

**Addis Ababa University**  
**School of Graduate Studies**  
**College of Humanities, Language Studies,**  
**Journalism and Communication**

**Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures**

**A Thematic Analysis of Beneath the Lion's Gaze**

**and**

**Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia**

**By Dereje Mulugeta**

**May 25, 2012**

**Addis Ababa University**

**School of Graduate Studies**

**Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures**

**A Thematic Analysis of Beneath the Lion's Gaze**

**and**

**Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia**

**By DerejeMulugeta**

**May 25, 2012**

**A Thematic Analysis of Beneath the Lion's Gaze and Held at a  
Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia**

**By DerejeMulugeta**

**A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Foreign Language and Literature in  
Partial Fulfillment for the requirement of Master of Art in Literature**

**May 25, 2012**

**Addis Ababa**

**Addis Ababa University**

**School of Graduate Studies**

**Department of Foreign Language and Literature**

**A Thematic Analysis of Beneath the Lion's Gaze and Held at a  
Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia**

**By DerejeMulugeta**

**Approved by: Board of Examiners**

_____	_____	_____
<b>Advisor</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
_____	_____	_____
<b>Examiner</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
_____	_____	_____
<b>Examiner</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>

## **Acknowledgements**

My first, heartfelt thanks go to my advisor, Dr. Melakneh Mengistu who gave me many insightful suggestions and constructive comments that have made this thesis far better than it would have been otherwise. The sacrifice he has endured to see the completion of this thesis is considerable. Thanks to several friends and families for their tremendous moral support during my studies. Finally, I want to say thank you for all my graduate programme instructors for their remarkably meaningful investment. The best investment in life is to educate others. May the God of all good deeds reward you.

## Abstract

This research work is based on thorough reading and careful analysis of “Beneath the Lion’s Gaze and Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia” which are written by Ethiopian-American female Diasporic writers Maaza Mengiste and Rebecca Hail respectively. First, it aims to publicize the works of the remarkable involvement of female writers in a number of different political, social, cultural and economic issues at different levels. Second, it is designed to fill the gap (i.e, scarcity of diasporic research works) through *a thematic analysis of the* literary product of these authors. Hopefully, it would be an additional meaningful contribution to this genre.

It mainly focuses on the political instability and economic crisis, the unimaginable commitments of the national icons or the amazing few who are determined to sacrifice their life for others, the secret of the ideal family bond, the importance of cherished traditional values, the major predicaments of the diasporas in the host land and the temptation of being drawn to the mother land. These diasporas are facing a wide variety of tremendous challenges, setbacks since the first generation diaspora. The analysis of the two literary works also reveals how much the diasporas were deprived of their national identity; and how they were torn between the old and new ways when competing set of beliefs, values and new ways of thinking came into play.

These Ethiopian-American female writers’ works exhibit common themes; nevertheless, the major concern of Maaza is occasionally being the minor concern of Rebecca. The converse is true also. This is evident in the literary works of these diasporic authors.

## Table of content

	Page
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	iv
<b>Abstract</b> .....	v
<b>Chapter One</b>	
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	1
1.1. Background .....	4
1.2. Statement of Problem .....	6
1.3. Objective .....	8
1.4. Methodology .....	9
1.5. Scope of the study .....	9
1.6. Organization of the study .....	10
1.7. Significance of the Study .....	10
<b>Chapter Two</b>	
<b>2. Related Literature Review and Conceptual Framework</b> .....	12
<b>2.1. Definition of Relevant Terminologies</b> .....	12

2.1.1. Diaspora .....	13
2.1.2. Diasporic Literature .....	13
2.1.3. Identity and Identity Crisis .....	13
2.1.4. Hybridity .....	14
2.1.5. Religious Fatalism .....	14
2.1.6. Historical Novel .....	15
2.1.7. Theories of Diaspora .....	15
2.1.7.1. Traditionalism .....	16
2.1.7.2. Totalization.....	17
2.1.7.3. Transnationalism .....	17
<b>2.2. Review of Related Literature .....</b>	<b>18</b>

## **Chapter Three**

<b>3. A Thematic Analysis of Beneath the Lion’s Gaze and Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>3.1. Synopsis of Beneath the Lion’s Gaze .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>3.2. A Thematic Analysis of Beneath the Lion’s Gaze .....</b>	<b>27</b>
3.2.1. Political Instability .....	28



3.2.2. Courage and Radicalism .....	32
3.2.3. The Pros and Cons of .....	35
<b>3.3. Synopsis of Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia ....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>3.4. A Thematic Analysis of Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery Ethiopia ...</b>	<b>37</b>
3.4.1. Political Instability .....	39
3.4.2. Nostalgia and the Glorious Past .....	41
3.4.3. Commitment to Transformation .....	43
<b>3.5. Inter-related Minor Themes .....</b>	<b>47</b>
3.5.1. Fatalist Psychology .....	47
3.5.2. Cherishing Traditional Values .....	48
3.5.3. Economic Crisis in the Host Land .....	50
3.5.4. Predicaments of the Diaspora in the Host Land .....	50
<b>3.6. The Thematic Convergence betweenBeneath the Lion’s Gaze and Held at a     Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia .....</b>	<b>52</b>
3.6.1. Political Woes in the Homeland .....	53
3.6.2. Family Bonds .....	54
3.6.3. National Icons .....	55
<b>3.7. The Idiosyncrasy of Both Writers .....</b>	<b>56</b>

<b>4. Conclusion and Recommendation</b> .....	58
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	63
<b>Declaration</b> .....	67

## Chapter One

### 1. Introduction

Since ancient times to contemporary society, humanity is constantly migrating from one place to the other for a number of various reasons. It could actually be forced or voluntary displacement. Migration occurs as a response to political instability, war, social and economic insecurity (i.e, looking for a better life). (<http://www.octava.net/text/historialFiction,htm>). Regardless of the nature of migration, it has had devastating effects, and potential danger.

Repeated studies have shown that Africa suffers the most, when it comes to intellectual migration. For instance, in 1998, research paper has been presented concerning Brain Drain on an international conference. It was reported that Africa roughly loses over 20,000 intellectuals yearly. Undoubtedly, this is one of the main constraints of under development in the continent. (<http://www.octava.net/text/historialFiction,htm>).

Initially, Diaspora comprises the Jewish, Greek, and Armenians. Since the 1960s, the use of the term 'diaspora' expanded to include others who had been scattered across the globe as well (Safran, 1991). Most notably '*the Africandiaspora*' came into use from the mid-1960s, generally referring to the descendants of the Atlantic slave trade (Alpers, 2001). Besides, according to Alpers (2001) the term 'the African diaspora' was first used in 1965 at the *International Congress of African History* at the University of Dar es Salaam by George. In recent years, the term has been employed widely and often refers to any group of migrants and their descendants who maintain a link with their

place of origin. Hence, today it is easy to find references to diaspora from almost any nation.

Consequently, international diaspora studies have developed significantly in recent times. Diasporic studies and post-colonial theories have become a major methodological approach in the study of culture and literature. Among those predominant new theoretical interests in the field are questions which pertain to the class, race and the problematization of subjectivity and identity in trans-nationalist frameworks.

Pre-military coup Ethiopian Diasporas who were living abroad were few in number. However, massive Ethiopian migration to the West, America and Israel began following the down fall of the Haileseles regime and the reign of the military dictatorial rule in 1974. It is evident in Hoge's work that Ethiopian migrants to America from 1983-1993 were huge (Hoge, 1997); followed by great number of Falashas movement to Israel.

This entails that, if not all, most Ethiopian Diasporas are victims of the violence, unrest, terror-filled moments and the imported socialist ideology; the effect of which was demonstrated in the form of all sorts of persecution, torture, pain, disappointment, disillusionment and mass execution. It was also expressed in the form of recurring severe drought and famine. These were certainly accompanied by impossibly risky and thoughtless movement to neighboring countries and beyond. These are evident in the works' of many diasporic writers such as MaazaMengiste's *Beaneth the Lion's Gaze*, and Rebecca's *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*, NegaMezlekia's: *Notes from the Hyena's Belly*, Maui Asgedom's *Of Beetles and Angels: A True Story of*

*American Dream*, and are prominent themes of these outstanding diasporic literary products. These works are actually the literary arts of well read, experienced, well educated, creative, award winning and different awards nominee Ethiopian-American intellectuals who are living abroad. Are these great literary works and other diasporic literary products given considerable attention by Ethiopian literary scholars? The response would most likely be no. Despite their uniqueness and resourcefulness, both literary scholars and the general public paid little or no attention to their literary products. What are the reasons behind this failure or passiveness? Ethiopian literary scholars or critics may have reasons; however, I do think, their reasons cannot be good enough excuses for putting these well-crafted, unique and resourceful literary works aside.

It is worth mentioning Endalkachew Hailu's contribution: to the thematic analysis of two Ethiopian-American Diasporic novelists' literary products: Fasil Yitbarek's *The Texture of Dreams* and Dinaw Mengistu's *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*. He did his MA thesis specifically under the title: *The predicament of the Diaspora as Reflected in The Texture of Dreams and The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*. He needs to be appreciated. For he appeared to the scene as if the voice of one crying in the wilderness: why did you put aside the resourceful research material (i.e. Ethiopian Diasporic literary works)? In his research, Endalkachew, first identified, described and analyzed major themes of migrants' predicaments. Second, he also indicated the various ways through which the predicaments and their effects are depicted in the two literary texts (Endalkachew, 2008). Overall, his contribution is a welcome corrective to the long neglect.

Rebecca is a graduate of Harvard Law School; whereas, MaazaMengiste is a graduate in Masters of Fine Arts: Creative Writing from New York University. This piece of research work makes a thematic analysis of these Ethiopian-American intellectuals and Female Diasporic writers' literary product: MaazaMengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*,"and Rebecca's *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*. It focuses on the prominent themes of these works and also reflects on the minor themes as well.

