Maaza Mengiste is one of these female writers. Dinaw portrays

female characters that are voices of immigrants, and stand against victimhood of women in patriarchy. In the selected texts, we witness changing images of women.

Both novels revolve around the theme that power and knowledge, or education can liberate women from the grip of patriarchal oppression. Maaza uses the incident in which Hirut's father passes on the gun to his daughter. This is significant since it symbolizes power and authority. In *The Shadow King*, Hirut reclaims the power and authority denied to women by deciding to retaliate against Kidane for confiscating the gun given to her by her father. It is also worth noting that Hirut's father stands for the rights and freedom of women.

A weapon in this story symbolizes power and authority. The patriarchal system advocates that power and authority belong to men not women because a woman's place is at home to care for household. Through her novel, Maaza subverts this patriarchal tradition. Similarly, Dinaw subverts patriarchal tradition by showing that Judith could speak at the meeting of Logan Circle.

Women, in the patriarchal society used to be prohibited from inheritance. They were not allowed to inherit their parents' property including land. That is to say, they were dispossessed from their parents' property which was divided only among sons. Gun or any armor was considered as a sign of power and authority, in Ethiopians culture. By all means, horses and weapons, were given to a son without any question. When Maaza writes about Hirut's wujigra /a kind of gun/, she intended to transfer the message that women should have power and authority and they should also have the right to possess weapons and fight for their country's freedom just like men do. Furthermore, the passing on of the gun to Hirut is a symbolic act which demonstrates the change that is taking place in the Ethiopian society with regard to women and inheritance. The act of Hirut's father defies the long-held attitude towards women.

In *The Shadow King*, Maaza's focus is on her land of origin though she lives in America and is a citizen of America. Dinaw, on his part, creatively shows the consequences of The Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 in his novel *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*. Therefore, one of the diaspora's focus is their origin and their root as Cohen (1997: 7) puts it.

In *The Shadow King*, Maaza also uses an element of Greek classical tragedy, the chorus. The chorus in this novel insists that Aster should not defy a long-held marriage tradition by going back to her parents' house. The chorus acts as perpetrator of traditional norms and moral values. This element makes Maaza's novel different from Dinaw's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*.

Documentation is another element in Maaza's fictional work. The characters play the role of informers. Furthermore, inanimate things such as photographs, letters, diaries and the like are part of the story. They provide invaluable historical information to readers.

In Maaza's narrative, we also witness the presence of conscience as a character. 'The Cook' who is unnamed in the whole story represents 'conscience'. 'The Cook' knows everything; she is like an omniscient character. She informs about what has happened in the past and what will happen in the future. Everything she tells us is true. However, in the case of *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* the 'conscience' is inside of the characters. That is to say, though they know the truth, they say it to themselves. We don't perceive 'consciousness in flesh as in *The Shadow King*.

Furthermore, the settings in Maaza's novels are all in Ethiopia. In spite of living in America and being an American citizen, Maaza is nostalgic about the country of origin. She intends to recreate past history by writing based on what she has heard and what she has read about Ethiopia.

In Dinaw's novel, not all the settings are located in the land of his origin, Ethiopia. In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* in which he reveals the cruelty of the Derg regime in Ethiopia, the protagonist character reminisces what happened in the past being in the United States of America. Addis Ababa is his memory of city.

Both Dinaw and Maaza raise the issue of motherhood. Judith metaphorically represents the mother who is the rock and shield of her daughter. On the other hand, in Maaza's novel, the bond between mother and son is emphasized through the grief metaphor. Motherhood in this novel is linked with suffering and despair of the mother, which is caused by loss.

The researcher also found out that both Maaza and Dinaw champion women's rights. They desire that women should be treated equally in the patriarchal society. The female protagonists in the selected texts are rational beings. They are characters who can contribute a lot to the welfare of their society. They have active social roles for that matter. They take the initiative in their social roles. They are not restricted to the private sphere.

Generally, in the selected texts, we perceive female characters who also challenge women's inequality by exercising agency in all social spheres. To put it in Kristeva's words, the female characters are neither passive nor submissive. They are determined to achieve their goals.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Josephine Reed of The National Endowment for the Arts on February 7 2014 interviewed Dinaw Mengestu about *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*. Here is the interview in full.

Josephine Reed: What inspired this book?