### **1.1. Background of the study**

Diasporic literature has a multi-faceted nature. Nevertheless, when a great number of people think of Diaspora and diasporic literature what instantly comes to their mind is a simple dictionary definition of diaspora (i.e. the displacement of the masses or descendants from their homeland to another region of the globe). It is true that these Ethiopian-American diasporic writers, MaazaMengiste and Rebecca Haile left their homeland while they were two and eleven years old respectively. Since then they are torn into two worlds where competing set of beliefs, values and new ways of thinking came into play; haunted by bad memories of terror-filled and cruel dictatorial military rule, and some of childhood experiences back home.

The major themes of diasporic writings are one or more of the following lists: political instability, recurring famine and draught, *wide spread corruption, civil-war, endemic poverty and low standard of living, military coup's, dictatorial rule and its effect, colonialism in all sense of the term and its effect (i.e. the evil of colonialism), slave trade, apartheid, culture-shock* and so on. In this regard, Ethiopian-American Diasporic literatures are somehow different from *BlackAfrican* literatures. Since Ethiopian colonial

experience is negligible, Ethiopian diasporic writers don't protest much about colonization and colonialism. Instead, their literary works largely focus and discuss about the country's sovereignty. Besides, nearly all Ethiopian migrant writers are in favor of religion or Christianity. Consequently, the readers of the migrant literary texts are often provided with writers' religious reflections. This is vividly evident, especially, in the literary work of Rebecca: *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*.

Since the essence of *Diasporic Literature* mainly refers to migrants' experience, African-American literature will be studied as part of migrants' literature. Hence, by bi-implication Ethiopian-American's literary works can be analyzed as migrant literature. Diasporic literature has its own unique features. The literature may refer to life in the host country or major events and phenomenon in motherland. Its themes could be socio-political, and/or experiences of discrimination, identity diffusion and culture-shock and their effects on the life of the migrants ([www, wikepeidia.com /migrant/literature/encyclopedia...htm](http://www.wikipeidia.com/migrant/literature/encyclopedia...htm)).

It is very essential to have a very short survey of the socio-political situation of the country, particularly during the reign of the dictator Mengistue, for it enables us to establish a framework for succeeding discussions. The story, especially Maaza's *Beaneth the Lion's Gaze* covers the events that took place during the last days of Haileseles and the entire period of the Derg regime. This was a period which was characterized by extreme turmoil, political instability, humiliation, mass murder. This was the worst period where Ethiopians were hunted like animals.

Mengistu remained in charge as head of the Derg, but he seized power more firmly in February of 1977, when he became commander in chief of the Ethiopian armed forces. Two months later, he spoke at a rally and promised that all enemies of Ethiopia's historic revolution would be brought to justice, and he smashed bottles that he claimed were filled with blood to emphasize his point. The Ethiopian Red Terror of 1977-78 began with that speech, and hundreds of suspected enemies of the regime were arrested, detained without trial, tortured, and even killed. The victims were primarily university students and bureaucrats who had voiced dissatisfaction with the pace or tenor of Mengistu's Soviet-style revolution.

The number of Ethiopians' Red Terror deaths is estimated to be half a million. A great number of people also fled the country, some settling in other Horn of Africa nations and others establishing the first serious communities of Ethiopians in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Inside Ethiopia, as well as in Somalia, Sudan, and other neighboring countries, Mengistu's opponents joined various armed groups established to fight the Derg and its harsh rule, but these groups had competing ideologies and goals that ranged from continuing the socialist revolution to restoring the monarchy. ([http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Mengistu\\_Haile\\_Mariam.aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Mengistu_Haile_Mariam.aspx)).

## **1.2. Statement of Problem**

Various research works have shown that there are few studies that have been conducted in the area of diasporic literature in Ethiopia. For some insufficient or unsound reasons, even those who are literate in literature have negligible inclination to read diasporic literature; still others don't have any clue about diasporic literature. This



research introduces Ethiopian diasporic literature and diasporic writers, particularly female Ethiopian migrant writers. Furthermore, it also discloses the contribution of female diasporic writers and asserts the fact that they have active involvement in various issues back home. Hence it aims to fill this gap through a *thematic analysis of the two Ethiopian female diasporic writers'* literary works, and would be a meaningful contribution. It mainly gives special attention to their research based personal reflection about the horror of the revolution or the Derg regime.

Moreover, the following research questions will also be considered carefully and treated properly during the analysis of the two literary products.

1. What are the prominent themes of the two works? Are there minor, but equally important themes?
2. Will there be any thematic correspondence, and thematic divergence between the two female diasporic works?
3. Is there anything that makes either of these works or both distinctively Ethiopian?
4. Do the characters react in a way that can be followed as examples to overthrow any dictatorial rule? Do women characters have any role in the revolution as it is depicted in the novel?
5. Is there any thematic overlap among diasporic literary products? Is the mode of presentation identical?

### **1.3. Objective of the Study**

Any literary work has its own distinct purpose, so does a thematic analysis of MaazaMengiste's "*Beneath the Lion's Gaze*," and Rebeece's "*Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*." For simplicity and better understanding or clarity, its objectives have been stated under the following sub-section.

#### **1.3.1. General Objective**

1. It aims at how the literary products are used to show terror-filled, ugly face of the communist regime in Ethiopia, the shortcomings of the monarch and any of those predicaments.
2. It aims to expose some of the themes of diasporic literature.
3. It explores the general outcome of migration, especially migrating outside of ones motherland.

#### **1.3.2. Specific Objective**

1. It is to acknowledge and celebrate the role of these female Ethiopian-American diasporic writers in the socio-political status of Ethiopians. In other words, it is to ascertain the role of females in exposing the evil of any system and structure, the rule of military dictatorship.
2. It also aims at disclosing the unique features of Ethiopian-American diasporic literature in particular, and publicize; thereby re-introduce and re-define Ethiopia which actually is such a glorious attempt to paint the right picture, particularly to non-Ethiopian.

3. It explores the specific effects of the displacement of Ethiopians as well. Are they passive observers, or somebody who strive to break out of any sort of serious predicaments? It aims to identify which effect does the dislocation have?
4. The researcher aims to investigate the outstanding strong conviction of Maaza and Rebecca as it is displayed in their literary works of art. Do these diasporic writers ascertain that there have been courageous, determined and passionate national icons in the past that can be good models for the contemporary generation? The writers seem to believe that there will be no meaningful change if people are not determined, courageous enough and ready to be martyred for what they believe worth dying for. Is this what they are striving to pass on to the next generation using their astonishing literary works?

#### **1.4. Methodology**

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, serious textual analysis has been used alone with practically relevant conceptual tools from Diasporic studies, and post-modernism. Comparative approach is employed to analyze parallel themes between the two literary works of art. A reasonable number of extracts have also been sorted out from each literary product and compared. Besides, the researcher has also carefully examined different related resource materials such as books, on-line reading materials, and some relevant research works on diasporic studies.

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

This research work is restricted to diasporic literary work of art, more specifically limited to a thematic analysis of two Ethiopian-American female diasporic literatures. It is all

about a thematic analysis of Maaza's debut literary product, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Rebecca's *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*. And it does not go beyond this, and attempt to do any sort of analysis.

### **1.6. Organization of the Study**

This study has four chapters. The first chapter introduces the subject and gives the background which actually suggests a clue about the purpose and significance of the Thematic Analysis of MaazaMengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, and Rebeece's *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*. The second chapter comprises a review related literature. It also defines some workable terminologies which directly and closely relates to the study. The third chapter makes vivid complete thematic analysis of the two literary works. Though great emphasis is given to the prominent themes, it also covers minor themes as well. Eventually, the fourth chapter concludes the entire work.

### **1.6. Significance of the Study**

Currently, Diasporic literatures attract the attention of most literary scholars or researchers across the globe, for they have a multi-faceted nature. Despite their uniqueness and resourcefulness, sadly, Ethiopian-American diasporic literary works have been given little or no attention among Ethiopian literary scholars and the general public as well.

This piece of research formulates a critical thematic analysis on Ethiopian-American female diasporic authors' outstanding literary works. In this regard, an ice-breaker, Endalkachew Hailu needs to be credited, for he was courageous enough to contribute something. Likewise, this research partly serves as an additional response to the most

forgotten and unexplored area of Ethiopian resourceful Diasporic literary works. First, it introduces both the general public and the researchers to these resourceful and unique Ethiopian-American literary products; thereby inviting researchers to do some sort of constructive and meaningful research in the field of their specialty. They could serve as resource materials for serious political scientists, historians, literary critics, sociologists and psychologists. Second, it offers an excellent opportunity for those who don't have access to what happened in the past. It would help them to read and understand their history and know each other. Third, through storytelling and thoughtfully crafted characters, the writers strive to win the readers' attention toward their own way of thinking (i.e. to politicise, or re-educate the people what it means to be an active participant in politics). Fourth, it announces and publicizes the role of female diasporic writers in politics (i.e. by exposing terror-filled, cruel act of the dictatorial military rule). Fifth, it educates and re-orientes the people about acknowledging people for what they have done in the past.

## **Chapter Two**

### **2. Related Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

A number of literary works which relate strictly or loosely to the theme have been examined carefully in order of their importance, and are used as an input in the organization of this piece of work. Of course, both published and unpublished reading materials, including M.A theses have been consulted.

Any important diasporic reading materials that address the following issues: political violence, religion, labor exploitation, corruption, and injustice, changes exhibited due to culture conflict identity diffusion, religious fatalism, retracing childhood memories, unimaginable predicaments the diaspora have been facing since the first generation diasporas will be surveyed and critically analyzed.

The literature review is divided in to two sub-sections. The first section deals with the meaning of relevant terminologies. The second section mainly focuses on the review of related literatures. Under this section, individuals' reflections are also included to show the international significance of the works of these diasporic writers.