Dinaw Mengestu: This book was inspired by a series of different narratives in my own life..... The story of Sepha Stephanos became the story of my family, became the character through which I could talk about the death of my uncle. He was the character through which I could talk about the immigrant experience in America, and then also at the same time there is a lot of my own history inside of Washington, DC.

JR: His friendships with Kenneth and Joseph, both of whom have come from Africa, were very compelling.

DM: The dynamics between Sepha, Joseph, and Kenneth are born out of a strange empty space to some degree. All three characters have lost their homes, are sort of isolated, lonely men, and yet together the three of them manage to again create the sort of surrogate little family around Sepha's store, and it's probably the only community that any of them have. And yet at the same time you can get a sense within that community that not only are they supporting each other, but they're also constantly performing for each-other.

JR: Naomi is an odd little girl. She's very, very independent. Why don't you describe her?

DM: Naomi's a very precocious child. She walks into Sepha's store one day and by doing so kind of automatically claims him as hers, and their relationship really unfolds from there. She's a child and yet she's also the one I think who dictates how their relationship is performed. And for Sepha there's a great relief in that, because finally here is someone that he can fully be himself with. Their relationship unfolds over these evenings and afternoons spent reading stories and sharing stories, and it's really through Naomi that Sepha begins to come alive and Naomi symbolically to some degree; not to talk about your characters as

symbols, but she does represent the sort of duality of the novel. She is both—she has an African father and an American mother, and to some degree I think Sepha's able to attach himself other because a lot of the anxieties of race are diminished in someone like her.

JR: Did your parents create an Ethiopian family in Peoria?

DM: My parents didn't strive to create an Ethiopian household in the States because I think they were too busy trying just to create a house. There weren't other Ethiopian families that we could spend time with and I think there was also a concern about becoming American, not for themselves but really for us. My parents wanted to make sure that we had the fluency of language, that we had the sort of cultural knowledge that we would need, and so growing up our childhoods were sort of strangely Ethiopian in the house and yet at the same time completely American outside of it.

JR: And was it when you came to Georgetown that you were able to assert or figure out what it meant to be and American with Ethiopian lineage?

DM: There was the battle of whether or not you were going to be African American or just American, and your name was strange and people didn't know how to pronounce it, and so I always struggled with the sense of not knowing exactly who I was or what I was supposed to say when people asked me where I was from. And I would say some of that began to resolve itself in college but really I think it was the act of writing that gave me the ability to say, "I'm both completely American and I'm Ethiopian as well." You begin to write your way into the world.I think I've come to believe that one of the more remarkable things about America is that it allows for that duality. You don't actually have to choose sides; there are no sides to be chosen. America is a country sort of comprised of multiple narratives and that's part of its beauty and its grace, and so for me to say I'm American doesn't exclude my Ethiopian background and heritage by any means.

JR: You're also known for your nonfiction writing. You've written journalistic pieces for Harper's, Rolling Stone, The Wall Street Journal, mostly about Africa. How did that door open up for you?

DM: In the novel, Joseph, Kenneth, and Sepha spend part of their evenings playing a game around the dictators and coups throughout Africa's history, and part of the reason why they play that game is because I used to spend a lot of time in college researching the different histories of African coups and African dictatorships. And while doing so I

became incredibly frustrated with not only the number of coups that had happened in Africa since the end of the colonial era but about our perception and understanding of them. We tend not to realize that these events are really the products of individual men who have chosen to make politics into something else, who have chosen a path of violence rather than democracy. So I was speaking with an editor at Rolling Stone about the situation in Sudan and Darfur at that time and expressing my general frustration that this very complicated political story has basically been cast in the Western media as the story of hell, that Darfur was a hellish place and people were sort of fighting this ethnic conflict and battle. I thought the story was much more complicated than that. I'm always interested in trying to find who the characters are behind these conflicts as a way of exposing not just the men responsible for them but as a way of saying, "We can understand these narratives, right. They're not so distinct or separate from our own political histories."

(<https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Reader-Resources-BeautifulThingsHeavenBears-revised.pdf>)

Appendix 2

In this interview, the interaction is between Maaza and two journalists, Kendra and Autumn. The interview is presented as follows.