#### **2.1. Definition of Relevant Terminologies**

These include terminologies which are specifically relevant to the study at hand. It is believed that familiarizing readers with these terms, prior to any analysis being made will enable them to comprehend the literary works of diasporic literature, their nature, and diasporas literary theories much better. Most of all it helps both the reader and the researcher to understand and analyze these well-crafted literary works.

### **2.1.1.Diaspora**

Simple dictionary definition: Diaspora is the movement of people from any nation or group away from their country. (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary). Basically, Diaspora refers to a minority community living in exile.

It is of two sorts: forced and voluntary Diasporas. The first group is those who migrate due to slave Trade and other political case; the second group is those who are displaced for the sake of professional or academic purposes (<http://www.postcolonialweb.com>).

### **2.1.2.Diasporic Literature**

“Diaspora Literature involves an idea of a homeland, a place from where the displacement occurs and narratives of harsh journeys undertaken on account of economic compulsion.”(<http://EzineArticles.com/1362004>).It is this multifaceted nature of diasporic literature that attracted the attention of many literary scholars.

### **2.1.3.Identity and Identity Crisis**

Identity is conceived as: The state or fact of being the same specific person or individuality; whereas, identity crisis is “ A psychological state of disorientation and role confusion occurring in an individual especially in adolescents because of conflicting pressure and expectations;” (Webster dictionary, 1998).

Staurt Hall defined identity: “ Identity can be defined in relation to a shared culture; specially, identity reflects the shared historical experience and cultural constructs which

give us a stable frame of reference amidst political and historical shifts.”(Hall, 1993:392).

#### **2.1.4.Hybridity**

Social system and culture are so intimately connected that it is desirable to have a better understanding about the content of culture. The most popular definition of culture Anthropologist Edward B. Taylor offered a broad definition, stating that culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”(<http://madisonian.net/2006/>) On the other hand, cultural conflict is understood and experienced: “ When an individual feels torn between her/his parents’ culture and the majority culture in which she/he lives.” (Webster dictionary, 1985). Integration is a form of transnationalism, and deals with the act of combining two things so that they work together (Webster dictionary, 1998).

#### **2.1.5.Religious Fatalism**

Fatalism refers to events that happen inexorably, following a blind or irrational cosmic process. In this sense it has no place in Christianity, but commonly encountered in oriental religion. It is a doctrine of despair, and saps individual’s responsibility (Harrison, 1988:215).

Fatalism is a philosophical doctrine emphasizing the subjugation of all events and actions to fate. Generally, it refers to several of the following ideas: first, an attitude of resignation in the face of some future event or events which are thought to be inevitable; second, everything work toward an inevitable end, technically called



determinism or predistination; third, defeatism where acceptance of the inevitability is more appropriate than being resistant (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>).

Maaza's representation of Yonas in "*Beneath the Loins Gaze*" could best illustrate the religious fatalism of the Guddu's regime. Unlike his younger brother, Dawit, Yonas has developed an absolute conviction that prayer would help them to cope with what is happening. On the contrary, Dawit believes and contends that struggling or fighting against all injustice, all sort of evil including evil government will ultimately bring peace and security to the society.

#### **2.1.6. Historical Novel**

According to Encyclopedia Britannica a historical novel is "a novel that has as its setting a usually significant period of history and that attempts to convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions of a past age with realistic detail and fidelity (which is in some cases only apparent fidelity) to historical fact. The work may deal with actual historical personages...or it may contain a mixture of fictional and historical character." (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>). Historical novelists provide the readers with invaluable experience by carefully combining historical accuracy with fictional form in exciting and interesting literature.

#### **2.1.7. Theories of Diaspora**

Diasporic writers translate reality and personal experience in two or more different systems, which is what their work can be regarded as an enrichment of culture, the resource and target one, or an important part of the emerging cosmopolitan culture. Diaspora, the dispersal of various peoples around the world (Cohen, 1997), often

caused by major historical and political changes, carries with it the collective cultural memory and wealth of the past, overseas or cross-border, the acknowledgement of the old country as a concept deeply embedded in an individual language, religion, customs and folklore.

Primarily, Diaspora is the result of migration. Diasporians are always moving and seeking better gains as entrepreneurs. They are unbounded by economic, political, historical limits. SathisGeorgouris concludes that diasporic communities should not be viewed as traces of a nation community; rather it should be conceived as a result of people's dispersal or mobility under specific historical condition (i.e, it could be political, economic, sociological, psychological and cultural). (www.eh.net/XIIICongress/cd/papers/10 Gourgouris 390.pdf,2008).

Conceptually, "Diaspora highlights the existence of transnational network of people and their sense of belonging in the communities beyond special boundaries," said Myria Georgiou. He also added that it was a post-modern concept like ethnicity, nationality and nationhood, boundary and identity in describing the complex contemporary world (Georgiou 2001:1).

Given this, where do we place Ethiopian diasporic writers? How did these concepts reflect in their literary works, and in who they are as migrants?

#### **2.1.7.1. Tradition**

A tradition is a ritual, beliefs or object passed down within a society still maintained in the present, with origins in the past which is socially meaningful, but the idea has also been applied to social norms. Traditionalists value traditional morals, safety and security as

well as conformity, commitment and consistency.  
(<http://legalcareers.about.com/od/practicetips/a/Traditionalists.htm>).

Some scholars have adapted the term "tradition," defining it more carefully than its conventional use in order to facilitate scholarly discourse. Anthony Giddons discusses tradition in relationship to modernity; he sees tradition as something bound to ritual, where ritual guarantees the continuation of tradition. Gusfield and others argue that tradition is dynamic, heterogeneous, and coexists successfully with modernity even within individuals. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tradition>).

It is also important to note that a number of factors aggravate the loss of tradition: such as assimilation, hybridization, globalization, industrialization and the marginalization of specific cultural groups. It is often the unchanging form of certain arts that leads to their perception as traditional.

#### **2.1.7.2. Totalization**

It refers to the tendency towards sameness, homogenization or Americanization (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Totalization>). Cultural assimilation, on the other hand means the total adaptation of a new culture (Webster dictionary, 1998).

#### **2.1.7.3. Transnationalism**

Diasporic writing today connects the past and the present and forges new notions of fluid and transnational identities; it opens up spaces for new expressions of a transnational global culture (<http://myuminfo.umanitoba.ca/documents/2124/MaverI.pdf>). Consequently, it seriously challenges, and somehow inevitably shapes traditional post-

colonial studies. Integration is a form of transnationalism, and deals with the act of combining two things so that they work together (Webster dictionary, 1998). A good example could be those transcultural and transnational Canadian authors who are known to be the writers of two homelands, figuring in the global cross-border English-speaking culture and in the multi-ethnic, post-ethnic society, where the so called minority literature is in effect now part of the mainstream, although not always practically effectual multiculturalism.

## **2.2. Review of Related Studies**

There are some Ethiopian writers who produced their literary work in English. These are Dagniachew Worku, Sahle – Sellaise Berhane Mariam, Ashenafi Kebede, Abbie Gubegna and Meron Tekleberhan who produced and published their literary works during the Emperor Hail Selassie regime and within the first five years of the Derg's reign. Sellaise Berhane Mariam wrote *The Afersata, Warrior King, Firebrands* and *Shinega's Village*; Dagniachew Worku contributed *The Thirteenth Sun; Defiance* is Abbie Gubegna's original work, and *The Savage Girl* a translation of his own book. *Ashenafi Kebede* also produced *Confession* which resembles most migrant writings, (i.e. his work specifically deals with the effect of culture shock and racial prejudices). From the recent literary work of art Meron Tekleberhan's "*The Letters*" which was produced in 2011 could also be included in the list.

Not only do we have these English literary products as resource reading materials, but some research works have also been done on the thematic analysis of these literary works of art. For instance, Debebe Seifu made an analysis on *Ethiopian Literature in*

English; whereas Taye Assefa studied *Tewodros in Historical Fiction*. The main focus of this research is not to make an assessment on Ethiopian literatures which are written in English, not at all, but it is to note that there are some literary works of art that have already been produced.

As it was cited in Debebe' M.A. thesis, "*Confession*" which was written in English in 1965 by ashenafi Kebede, seems to cover themes of most diasporic literary products like culture conflicts, racial prejudices and the rest. The story is about an Ethiopian who falls in love with a white girl. The writer depicted how miserable the relationship was. As the couple deal with the frustrations of life, their expectations of each party fall short, driving them apart, leaving him unstable, and suffers from nostalgia, loneliness, identity diffusion (Debele, 1980:74-77). Does this literary work exhibit common feature of contemporary migrant literary writings? Indeed, these are the common themes of several diasporic literary products.

The major themes of nearly all diasporic writings are one or more of the following lists: *wide spread corruption, civil- war, endemic poverty, military coup's, dictatorial rule and its effect, colonialism in all sense of the term and its effect (i.e. the evil of colonialism), slave trade, apartheid, culture-shock* (Ramarj, 1996: 217-219) and so forth. In this regard, Ethiopian-American Diasporic literatures are somehow different from *BlackAfrican* literatures. Since Ethiopian colonial experience is negligible, Ethiopian writers don't protest much about colonization and colonialism. Instead, their literary works largely focus and discuss about the country's sovereignty. Besides, nearly all, Ethiopian writers are in favor of religion or Christianity. Consequently, the readers of the migrant literary texts are usually provided with the writers' religious reflections. These

are clearly evident, especially, in the literary work of Rebeece: "*Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*;" so does in Maaza's literary work of art, "*Beneath the Lion's Gaze*."

Likewise, those common features of migrant literature are also reflected in Mahelet Abraham's M.A. Thesis, entitled: "Colonization, Cultural Conflict and Identity Crisis: Joys of Motherland and Nervous Condition." Mahelet read through the works of two African writers: Buchi Emcheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga and carefully analyzed (Mahelet, 2006: 26-34). Of course, she did her best in trying to figure out the identity crisis and culture shock or cultural conflict the migrants are facing since the first generation diaspora.