Kendra: Hello, I'm Kendra Winchester, here with Autumn Privett. And this is Reading Women, a podcast inviting you to reclaim half the bookshelf by discussing books written by or about women. And today we're talking to Maaza Mengiste about her book *THE SHADOW KING*, which is out now from W.W. Norton.

Autumn: So we first saw this week at Book Expo way back earlier this year. And the cover, since we're suckers for beautiful covers, the cover is what drew us in. But oh, man, this book is big and beautiful. And it just covers so many things I never even thought about before.

Kendra: I never heard of, let alone read, a novel about the Ethiopian-Italian conflict during World War II until this book. And I mean, it's a really fabulous way to enter the topic.

Autumn: Like you just said, this is a part of World War II history that I think was literally glossed over in my history books. And so it's. Like, a novel is such a great way

to learn about areas of history like this that you might not have known about previously. And this one is a beautiful, sweeping, mesmerizing story that I just couldn't put down, which is always a bonus.

Kendra: It's definitely a type of novel where you read it and then you want to go read all of the nonfiction things about it, for sure. Maybe that's just the history nerds in us. But that's definitely how we felt.

Autumn: Basically.

Kendra: So a little bit about Maaza Mengiste, she is a novelist and an essayist. And so her debut novel was *BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE*, which looks at a different part of Ethiopian history. And she says in our interview that *THE SHADOW KING* is a sort of prequel of *BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE*, which I didn't know until she said it. So that's amazing. So *BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE* was selected by *The Guardian* as one of the 10 best contemporary African books and named one of the best books of 2010 by the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Boston Globe*, and other publications. And she's a Fulbright scholar, which we talk about, and she's been

published in all of the places and just generally a very prolific writer. And THE SHADOW KING has recently been optioned for film. So she has all the things going on.

Autumn: So without further ado, here's our conversation with Maaza Mengiste about THE SHADOW KING.

Kendra: Well, welcome, Maaza, welcome to the podcast. We are so excited to have you on.

Maaza: Oh, it's great to be here. Thank you.

Autumn: We were so excited to actually read your book because we first saw it at Book Expo way, way, way, way, way back this spring. And so we waited a long time to get to read it, and it definitely did not disappoint. So we're excited to get to talk to you about it and to share it with our listeners as well.

Maaza: Oh, thank you. Thank you.

Autumn: So before we get into talking about the book itself, for our listeners who have not yet read THE SHADOW KING, could you describe it for them?

Maaza: Sure. Well, THE SHADOW KING is set during Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 in an attempt to colonize the last remaining free country in Africa. It was . .

. . It is thought by many historians to have been the first real battles of World War II. I grew up with these stories of a poorly equipped Ethiopian army charging against a very, very advanced military, European military, and winning after five years. The story is set around that period. But one thing I discovered while researching this war was that women were very involved. In fact, more involved than I had thought. And in my book, I focus on women who joined the front lines in Ethiopia to fight against the Italian fascists. The story also involves both sides of the battle lines. I was really interested in what it was like to be a woman in war, but also how the men responded to that. And then I was interested in telling the story, also, from the Italian perspective. I've woven those threads throughout the book.

Kendra: I didn't realize a lot of Ethiopian history until one of our contributors, Bezi, is Ethiopian American. And so she did a "Read Ethiopian" week and featured THE SHADOW KING. And so she was talking about it and made us really excited to pick it up. Having this novel in the backdrop just makes it immediately like, oh, of course, we need to read this book because I do feel like that is definitely a story that, about World War II in particular, that I hadn't heard before. And I feel like a lot of us have read a lot of World War II books before.

Maaza Yeah. You know, it's fascinating. I mean, even as an Ethiopian child growing up in Ethiopia, I understood how powerful the story was. You know, all the experiences of people from my grandparents' age and even a little bit earlier, I heard those stories growing up, but I never understood fully, until I was doing this research, how pivotalis this battle or this war was an on a global framework. This was part of world history, not just Ethiopian history and not just Italian history. Everybody was watching what was going to happen. And it was helping to decide who would be on the allied side and who would beon the axis side once World War II really kicked in.

Kendra So this is your second novel, correct?

Maaza Yes, it is.

Kendra And so your first novel, BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE, I believe thatwas. Is that also historical fiction?

Maaza It is. And that's set in 1974, during the early years of Marxist-backed revolution in Ethiopia that would eventually deposed Emperor Haile Selassie, who featuresalso in my book, the second book that's set in 1935. In some ways I consider that THE SHADOW KING, a prequel to BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE. It involves some similar characters from 1974. They show up forty years younger in 1935. And, you know, writing about the revolution of 1974, I became really curious about the way that, I guess, people live with memories of war, of conflict, of trauma in all its various forms. What happened decades later when the country erupts again, this time in a civil conflict? I wanted to figure out what were these characters like in 1935, and might that help me understand who they were by 1974? And so I'm looking at history as a continuum in both these books, but really also looking at the ways that my characters develop over the decades.

Autumn: Oh, man, I've not read your first book. And now I need to read it immediately after reading this one.

Maaza: Well, you get a hint of this with Hirut. You know, I opened the book in 1974. I opened the second book in 1974. And then we go back to 1935. And so, even without having read the first book, you get a sense of how a character carries all thesedifferent kinds of wars with her over the decades. And in 1974, she's forced to confront aspects of 1935. This is how the book opens. And again, I'm asking these questions of, how do we travel with our memories? How do women continue to live in the body that hasbeen in some ways not fully in

their control while they were growing up? And I think these are questions that Hirut in 1974 finally, finally confronts. And I won't say too much more.

Autumn: No, definitely. So that's really interesting, especially because this story was inspired by stories about your great-grandmother, is that correct?

Maaza: Yes. Yes. And again, you know, I did not know this story about my great-grandmother until I had already—basically, I had written Hirut. I had found these women in history. It happened to be in Ethiopia. And I was talking to my mother about my latest discovery of a photograph of a woman in uniform with a rifle. And she just casually mentioned, "Well, what about your great-grandmother?" And I had no clue at that point.

And I've been to Ethiopia several times even before then. My mother has been on research road trips with me. We have had conversations. And when she said that, at first, I wasn't sure that I heard right. And I asked her to repeat herself. And she said, "Well, of course, your great-grandmother!" And so my great-grandmother, when there was a mobilization call throughout Ethiopia in 1935

Haile Selassie is definitely sure that the Italians will be attacking. There will be a war. He says every every able-bodied person, the eldest child of every family, get your weapon and come to war. Come to enlist in the front line.

Maaza: And my great-grandmother was the eldest of four children. She had three brothers who were much too young to be fighting. Her father was too old, but she was still a girl. She was not a full adult. And in fact, she was in an arranged marriage with an adult man. And she was too young to live with him and be his wife. So she was young. Her father wanted to give his old rifle to her husband so that the husband could go and represent the family. And she said, No. First, she didn't like the guy. She would eventually leave him and marry somebody else. But she said, "He's not getting my gun. That's mine. The call was for the eldest person in the family. I'm going to go and represent the family." Her husband—or her father refused. So she took him to court. And in front of the village judges plead her case. She won and took the gun and went to the front lines. And I did not know the story until not very long ago.

Autumn : That is such an amazing story. I'm surprised your mom could not have mentioned it for so long.

Maaza: It made me think about the ways that the stories of women are told. Because I had heard about every single man in my family who had been involved in this war. I had heard those stories again and again. I'm not sure why people did not speak of the women. Now that

the book has come out, now that I've shared my great-grandmother's story, what has been really interesting to me is at different readings, people will come to me and say—Ethiopians will come and say, "I checked with my family, and my grandmother was in the war" or "This aunt did fight." So people are starting to come and share those moments, but they didn't know either. And it makes me wonder how the stories of women are passed down. And maybe they're talked about in kitchens and then around coffee, moments when women will get together and relive memories. But those stories never leave those sections of the home that are reserved for women, or have been traditionally in Ethiopia. And that is really. It has been an interesting question for me to think about as this book has been out, you know, going out into the world, and I'm getting more of these stories from other people.

Kendra: My mind is just blown away by this history. And as we were reading for this interview, you know, Bezi sent me an article on Lit Hub, and in it I believe you quote Svetlana Alexievich, who says, "Everything we know about war, we know with 'a man's voice.'" And what you're talking about, I feel like it just encapsulates that, that what we know about war comes from men's perspectives. But your book tackles what war looks like from a woman's perspective in this way.