A great number of Ethiopian Diasporas are also victims of the terrible violence, unrest, terror-filled bloody moments and imported socialist ideology. The effects of these inhuman and ferocious acts were demonstrated in the form of all sorts of persecution, torture, pain, disappointment, disillusionment and mass execution. It was also expressed in the form of recurring severe drought and famine. These were certainly accompanied by impossibly risky and thoughtless movement to neighboring countries and beyond. These issues are boldly addressed by dozens Ethiopian diasporic writers. It is evident in the works' of the following noble, well read, well-educated and well experiences migrant authors: such as Maaza Mengiste's *Beaneth the Lion's Gaze*, Rebeece's "*Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*," Fasil Yitbarek's "*The Texture of Dreams*," Dinaw Mengistu's "*How to Read the Air*," and another book by same author: *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*," Nega Mezlekia's "*Notes from the Hyena's Belly*," Maui Asgedom's "*Of Beetles and Angels: A True Story of American*

*Dream.*” These writers have embodied the unimaginable terror and trauma of those worst moments in Ethiopian history. However, we, as readers and investigators are privileged to read the works of these writers.

Endalkachew Hailu’s contribution on thematic analysis of two Ethiopian-American Diasporic novelists’ literary products: Fasil Yitbarek’s, “The Texture of Dreams” and Dinaw Mengistu’s, “The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears,” was profound and worth mentioning. He did his MA thesis specifically under the title: *The Predicament of the Diaspora as Reflected in The Texture of Dreams, and The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*. He appeared to the scene as if the voice of one crying in the wilderness: why did you put aside the resourceful research materials (i.e. Ethiopian Diasporic literary works)? Since he dare to break, chew and digest that which has not been touched for years, and be able to discover the beauty and resourcefulness of this recently introduced literary genre, he warrants to be appreciated.

Identifying the themes of *The Texture of Dreams* and *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* on which Endalkachew’s analysis based would sharpen and contribute a lot in understanding what diasporic literature share in common. Particularly, it helps us to comprehend some of the common features Ethiopian-American migrant writers’ works of art.

*The Texture of Dreams* is written by diasporic writer, Fasil Yitbarek in 2005. It is about a young Ethiopian, Yosef who flee to the USA during the fall of the Derge regime for economic and political reasons. He spent stressful months of hopelessness and joblessness, and then he became an English teacher to Russian refugees in USA. while Yosef was studying his M.A. in Teaching Language as a Second Language, he fall in

love with Helen his classmate. Though she has a boyfriend, he couldn't give up. On the other hand, memories of his childhood, loneliness, and emptiness his love for music haunted him in the host land day in and out. Besides, the sudden death of the lady with whom he has developed an intimate mother-son relationship aggravated his nostalgia and emptiness. While he was planning to leave for Ethiopia for two months' vacation, Helen changed her mind to marry him. He thought that this new relationship will draw him out of his tragic situation.

*The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* is written by diasporic writer Dinaw Mengistu in 2007. It is about an Ethiopian migrant, Stephanos who terribly lost his father and escape for life from the red terror of the late 1970<sup>s</sup> and flee to USA. Stephanos, Joseph and Kenneth from Congo and Kenya respectively who have suffered from Poverty, homelessness and disappointment are constant companions. They drink together, chat and playing games in trying to forget the bad memories of the past. Then Judith, a white woman, and her daughter slip into Stephanos' life. However, his desire to love and family fall apart due to the differences in socio-economic status between him and the lady. On top of this, torning between two worlds aggravated his situation ([www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).Thursday, March 1, 2007). Given this, what did Endalkachew do in his thematic analysis of the two well-crafted literary works? The outcomes of his unique research work are indicated in the following paragraph.

In his research, Endalkachew, first identified, described and analyzed major themes of migrants' predicaments. Of course, he did meaningful job in tracing the predicaments that the migrants have been facing for so long. Second, he also indicated the various ways through which the predicaments and their effects are depicted in the two literary



texts effectively (Endalkachew, 2008). Third, based on his findings, he also wanted to challenge Ethiopian literary scholars and researchers to do meaningful inquiry on migrant literature. Despite its resourcefulness and usefulness, very few studies have been done on Ethiopian diasporic literature. This could be a possible major motivating factor for potential researchers.

Furthermore, chair of the Dayton Literary Peace Prize Foundation, Sharon Rab said “This year’s finalists help readers to see pressing political issues through the eyes of individuals whose lives are inextricably bound up in the larger world around them, Each work, in its own way, reminds us that even the most personal decisions can have a profound effect on the lives of people halfway around the globe and far into the future.” Mengiste’s debut novel is an epic tale of a father and two sons, of betrayals and loyalties, of a family unraveling in the wake of Ethiopia’s revolution.

Lorrain Adams, in her review, also summed up *Beaneath the Lion’s Gaze* in the following manner: “Mengiste joins a group of other young Africans writing in English ... whose subject is the continent’s postcolonial civil wars. But Mengiste understands well the unique position her country occupies in Africa’s postcolonial landscape. And her uncanny rendition of Selassie’s last moments reveals her sensitivity to the twisted singularity of his magnetism. It is brave of so young a novelist to attempt to tell not only Selassie’s story but also that of the Derg. (<http://www.nytimes.com>).

## Chapter Three

### 3. A Thematic Analysis of *the Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and *Held at a Distance: Rediscovery of Ethiopia*

In approaching individual postcolonial texts, we need not only appreciate what is distinctive and individual, but also see how that text fits into the broader genre of postcolonial literature, how the writer has responded to key issues of postcolonial literature. This provides a useful framework for analysis. The two Ethiopian – American female writers' works exhibit and treat common theme; nevertheless, the major concern of Maaza might occasionally be the minor concern of Rebec. The converse is true either. A critical reading of the two works enables us to see these differences clearly.

Ethiopian Diasporic Literature just like any diasporic literature emerged as a result of migration, especially to the west, America and Israel. Ethiopians' massive migration to these parts of the globe began following the down fall of the Haileseles monarchy and the reign of the military dictatorship rule. From this, one can deduce that Ethiopian diasporic literature is a very recent phenomenon. The distinguishing marks or the major themes of Ethiopian-American diasporic literatures are indicated as follows. Generally, these literatures, on the one hand, deal with political violence, impoverishment, corruption, injustice, and human right violation in the motherland; on the other hand, various experiences and challenges of the migrants in the host land and its effect in their life.

More specifically, this entails that the majority of Ethiopian Diasporas are victims of unrest, violence, and terror-filled imported socialist ideology; the effect of which was demonstrated in the form of all sorts of persecution, torture, pain, disappointment,

disillusionment, recurring bad memories and mass execution. It was also expressed in the form of repetitive severe drought and famine. At times, these authors are occupied in making an attempt to re-introduce their country of origin. These were often accompanied by very risky and thoughtless movement to neighboring countries and beyond. These are evident in Maaza's, Rebecca's and other diasporic writers' works.

A great number of people do not always have access to know what actually happened in the past. It is particularly, true of Ethiopian younger generation. Hence creating narrative story and portraying it in an attractive, readable and stimulating way is a necessary tool to understand both our history and each other. These two well-educated and articulate female diasporic writers most important and most critical voices meant to fill this important gap. In this respect, Barbara Tuchman's statement: "Books are the carriers of civilization. Without books, history is silent, literature dumb...thought and speculation at a standstill;" holds true.

Ethiopian female writers are marginalized and virtually invisible in the literary landscape due to cultural and social inhibitions. Until recently, the richness and particularities of the experiences of female writers in the field of literature and literary studies were compromised. Nevertheless, Maaza, Rebecca and others took a major step by offering outstanding, relevant and powerful literary products. Particularly, Maaza's historical narrative is an amazing satisfying novel; hopefully, it will encourage thousands of silenced Ethiopians to voice their sufferings from the state sponsored violence of the Derg period. Indeed, she became a voice to the voiceless Ethiopians' who are living under the terrible oppression of the dictatorial military rule back home.

The discussion of the themes takes the following points in to consideration: relevance, importance to the Ethiopian society, the manner and depth in which they are discussed. Like many diasporic writers, these Ethiopian female diasporic writers adopted and dealt with such universal themes as political violence, dictatorial rule, economic shock and accompanied by low level of living, religion, continuous unemployment problem, corruption, and injustice; they employed human characters and concrete symbols.

### **3.1. Synopsis of the Beneath the Lion's Gaze**

Maaza, was born in Addis Ababa, and displaced from her homeland at the age of four during the early years of the revolution. In her early age, she has passed through that unimaginably hellish experience, and was the victim of the 1974 revolution.

This young, outshining Ethiopian diasporic novelist came up with her well-crafted, interesting, readable research based serious historical novel that was published in 2010. No doubt, both the content and the lists of bibliography included in the book entail that this literary work is classified under historical novel.

The story takes place during the last days of Emperor Hail Selassie regime, and relatively covers the whole extent of terror-filled communist Derg or Major Guddu's regime. It was superbly portrayed in a unique way through one family (i.e, the prominent medical doctor Hailu or Gash Hailu as the majority used to call him, his two sons Dawit and Yonas, their partners, friends, and relatives). The writer depicts the severity of famine, and its impact; the bloodiest and full extent of human brutality; betrayal of Ethiopians by Ethiopians, even children against their parents and vice versa. The novel is as much about guilt, betrayal, genocide, and unbearable torture, full of immoral and

inhuman acts as about courage and compassion. She used Gash Hailu and his family very artistically to show the extent of courage and compassion they had. They were impossibly courageous enough and determined to risk their life.

### **3.2. A Thematic Analysis of Beneath the Lion's Gaze**

Diasporic writers through their literary works often address issues like civil war, injustice, inequality, dictatorship, authoritarianism, genocide, immorality, freedom of expression, struggle for peace and security, identity crisis, cultural conflict, national identity, military coup and so forth. The role of these writers is to try to hold a mirror that reflects the historical situations in which the society lives. They usually expose these messes in their imaginative works. A good historical fiction writer infuses historical facts or truths in her/his novel and evokes readers' response. This is exactly what Maaza did in her work.

When she was hesitant about writing this novel, her professor Breyten Breytenbach at NYU said, "Sometimes fiction tells truth that history can't." This was the kind of advice and inspiration she needed. Though it seems an impossible attempt for her to contain the events within a family, at the end she succeeded.

Three outstanding themes are identified and analyzed carefully. First, the horrific life experiences of a great number of Ethiopians beginning from the last days of Emperor Haile Selessie, nearly throughout the whole period of Guddu's regime are exposed artistically in this historical novel. It includes *Red Terror* in reaction to *White Terror*, and the hellish experience of military coup d'état. The effects of this mess have also been pointed out in the story in such a way that it captures the attention of its readers. She recreated those specific past events, and be able to inform and educate those who do

not have access to the past. Second, the struggle of those courageous and radicals has also been given due attention. Third, though Maaza did not fail to vividly depict the failure of the emperor and higher officials, she was annoyed at the cruel and disrespectful act of the Guddu or the Derg. This theme is analyzed under the sub-topic *pros and cons of the bloody revolution*.

### **3.2.1. Political Instability**

Most of all, Emperor Haile selassie had failed to recognize and take action to alleviate the horrific famine which had cost nearly two hundred thousand lives. In other words the Emperor was so reluctant to address the horrific and devastating current situation; he also ignored the increasing grumble of discontent and continuous complaints among his subjects. In her debut expressive enough literary work, Maaza portrayed the reality and severity of the 1974 famine in an unbelievable tragic way. The famine was all over *Wello, Tigre and Shoa* (Maaza, 2010:28). On the one hand, there is a starving child with painfully swollen limbs; on the other hand, Haile selassie was feeding his chihua hua meat from a silver platter. Plus, soldiers had no clean water while the emperor officers had beer and wine (Ibid: 34). These and other things intensified the student violence and military revolt which ultimately contributed to the outrageous down fall of the emperor's regime. A group of military army staged a successful coup and removed Hail Selassie from power.

Even though the author did not hide the weakness of Haile Selassie's oppressive, exploitative and extremely selfish regime, she seemed somehow sympathetic to the emperor and some of his officials. The writer has enough reason to be so. It appears

unfair and unhealthy for Maaza to discredit everyone and dismiss everything, or what individuals have accomplished in the past altogether.

Major Guddu came to power with a couple of unrealized promises and spontaneous decisions which are full of emotions such as: land to the tiller, People's Government for All, freedom of expression, nationalization of privately owned houses. Residence nationalization was taken as part of their effort to help the poor (124-125). Please, notice it is the author's personal choice to represent Colonel Mengistu, as *Major Guddu*. The reform was deficient and spontaneous. It served neither the poor nor the rich; none of these groups of people were benefiterers of the communist regime.

Dawit, a university student, is committed to overthrowing Selassie. However, Dawit withdraws from the military junta when he sees the Derg randomly kills innocent Ethiopians. Disillusioned, he unites with the guerrilla forces to fight his real enemy and the enemy of innocent Ethiopians, the Derge. Now he jumps and dives into the long, dreadful, horrific, painful and tiresome struggle for free Ethiopia.

There was no stability throughout its reign. They were restless. No sooner did the Derg come to power, there was violence in every corner of the country; especially, in Addis, it was very acute. The people denied the freedom they hoped for so long. Although Guddu promised that there will be no bloodshed, he killed sixty officials in one night including General Amman in his home (293). Nearly everyone was upset, deeply disappointed, disillusioned, and some revolted against the communist Derg dictatorial rule. In the story, Gash Hailu and his family are assumed to represent those some determined and courageous Ethiopians who are striving for free and better Ethiopia.

The communist Derg began to hunt Ethiopian youth randomly like wild animals and murdered them brutally. Each night there was house-to-house searching. Dawit, Gash Hailu's courageous youngest son and Sara, Yonas' wife were always busy lifting the corpse of many young boys lying all over the streets of Addis. Some of them were naked.

*Dawit and Sara stopped at a barefoot boy lying face up the road, not more than fifteen years old. His shoulder was dislocated, face swollen, neck broken. A note was pinned to his torn cotton T-shirt:*

*I AM AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE.*

*MOTHER, DON'T WEEP FOR ME. I DESERVED TO DIE (240).*

On top of this, the death of mid-level government official ignited and worsens the situation. The official was shot dead by the revolutionary group. They suspected the little boy Berhane. They caught him and urged to tell them what happened. They found a piece of paper from the little boy that read: "the essence of our existence is the destruction of the Derg." (218). They threw the little boy to prison. After a while the dead body of the same boy was given to Sofia who determined to wear black for the rest of her life. This compelled Guddu to appear with new bloodiest strategy.

*The red terror will break the backs of those enemies of the state.....we will fight bourgeois White Terror with Red Terror. Until Ethiopian soil is soaked with their bones and flash and cries, we will not stop. Death to our enemies. Death to our enemies. Death. He raised the bottle which was filled with 'blood' higher and sent it crashing to the ground(290).*

When someone was late at night, the whole family began to worry. There was the sound of gun fire every day. They always looked for someone to throw in jail. "No boys today. We just brought in those women from a funeral for an anarchist." Said the police



man (230). The policemen never return empty handed as if they will be judged in death penalty.

Once, Dawit and Sara were busy collecting the dead bodies, a soldier came close and asked him what he was doing. What an amazing conversation was it? Very strange.

*He is a traitor to the revolution. What are you going to do? His finger still rested on the trigger. He needs to be buried. He will stink soon. The soldier shook his head. No funeral for the enemy. Let the hyena eat. It will be just a burial. No funeral ..... Dump it out, the soldier said. Comrade, Dawit said holding his hands in front of him; can a dead boy still be an enemy? Get it out (242).*

The soldier screamed at them. There are lots of funny things in the military. In case, parents or relatives wanted to bury the corpse, they would be asked to pay one hundred- twenty-five birr for the bullet that killed the person. There were times where the soldiers shot dead bodies if they killed them some other way. You will be curious to know the reason. It was to collect the fee (254-255). Surely, this is barbarous and ridicules.

Despite the harshness of the communist regime, everybody kept on reacting aggressively against its dictatorial rule. Several people have died to secure freedom for their nation. In her literary work, she showed the real cost of freedom. Of course, it cost millions precious lives, and is not easy. It was the bloodiest revolution ever in the history of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, they are optimistic that one day, they will achieve the freedom which they were searching for so long.

Reading Maaza's imaginative literary work, "*Beneath the Lion's Gaze*" is a richly rewarding experience. Historical fiction of this sort often transports the reader to a definitive period in a country's real history. Surely, she/he will be affected deeply by

what they read. In her carefully and thoughtfully crafted beautiful novel Maaza Mengiste has played that distinct role. She presented the history of Ethiopia which took place within specific period in the past in such an attractive and artistic manner that anyone picks and reads it.

Over all, political violence, dictatorship, violation of human rights, horrors of civil war which inevitably leads to impoverishment and deep disappointment make migration possible and the best choice. Most Ethiopians migrated to the West during Guddu's reign, and the political woes of the homeland during this period appear as a theme in writings of Ethiopian-American novelists. As if political crisis and its consequences are the marks of the Ethiopian identity. It is evident in the writer's life, her family lives and numerous Ethiopians lives.

### **3.2.2. Courage and Radicalism**

The historical novelist presents the reader with characters caught up in a conflict and builds his narrative from historical details. As the reader becomes involved with the characters and story line, he begins to absorb the historical data and begins to recognize the many human qualities of the character. Gradually the characters become real to the reader and the reader begins to root for this character if he or she is being treated unjustly. The reader might question in his own mind the need for law or government to protect these characters individual rights.

There were several focused, committed and courageous enough males and females who boldly confronted the dictatorial rule (i.e. the Guddu's regime) so that many of us may entertain and experience real freedom and live in peace. In that horrific and

hopeless period in Ethiopian history where many intellectuals were imprisoned, tortured and brutally murdered, these rare brave individuals were committed to play significant role for the down fall of the regime and building new Ethiopia. The author vividly depicted the involvement of both sexes in the revolution. They were the main actors to bring the desired all rounded change to the oppressed people. The writer used the story effectively by narrating it straight to the heart and thereby affecting or influencing their reader. This is precisely because the book is said to be more educating than entertaining.

Maaza's amazingly crafted imaginative literary work of art is an unforgettable, captivating. Amid the unspeakable adversity, there were enormously courage and focused people who were determined to scarify their lives for the brighter, peaceful and prosperous *Promised Land* Ethiopia.

In the story, Gash Hailu and his family are assumed to represent some determined and courageous Ethiopian males and females. Through that impossibly courageous and determined family, the writer has shown an overwhelming desire to re-educate her nation how to resist and struggle against all sorts of systemic and structural evil in Ethiopian leadership.

On top of this, through her fictional family acts, she made the best attempt to teach her nation about *courage, compassion, responsibility, accountability and how to live purpose driven meaning life*. Gash Hailu the prominent medical doctor, the revolutionary Dawit, his youngest son, Sara, Solomon and others in the story are courageous enough to risk their life for anything that is worth dying for, or the purpose, they have set ahead

of them. No one sits idle. The entire family members carry out their task responsibly though they have *no boss, but their conscious*. The characters are artistically well-crafted to properly carry out their assignments.

When Dawit and Sara were busy collecting the dead bodies, a soldier came close and asked him what he was doing. What an amazing conversation was it?