Maaza I: really have been indebted to the writings of Svetlana Alexievich. I kept coming back to this thing that she had said, this man's voice. And what does it mean to talk about war in a man's voice? And I realized that when we share stories of war, and we immediately speak about—I guess we speak of, when we imagine these soldiers or warriors always as male figures, always in uniform—

We understand and we speak about the brutalities of it, which are the physical confrontations on the field. I started thinking about a woman's voice speaking about her ideas of war. A woman's war is not only the battlefield with all of those same bloody and difficult confrontations and with all its moral ambiguity. But the woman's war also extends to the camp, to where she sleeps, to how freely she can sleep, how undisturbed her body is once it's off the battlefield. And once I began to realize that's what it means to be a woman in conflict, Hirut's story, Aster's story, the stories of and the cook and all the women in my book really started to come alive.

Autumn: I think that something that is so interesting to think about, especially because it's like, I know here in the US, there's been a lot of talk about whether women have a place in war and

should they be fighting and all those kinds of things. And the women in THE SHADOW KING are so resilient. They're so brave. I mean, not without being flawless or without their their own fears and things like that. And you show that very well in the novel, this interplay between like masculinity and femininity and how it plays out in the war. What were some of the things that you wanted to examine as far as that goes, as far as resilience and how men and women may react differently in wartime?

Maaza: I wanted to examine It was this question of women in some ways pushing their way into a space where some thought that they didn't belong, which was really quite literally the front lines. But also, what some of my characters were doing in the book was, you know, they were saying, "Not only can we fight, but we deserve the same respect as everyone else on the battlefield." And I know that Aster, with her determination to, frankly, she wants to raise an army. She wants to be in the front. She wants to be a commanding officer of her own group of women. She's demanding respect from her husband, who has his army. She's demanding respect not only as a soldier, but as his wife. You know, she was fighting two different battles here, but it's under the guise of war, under military terms. But she is demanding a respect from him that she feels she never got because she was also in an arranged marriage with him. She had no choices in who she could marry and what would happen to her once she was married to him. And when this war comes, she uses it as her opportunity to become something other than this man's wife.

Kendra: Recently, a co-host and I, Sumaiyya, talked about a collection of essays called OUR WOMEN ON THE GROUND, which looks at Arab women reporting from the Arab world. And one of the first essays talks about the uniqueness of women's perspective during war. In this case, it was that these women were survivors. And so they were the ones left to tell the story. But in this case, this one is, I feel like, a very much active in the combat and in that way. And we've talked a lot about women's voices during wartime. What was something unique about women's voices during wartime that you discovered while writing this novel?

The things I realized was their perspective on the many ways that a body could be injured. I think men..... There was a double awareness of the fragility of the body. For a woman, I started to think, you know, I remember quite literally writing this battle scene and saying, well, how is Hirut understanding this as opposed to the way Kidane or one of the other male fighters is understanding this particular battle? And I began to understand

that when she was in battle, she was also carrying with her this body that had been abused and subjugated by the man who was leaving the army. And she began to understand that there is more than one battlefield here. She just happened to inhabit one.

Maaza: And I understood then that all of these women were well aware that if they were captured as prisoners of war, or if something happened to them and they were in the hands of the Italians, what they would face would also be something equal to and also very different from what the men would face as prisoners of war. They, if either group survived, if either the men or the women were kept alive I began to understand that double burden of being both soldier and a vigilant protector of yourself. And I think there's one point in the book when Hirut is in battle and that—I don't know what to call it—but those two dueling identities really crashed down on her. And she wonders, "What can I do? Am I a soldier? Or am I just this girl or this young woman at this moment? Which body am I in?" And at some point she realizes the only way to stop the pain of being this woman that has to go back and deal with another kind of battle in the military, in her camp, is to maybe really be a soldier and just die in the field. It really forced this reckoning with me also about how to speak of soldiers and the military and misogyny and war all at once.

Autumn: Something else too, so the title of the book is THE SHADOW KING. And as I was reading, I started to pick up on the many different types of shadows that are in the book. You know, there's this one scene where the emperor is looking at his shadow and how strong his shadow looks. And the photographer, Ettore, he's talking about shadows as it relates to photography. A lot of the things that happened to Hirut happened in the shadows, like those kinds of things. And then the actual shadow king himself. When did you know that shadows would become such a big theme in this story? Or did it just kind of come out organically as you were writing it?