*He is a traitor to the revolution. What are you going to do? His finger still rested on the trigger. He needs to be buried. He will stink soon. The soldier shook his head. No funeral for the enemy. Let the hyena eat. It will be just a burial. No funeral..... Dump it out, the soldier said. Comrade, Dawit said holding his hands in front of him; can a dead boy still be an enemy? Get it out (2010:242).*

Dawit rescued a woman older than his mother from being raped by Fisseha, the soldier. He hit Fisseha and left him half dead. When his mother, Selam saw blood on his clothes she wondered. He explained. Then she said, "*This is how boys learn how to become men.*" This is especially what many Ethiopian mothers used to say (23).

At times, Maaza Mengiste appears as charismatic preacher who can easily persuade her/his listeners for action and win toward her/his way of thinking, or set of beliefs. She seems to utter; I have a dream and absolute conviction that one day; there will be many Hailus, many Dawits, many Saras, Solomons, many Selams and the like among you. You persecuted, not celebrity be determined and courageous to make Ethiopia a better place to live in; no ifs and buts. Listen to me: you were born to leave a legacy! Even in the midst of confusion,

never faint. Instead, you are supposed to encourage each other as true revolutionary. Every character in the story was well-crafted to carry out his/her revolutionary mission carefully, diligently and with utter commitment. "Nothing happens overnight, but every act counts," Said, Solomon (245). Chang is coming soon. The utter disintegration of the horrific dictatorial rule in Ethiopia is within reach. Things won't be the same again. If everybody is playing his/her part in this massive revolutionary movement, no matter what happens, we will give big terminal blow to any dictator, and build new prosperous, peaceful Ethiopia.

### **3.2.3.The Pros and Cons ofthe Bloody Revolution**

Even though the author did not hide the weakness of Hail Selassie's oppressive, exploitative and selfish regime, Maaza seemed somehow sympathetic to the emperor and some of his officials. It appears unfair for her to discredit everyone and dismiss everything altogether. For some Ethiopians gave their precious life in the war with Italian invaders and war with Somalia to protect the country's sovereignty. For instance, General Amman won the war with Somalia and avoided the war with Ertirea (2010:58, 87, 93-94, 133).However, their end is undignified and without ceremony. Everyone wonders why did this happen all the time.

In the early days of the revolution, emperor Hail Selassie was deposed on September 12, 1974, and jailed. Plus, 66 military higher officials were also executed all in one night. They reversed the long held noble tradition that Ethiopians have to those war heroes and martyrs. Fathers who sacrificed their life in defended invaders are highly respected.

This is the sentiment we have about these heroes in the past. There are actually many funny things in the military which you can hardly think of, even in the fictitious world.

She also condemned the deep ignorance of discrediting people for what they contributed for the development and sovereignty of their country in the past. She strongly believes that people, especially the majority of Ethiopians, or those who come to power or take the leading position need to learn to give credit for all the good things that individuals have done while they were in power. That is healthy, and can be acquired. We can learn this from other democratic or developed countries.

The author knew what *"Beneath the Lion's Gaze"* is supposed to produce. She also knew what role this literary work plays in the lives of the people, particularly in the lives of her nation. Surely, she does. Once you read the book, you can hardly stop contemplating about the events that are portrayed. The historical novelist approaches the reader on an emotional level, but the good historical novel can evoke an intellectual response.

In this respect, Maaza was determined to educate her nation; however, she did not treat the problem in detail. Disrespecting and discrediting those higher officials, and executing all in one night, and imprisoning the emperor were a big deal to her. She used a paragraph or two to deal with this issue. Probably, she might have been thoroughly captivated and immersed by other major themes.

### **3.3. The Synopsis of *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery Ethiopia***

Harvard graduate, Rebecca was born in Ethiopia, and migrated abroad with her family two years after the military coup in 1976. In her early childhood, at eleven, she has

experienced the brutality of the derge military junta; was the victim of her father's shooting incident. Then her family left their country and was forced to live in the host land: USA, Minnesota.

Her book, *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia* is a carefully crafted, insightful, interesting, readable autobiographical, historical, and diasporic narrative. It is very unusually to combine the story of the family to the story of the motherland; blends history, culture and political violence in a story format. This gifted writer was so successful in knitting those things together.

Indeed, it is a memoir of dislocation, migration, and rediscovery of Ethiopia after a revolutionary turmoil. The narrative is inspired by and is based on her trip to her homeland Ethiopia after twenty-five years. Rebecca meticulously narrates how she and her family succeeded in overcoming traumatic experience and meaningfully maintain and sustain their productive lives in the Diaspora without being disconnected from the motherland. This literary work rolls a memoir, travelogue and interesting historical accounts. Her mode of presentation made the revolution real to any interested reader. Everything relates to her childhood personal experience and her experience in the host land. Moreover, her literary product is so special that it shines a bright and unique light on Ethiopia, especially for those who associate Ethiopia with famine.

#### **3.4. A thematic Analysis of Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia**

Diasporic writers, through their literary works often address issues like injustice, violation of human right, inequality, dictatorship, authoritarianism, genocide, immorality, freedom of expression, peace and security, identity crisis, cultural conflict, military coup

and so on. The role of these writers is to try to hold a mirror that reflects the historical situations in which the society lives. They usually expose the messes and the direct horrific consequences in their imaginative works.

Rebecca, however, focuses largely on the horror of the revolution during the Derge regime (i.e. political violence in the homeland, and economic shock in the host land). It is true that those who flee from their home land for various reasons often experience economic crisis and disillusionment. Likewise, Rebecca and her family experienced the same thing.

Dr. Ayele Bekerie, from Cornell University summarized the key points of her work in the following manner.

*Rebecca's Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia is a well written, incisive and pleasant to read autobiographical, historical, and diasporic narrative. It is indeed a memoir of dislocation, migration, and rediscovery after a revolutionary upheaval and change. The narrative is inspired by and is based on her four weeks trip to her homeland Ethiopia after twenty-five years of absence. Rebecca meticulously narrates how she and her family succeeded in overcoming traumatic experience and rebuilt their immensely productive lives in the Diaspora while they remain connected to the motherland. Her narrative is in fact therapeutic and, hopefully, it will encourage thousands of silenced Ethiopians to voice their sufferings from the state sponsored violence of the Derg period. Rebecca's initiative in this regard is commendable (<http://www.meskot.com>).*



She wants to bridge the gap that held her at a distance for more than two decades, the gap that forced her to seek new life in America.

### **3.4. 1. Political Instability**

The fact that Emperor Haile Selassie's government was perceived as having so much concerned with covering up the late 1960's devastating famine than looking for the way out had had negative consequences. This failure has been manipulated by the revolutionaries. They televised starving and dying farmers, children, mothers and cattle and wasted farmland on BBC while older 'Majesty' was attending his hand-feeding pet dogs and leopards, and lavish palace ceremonies. This ignited the revolt, and contributed to the final heavy blow of the Haile Selassie's forty and more years autocratic rule (Rebecca, 2007:3-4). No sooner did the Derg come to power that all University professors, students, union leaders and others lost their hope, for the revolution was hijacked by Colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam.

Well-educated and well-read Getachew Haile, Rebecca's father was planning to contribute his part in the development project of modern Ethiopia; however, his dream has been aborted. The Derg soldiers wanted to arrest him. The moment was so dramatic. There were numerous uniformed men and tanks on the street in front of their residence. Neither family member nor relatives were allowed to get closer to their compound. Getachew was shot; badly wounded and taken to a military hospital (Ibid: 5-10). He and his wife Misrak Amare escaped miraculously for life to USA a month after the deadly shooting. The saddest part of this dramatic event was accompanied by terribly unbelievable tragic incident that those officials who rescued and helped them to

flee abroad were killed right after their departure. They sacrificed their life on behalf of Rebecca's parents.

The period was full of tragic drama that Anjabu, a distant cousin of Rebecca's father jumped from a distance of five or six feet with a baby, (i.e. Rebecca's little sister) strapped to her back. She bruised a knee pretty badly, because she was afraid that she might get shot. She was praying unceasingly while she was creeping toward the main gate to escape (Ibid. 32-33). There was an exchange of gun fire, and gunmen also saw her creeping to the main gate; however, miraculously, she survived.

The horrors of civil war (i.e. red and white terror in Ethiopia), political unrest, injustice, misuse of power, extreme violation of human rights, harassment, imprisonment, massacre etc. are the major reasons that forced Rebecca and her parents flee to abroad from this political turmoil. After their departure the situation gets worse. The two poorest countries in the entire globe, Ethiopia and Somalia clashed, and get into serious war which took many souls. Ethiopian's relationship with United States ceased; it was devastating and a sad end (Ibid: 12).

Alone with countless others, my parents were swept up in that wave and soon the life they had built together had been completely washed away. In the summer of 1976, my parents, my sisters and I found ourselves abruptly deposited in the United States, stripped of our possession and expectations; left to start over financially, professionally and emotionally. I was ten when it became clear we could not stay in Addis Ababa, and had just turned eleven when my sisters and I reunited with our parents in small central Minnesota town. (Ibid:2).

"My uncle, Tedesse swore, you couldn't trust your own shadow. By then, government soldiers had nearly killed my father, and my parents had fled the country;" (Ibid:1).

These political woes in the cases of traumatic human rights violations, like the one

committed on her family, humiliate immigrants and kill their inherent desire to live in their motherland and enjoy life to its fullest for the rest of their lives.

To sum up, horrors of war, dictatorship, violation of human rights, and impoverishment forced a great number of Ethiopians to migrate to foreign land and strange culture. They also left their mark on the personality and behavior of those people who experienced them. Most Ethiopians migrated to the West during the Derge regime, and the woes of the homeland during this period almost inevitably appear as a theme in nearly all Ethiopian Diaspora writings.