Maaza: That's a good question. I realized at some point writing my first book that I was really, even in that book, really starting to think of scenes and moments and characters in terms of shadowing and grayness and light and dark. I was already moving into that way of speaking, and those metaphorical—I don't know what to call them—but those metaphors when I started thinking about this book. And then I had started to also think about the ways that photography was used during this war to create a very specific narrative about Ethiopians, about Africans, about colonialism, about Italians. I started understanding that I really could push these ideas I

was thinking about in terms of shadowing, shadows, a photographer working with light and dark. But then he himself is being a completely ambiguous character, kind of living in this gray world of complicity and also lacking certain freedoms. And so I wanted It felt very natural once I started thinking about photographs and images. But another thing I was thinking about was there is a saying in Ethiopia that an emperor is a sun unto his people. And I knew, according to history, that Haile Selassie had left Ethiopia very early on in the whole conflict with Italy. And then suddenly I imagined this country in shadow. And what would emerge, I imagine, was a king that was of that shadow.

Autumn: I love that. I love like I love themes like that, especially when they come so organically from the story. And now that you've mentioned it, like you're right, so many of the characters are living in this shadowy space where you're not really sure what to think about them yet. That's so cool.

Kendra: There's so much depth to the novel and the historical events that you've mentioned, and I believe you received a Fulbright Fellowship to go research this novel. At any time did you ever consider writing a nonfiction kind of narrative about this or were you really just looking at the medium of a novel?

Maaza: I was really looking at the novel form because I know how World War II is just a gigantic field of study. And I know that even this part that took five years of of Ethiopian and world history was really complicated. It is really complicated. There are still things to learn and discover from it. And I, at some point, I knew already I was going to write a novel. The question for me, though, was how indebted to historical research would I be in this book?

Maaza: I thought initially that I would be re-rendering, re-describing very specific battles looming over the course of the war, the way that the war unfolded, tracking my characters and—mind you, when I was first researching this, I did not know about the female soldiers—so I imagined these men that I would follow, these historical figures, and a few fictional characters, and composites of certain people. And I would basically lay out the general trajectory of this war in a novel form with a lot of history and historical data. A lot of research. I wrote that book, and it was the most boring book. It was painful to go through. It was so bad by the time I got to the end. And I remember the day I finished and I said, "This sucks. It's terrible. And I can't publish it like this." It was not.....It had nothing of the excitement, the myth, the legend that I imagined when I was first hearing about

the story as a child.

Maaza: And I did a complete revision. Really got rid of that draft and started saying, "Whose story is this? Whose story is this? Who wants to tell their story and why?" As I was thinking that, I had already rendered Hirut. I'd already created Aster. But they had always been in the background. And Hirut stepped forward quite literally. She does seem to step and say, "This is my story, but you're not listening to me." And I went back to the drawing board. And I said, "All right. Let's see. What happened to Hirut? And, you know, what am I not seeing here?"

Maaza: And the first clue, the first kind of eureka moment I had with this re-visioning of it was the understanding that women, traditionally in Ethiopia, followed behind the men as they were going off to war. They carried water. They carried heavy things. But they also tended to the wounded. They collected the dead from battlefields. There were no dead left. You know, they were buried. They were taken care of. They fed the army. They did all of those tasks so that men could focus on fighting. They ran behind the men in battle. And if there was anyone that wanted to turn around and retreat, the women were right behind them, singing songs, mocking them. And, you know, according to my mom and several other people, the taunts that they hurled at the men was so humiliating that it was better to just keep charging than to go back.

Maaza And I started thinking about these women, even in the ways that we knew that they were involved in war. I began to understand that as the Italians are dropping poison on human beings, the women were not exempt from that. They were right in the line of fire as the tanks were coming in and shooting into the fields. The women were catching that. As the artillery was going off, the women were subjected to the same bullets as men. And I understood that, my god, even if they weren't "in the front lines," they were in the war, and they were facing the brunt of it. And no one ever really discussed that. And then slowly, I started finding threads and soldiers, letters, diaries, photographs that depicted or talked about a woman in war. I found headlines in The New York Times and different newspapers about a woman whose husband was killed in action. She runs up, takes his gun, and leads two thousand of his men into battle. And I said, why didn't I ever hear about this? And this is really where the book started to come alive in this new revisioning. And Hirut took the lead.

Autumn Well, I think that the novel format is perfect for this story. And it is not boring. I sat down one night only planning to read a couple pages and ended up reading more than 100. It's

like, very late. I mean, I was so drawn in by these characters. You alluded to earlier the way that you kind of wove the different narratives together. It really put it into stark contrast for me. Like how tangled together and in conflict these people's lives were, you know, on so many different levels. But I thought it was interesting, too, that you also divide it into three separate books within a book. So I was wondering, like, what was your process for establishing the rhythm and structure of the novel in this revision that you were kind of talking about?

Maaza Yeah, that was one of the central questions. How far do I move into the war? How do I divide up these five years? The pace of the writing, the different POVs that I was incorporating. I felt in some ways, I don't need to tell the full five years of the war, not the chronological time. But I do need to follow each of these characters and tell their own particular wars. And so I focus on individual—I don't want to say timelines—but I focus on the individual rhythms, the rhythms of these individual characters as opposed to rhythms of war. And the beats in a war. And I started understanding that each of them, in particular Hirut, but all of them, there were certain moments of their lives in those years that I was covering that seemed to coincide with each other.

Maaza The book begins with, I think, waiting. Of course it's not. I opened the book forty years after the war. And this is Hirut getting ready to meet somebody. But there's much more than It's much more than one person she's waiting for. She's in some ways waiting for resolution to happen in that space. And then there's invasion. And that's just natural. Everybody's getting ready for that. So I have these breaks that seemed very naturally. I think it fit very naturally into the beats of each of these characters' lives. And I worked with that and divided the book up in those sections. The war itself went through certain phases. But I was really interested in the phases of these people.

Kendra And that is just incredible. And I'm just trying to wrap my mind and visualize the structure of this book. And it's so well crafted. So congratulations on such a well-written novel, and I hope all of our listeners go and pick it up. So before we let you go, we wanted to ask you, are there any Ethiopian or Ethiopian American women writers that our listeners should definitely know about and pick up?

Maaza Oh, yes, definitely enough. Nafkote Tamirat is a new writer who just published her book recently, *THE PARKING LOT ATTENDANT*. Incredible. And Meron Hadero is an incredibly interesting and wonderful writer who's been winning short story awards and has

some short stories in different anthologies. I think she's definitely one to watch. And she has a book that will be out. There is a Canadian writer, Ethiopian Canadian writer, Rebecca Fisseha. And she has a new book that just came out. And Mahtem Shiferraw is a poet and just absolutely fantastic. And I edited an anthology with Akashic Books called ADDIS ABABA NOIR, and it's coming out in August, next August, and it will feature fourteen fighting writers living in Ethiopia and outside of it. And I think that's something that people should definitely pick up. And it's in another way to introduce writers to a wider audience from Ethiopia.

Autumn Well, all of those sound amazing. You just mentioned the collection you edited. But is there anything else that you have forthcoming or are working on that you would like for our listeners to know about?

Maaza You know, I'm I'm right in the middle of this book tour, but I am really looking forward to starting on book three. I can't talk too much about it, but that is going to be my next major project. But what I will let everyone know is that THE SHADOW KING has just been optioned by Atlas Entertainment. They are working on making it into a movie. So I think listeners should look out for that. That is going to be really exciting to see how this unfolds.

Kendra Well, that does sound fabulous. And congratulations on that, and on the new project and Thank you so much. Thank you.

Autumn, Thank you, Maaza, for coming into the podcast and talking with us about THE SHADOW KING. We definitely loved reading it. And it was just so great to get to talk to you about it as well.

Maaza Oh, it was such a pleasure to talk to you. Thank you so much. Thank you.

Kendra We'd like to thank Maaza Mengiste for talking to us about her novel, THE SHADOW KING, which is out now from W.W. Norton. You can find Maaza Mengiste on her website, maazamengiste.com. And on Twitter (@maazamengiste) and on her Instagram (@theshadowkingnovel). And of course, all of her information will be linked in our show notes.

Autumn We would like to say a special thank you to our patrons, whose support makes this podcast possible. You can find Reading Women at readingwomenpodcast.com and on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). Thank you all so much for listening. And we'll talk to you next time.

<https://lithub.com/maaza-mengiste-on-women-pushing-to-the-front-lines-of-conflict/>