### **3.4.2. Nostalgia and the Glorious Past**

In her book entitled: "*Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*," Rebecca limited her reflection on Ethiopian history and historical sites to the northern part. She retraces the historic north or what she calls "the remains of an empire", an empire that left a legacy of visible monuments, written records and dynamic religious and cultural institutions.

Rediscovery is a way of coming to terms with shocking and tragic past experience. It is an attempt to overcome trauma, psychological and physical dislocations triggered by radical social turmoil.

Rebecca also tried to paint mental pictures in the minds of her reader, especially those who are born and raised in the USA. She drew the historic northern part of Ethiopia artistically in the minds of her readers (i.e. Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian) through her literary work. In her thoughtfully crafted, insightful autobiographical, historical, and diasporic narrative, she is able to re-introduce and re-define Ethiopia for those

Westerners and the Americans who frequently associate Ethiopia with famine and war. For so long, Ethiopia remains to be synonymous with poverty and warfare. This literary product shines a bright and unique light on Ethiopia. It is assumed that anyone who reads "*Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*,"critically will ultimately alter his/her perception and have the right picture and an unbiased knowledge of Ethiopia.

When her parents were in Ethiopia, Rebecca did not get the chance of visiting those remarkably important historic places such as Lalibela, Gondar, Lake Tana, and most of all, the city of Axum which represents an important piece of Ethiopian History.

*Lalibela is home to massive monolithic churches that eleventh century masons extracted from solid mountainside; Lake Tana has atmospheric monasteries that depict multiple facets of an age-old church; and in Gondar are medieval places where kings, courtiers and early Portuguese explorers plotted royal intrigues. Axum the oldest and most important of these places, is also the hardest to categorize. As I would discover, the city is home to an extra-ordinary mix of ancient ruins, historic churches and present-day tensions that reveals a complex and unsettling picture of nation and national identity.*

*Two thousand years ago, Axum was at the center of an empire that stretched from northern Ethiopia across the Red Sea to the South Arabian Peninsula. Several centuries later Axum witnessed the birth of Ethiopian Christianity and the rise of powerful legends that linked Ethiopia's monarchs to Israel and laid claim to the Ark of the Covenant. Nineteen century Axum signified the line the colonial Italians could not cross – the town sits just south of Adwa, the famous battlefield where Emperor Menelik's ragtag army stunned the aggressors in 1896 (75-76).*

During her visit, Rebecca discovered three distinct strands of Ethiopian identity: *ancient empire, Christian kingdom and divided modern nation*. The experience left her as though she had walked out of a theater before the final act (76-77). For someone these

are what it means to be an Ethiopian. What she saw during her trip to the northern part of Ethiopia was deeply disappointing, and erodes our pride as an Ethiopian.

Her connectedness with these historic sites and her homeland is vividly displayed and beautifully described in her work. Thus, for her this is what it means to be an Ethiopian. Though she was overjoyed with her trip, after 25 years in exile, some of the strange things that she saw shattered her long held Ethiopian identity.

### **3.4.3. Commitment to Transformation**

The text invites us into a transformation of allegiances and commitments which will manifest itself in behavior appropriate to our socio-economic and political setting. Given the Guddu's regime socio-economic and political scenario, how were different responsible individuals responding to the situation of their nation, and the most corrupt and dictatorial rule?

Despite the unpredictable nature of the Derg regime, Rebecca's uncle, Engineer Tadesse was unimaginably determined to bring meaningful and permanent change for this nation. He strongly believes that economic transformation will lead to political change or transformation.

Rebecca's narrative about Engineer Tadesse, is unbelievably moving. His determination to continue to live and build bridges in Ethiopia, even under the most trying moments of the Derg, is quite exemplary. Surely, every responsible citizen shares his vision of putting the abundant water of the Abay River to large-scale irrigation agricultural development. A leader who puts his vision into reality will be a true national leader, comparable to President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who built the great Aswan Dam

in Egypt. Thanks for the Dam, Egypt is not only generating massive amount of electricity, but it is turning vast tract of desert land green.

He is deeply committed to helping Ethiopia prosper. He is a successful businessman, having done many different things during his career, and is a true visionary. He believes that jobs, not handouts, are the solution for Ethiopia, and he sets up each of his construction projects so that it can employ the maximum number of people in the community. He has been in charge of the construction of many roads and bridges in Ethiopia. He was also persistently thinking and planning about the construction of reservoirs and irrigation systems in Ethiopia that would allow farmers to water their fields even during the dry season (2007: 57-63). Tadesse is such a gifted person that he has the ability to see beyond his time. He dreamt about “Abay dam” way back in the past how Ethiopia shall benefit from it. Large-scale irrigation and generating hydro-electric power were his major plans. From this one can deduce that the issue of “Abay dam” is not something new. We still need to learn to acknowledge individuals for what the noble things that they have done in the past.

Major Guddu nationalized the company in 1978. Subsequently, his construction company was confiscated. Though it was an extremely devastating act, Tadesse did not give up. His tenacity to start from the scratch is so amazing; was determined to raise and fatten sheep, and raised rabbit (58). He constantly preaches independence, hard work. Moreover, he is deeply concerned about the welfare of others; dedicated to promote the social welfare of his nation, but allergic to corruption and corrupt government officials. He expressed his anger in the following manner: “At the most basic level, bad government means that many good companies are hindered by

administrative corruption. The monarchy, the Derg, and now the TPLF, all favored business connected to people in power, so that the most successful companies in Ethiopia are rarely the best-run;" (63). He always strives for the greater good; comes up with new and better project that benefits the majority, because he wants to see Ethiopia prosper, and be self-sufficient (61). He comments this has not been addressed and carefully thought about by the government. "He also commented on the current government's emphasis on regional and ethnic identity over national unity. This has created an environment where a contractor from Addis Ababa is not welcome in Axum or Mekele, no matter what his qualifications." (64).

It is so dramatic when TPLF leaders came to power, and returned his construction company in 1991, which was actually confiscated by the Derg. This gives him hope, and came up with thorough and well-crafted proposal entitled: "A Proposal for How to Eradicate Hunger in Ethiopia." He is well aware of the fact that such a grand project needed government support.

*The premise of Tadesse's astonishing thesis was simple. First, there is more than enough water in the abundant rivers of Ethiopia's central highlands – particularly given the volume of increased flow during the three-months rainy season-to satisfy the country's agricultural needs. Currently, most of these rivers run off during the saturated rainy season, sometimes washing away fertile soil. Second, because most of these rivers, including the Blue Nile and its tributaries, are at elevations higher than the country's agricultural areas, engineers could exploit the drop in elevation to collect their waters and route it towards lower-lying farmlands in a cost-efficient manner. Specially, Tadesse pointed out that*

*Lake Ziway, an existing crater lake near Addis Ababa, could be enlarged topography to maximum advantage, several rivers could be diverted or partly channeled so that their waters collected in the lower-elevation lake during the rainy season. The conserved water could then be released to farms whenever the rains failed or even to lengthen the growing season.(65-66).*

Tadesse presented his new proposal entitled: “A Proposal for How to Eradicate Hunger in Ethiopia.” to Ethiopian Association of Engineers. One of his slides written in big bold letters reads: “If only [thirty years ago], we had made our slogan water for the tiller instead of land for the tiller, we would not be hungry today!”

What a great privilege is it to encounter with such a visionary, dedicated, courageous, self-less, practical person, especially, in our time where individualism reign. He is a real change agent; can easily influence the way you think and do things. Rebecca also played her writers role by effectively depicting challenging story of Engineer Tadesse in a very artistic and readable manner.

It is quite reasonable that Rebecca gave enough space for Engineer Tadesse’s profile. She crafted and narrated it beautifully that it may affect the thinking of every Ethiopian who reads *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*. It teaches us that an individual can make a meaningful difference even in the midst of unimaginable and deeply disappointing circumstances. Through Tadesse’s story, she taught us a lasting lesson about what perseverance meant, and its reward. One can dare to say that he has succeeded in life, because success is measured by what we leave for others.



### **3.5. Inter-related Minor Themes**

Under this section the minor, but equally relevant themes' of *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia* will be analyzed with due care. The writers are determined to educate their nation through story telling. Any critical reader can clearly see the power of literature in the lives of a given society if it is produced with a clear purpose in mind. These invaluable and lasting lessons are presented in the following manner.

#### **3.5.1 Fatalist Psychology**

There were devastating famines, genocide, military coup, torture. It was a time in the history of Ethiopia where everyone was hunted to death. Perhaps, these catastrophes of different sort may have created religious fatalism. During Guddu's regime, quite a large number of people tend to accept everything that happened as the will of God. Harrison once said that religious fatalism is dangerous. It is dangerous because it teaches about despair, and saps individual's responsibility (Harrison, 1988:215). As it is stated in Maaza's first novel, during the Derg era the majority of the people of Ethiopia were passive, simple spectators. For they have accepted every phenomenon as if it was the will of God. Thus everybody was waiting till the mercy of the almighty come up on them (2010:264, 234). They were not responsive to any sort of ruthless injustice and inhuman acts.

Unlike his younger brother, Dawit, Yonas has developed an absolute conviction that prayer would help them to cope with what is happening. On the contrary, Dawit believes and contends that struggling or fighting against all forms of injustice, all sort of evil

including evil government will ultimately bring peace and security to the society. His conviction is so strong that Dawit is involved with an underground resistance group to fight against the Derge, military junta. Even his father, Gash Hailu is unable to control or convince him. Any critical reader wonders, what is the position of the writer? As a writer, although she depicted artistic-fully crafted characters holding conflicting positions which add tension in the story, she is not in favor of religious fatalism. This is how the role of the writers is displayed in their literary work of art. While they were entertaining their readers, they keep on commenting on those erroneous assumptions. Maaza as a responsible writer strive to communicate her strong conviction in the form of a story, and carefully pass her correction on to her readers.

### **3.5.2. Cherishing Traditional Values**

In a critical time like ours where the majority of Ethiopians assume the west is always the best, nearly everything is Americanized or westernized, once again the gifted diasporic novelist, Maaza appeared in such a devastating period where there is confusion and identity crisis to remind her nation that we have rich cultural heritage; our own amazingly beautiful way of doing things in a culturally accepted manner.

Maaza deliberately used Amharic words in the organization of the story. Hopefully, it gives diasporic flavor to the text. Here are some of the selected dictions used: *Abbaye, Emaye, eskesta, washint, Emama, berbere, madiat, Emebet, Gash Hailu used to call Selam his wife, shamma, dabo, dabo kolo, netela, injera, yealembeqayn, hebrettesebawinet, masinqo, misser , shiro, zebenya, Aizosh, wereda, kebero, Abebaye Hoy, silet, budah, lijjay, Zamecha, habesha chemise,(2010:10-298)*. Was the

author consistent throughout the end of the story while she was using these words? Partly, she did this to inform or educate some Ethiopians and the other parts of the world that we also have something to be proud of and something to share for humanity, in general. The author was very selective and careful not to incorporate some of the harmful traditional practices. The characters were given same sense of responsibility. Whenever maaza planned to introduce anything to the other world and to this generation, she did it with complete care. Rebecca also employed Amharic dictions such as Meqdes (2007:112), Igzeryistilign, Ishe (115) and others,

Mimi represents Ethiopians who refuse to be labeled as baggers. When Rebecca and Mimi is approaching St. Giyorgis church, “Mimi let Jean, Rebecca’s husband lie down to the backseat of her car until she had driven past the group of alms seekers near the gate. She did not do this to avoid giving money – in Ethiopia it is customary to give before entering a church, and everyone, especially Mimi carries coins for this purpose – but to avoid the anger that foreigners always trigger.” (113).

Dawit rescued a woman older than his mother from being raped by Fisseha, the soldier. He hit Fisseha and left him half dead. When his mother, Selam saw blood on his clothes she wondered. He explained. Then she responded, “This is how boys learn how to become men.” This is especially what many Ethiopian mothers used to say (2010:23). Any Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian reader may know and learn that this is something which is typically Ethiopic. This is deliberate inclusion by the author.

Before the reader turns a page she/he sees a thoughtfully and carefully selected picture on the jacket of the book which has a magical power to capture the attention of nearly

anyone. It is typically Ethiopic, and conveys a certain important message about Ethiopia. Hence it creates sense of belongingness. Particularly, if you are an Ethiopian, regardless of where you are geographically the good and the bad memories of homeland and childhood memories come to your mind. This is actually one of the features and marks of diasporic literary products.

### **3.5.3. Economic Crisis in the Host land**

The moment Rebecca and the entire family landed on a foreign land, initially, they felt as if they were left to sink or swim. They were utterly confused. None of them have had jobs to sustain their lives. They were worried very much about the future ahead of them. It is very tough for the family, who has experienced good life back home to lead their lives under such an unimaginable scarcity, is it not?

Though Rebecca's parents were somehow relatively safe and secured, there was no magical way to escape from the inevitable economic challenge in the host land. Hence, they have to work hard to cover all the expenses, including Rebecca's school fees (2007:14). It was not easy to make money as an incoming migrant. She tried to point out to her readers how life without job, especially in the foreign land is difficult. Regardless of their origin, the challenge of joblessness is common nearly for all new immigrants.

### **3.5.4. Predicaments of the Diaspora in the Host Land**

Trust me, USA is not a paradise on earth as new immigrants erroneously assume. The truth is that almost every immigrant will inevitably experience one or the other form of

challenges in the host land. Migrants wrestle or tussle with frustration, disillusionment, emptiness, and suffering from every sort of discrimination. These can be themes of Rebecca's work; whereas this is not the focus of Maaza's debut novel.

There was a time Rebecca and her parents swore not to return home whatsoever the circumstance would be. The horrific experience and devilish injustice in the homeland were unbearable to Rebecca. Haunted by the traumatic memory and the humiliation her family suffered. Initially, she was constantly looking for meaning in life, but she always felt emptiness. She spends the rest of her life trying to escape the bitter memory of the traumatic experience of injustice.

Rebecca said, "As the years went by, I became more and more consumed by my American life and less and less connected with an Ethiopian. I soon stopped thinking of as home." Besides, her parents were not insisting her to speak Amharic. "The preservation of Ethiopian culture was not a priority for them as it has become for the generation of Ethiopian immigrants that has arrived in the last decade. As a result we adopt a classical assimilation approach to cope with our dislocation." (2007:15). Especially, reading the following statement, one can detect sort of confusion: "I did not feel comfortable in traditional Ethiopian circles .... At the same time I did not feel entirely American. I never felt at ease with the fundamental lightheartedness of my classmates or shared the sense of self-control and invincibility that seemed to underlie it." (16).

Maaza did not assimilate to the host culture nor does she claim her culture is always the best, as some people erroneously assume that the west is always the best. Is she the traditionalists? I'm not sure. But I'm certain that she is in favour of the traditionalists. Is she against the intergenerationalists? I don't think so, because she sometimes seems to

share their ideas. For example, you find expression such as “...*holding his penis ...the soldier was ready to rape mulu, but Dawit rescued her.*” (2010: 23). Those African traditionalists use expression like “*private part*” to mean the same thing. Sahle Sellassie who joined those prominent African writers who writes in English also preferred to use the expression “*private part*”.

There are textual evidences; however, about cultural conflict. Although she used the Amaharic expression “*abbaye and emaye*” as substitute to father and mother throughout the story respectively, she deviates. For instance, the expression: “*please, don’t let them take my daddy or abbey.*” (194,298); and the expression: “*I want my mommy.*”(163). Unless, Maaza has some other sound reason, most diasporic theoreticians agree that such deviation occurs as one torn between her/his parent’s culture and the majority or host culture. And of course it is one of the features of diasporic literature.

### **3.6. The Thematic Convergence between *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* and *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia***

Some literary comparative analysis is done to find the correspondence between the two works of literary art. For the sake of clarity, parallel themes will be treated under the following sub-themes. It has been discovered that the political woes in the country, Ethiopians’ collective life style as described in family bond and national icons are among the outstanding themes that the two works share in common.

### 3.6.1. Political Woes in the Homeland

“Political woe in the homeland” is one of the major themes that both Maaza and Rebecca share in common. In this respect, except its mode of presentation, and its depth, it seems as though you are reading identical story. At times, you would be tempted to assume who referred the other document first. One may also ask: will there be any intentional or unintentional inter-textual link between the two literary products? Perhaps, there might be an indirect inter-textual link between Maaza’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* and Rebecca’s *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*. Indeed, there are significant differences, especially, in its mode of presentation. For instance, Maaza employed thoughtfully crafted fictitious characters, and narrated the story through one family and relatives, whereas Rebecca tells us the horrific events through her extended real family members. Both authors adopted their own style of communicating the truth and presented what is left unsaid in a very attractive manner.

The horror of civil war, random public shooting and murdering are the some of the distinguishing marks of the Derg regime. Rebecca’s father barely survived after being shot by the military junta. It is this political unrest and turmoil that forced us to live our country. Even though maaza did not include any character in the story who flee to US, she did not shy away to expose the hideous effect of the dictatorial rule in a country. It is evident in her interview and in a great number of her book reviews by different reviewers that they migrated to US due to the political unrest in Ethiopia.

Maaza also dealt extensively with this horror-filled, hellish dictatorial rule. She described the situation in such a way that none can stop contemplating about what read.

### **3.6.2. Family Bond**

It is this well established collective thinking driven life style that causes her trip to Ethiopia after 25 years. The strength of collective thinking surpasses all the setbacks and hellish childhood experiences. It is the mark of Ethiopian identity. Although individualism is creeping into people oriented Ethiopian society, strong family bond is still there.

Rebecca has taken steps to narrow the distance and to re-link with extended family members and country. It certainly presents a balanced life of the author, a balance in which she displayed an American face to the world while she nurtured a private identification with Ethiopia that she kept mostly to herself. Abel Walelu, in his review, on July 22, 2008, also explained her work as follows: "I've not read a book that I can personally relate to as 'Held at a Distance.' It has mesmerized me; got me hooked throughout the book. I love her theme; wrote a book report for my cross-cultural communication class..." ([www.Washingtonpost.com](http://www.Washingtonpost.com)).

Rebecca's interaction with her grandmother and aunt also provide ample examples of the strength of family bond, and its capacity to sustain and nourish the family members. One particularly memorable relative is Rebecca's uncle, a man who still lives in Ethiopia and is deeply committed to helping Ethiopia prosper. He is a successful businessman, having done many different things during his career, and is a true visionary.

Family is a good institution where you can build your personal identity. Rebecca use to say that her grandmother is a strong, independent woman; she believes that she has inherited some of her strength and spirit. Besides, her grandmother is a symbol of what



it means to be an Ethiopian: to be connected to family and community, and to understand one's place in relation to those who've come before and after.

At the core of Maaza's searing work are one family's hellish experiences during the 1974 revolution. The family's patriarch — the good doctor Hailu — is a prominent, proud man highly trained to alleviate pain, cure illness, and save the dying. And yet he can do nothing for his beloved wife who lies in a hospital bed, shriveled, exhausted, and ready to pass on. Hailu's elder son Yonas gravely tries to hold his family together, but is himself helpless when his young daughter becomes seriously ill and his wife Sara is crushed by the fear of potential loss.

Dawit is devoted to his dying mother, emotionally dependent on his sister-in-law Sara, and in love with a headstrong young woman. He looks on in anguish and disgust as the new regime claims his childhood best friend.

He sets up each of his construction projects so that it can employ the maximum number of people in the community. .

### **3.6.3. National Icons**

In all ages, there are remnants that can do something miraculous and be an agent of meaningful change. These individuals are honest, self-less, generous, dedicated, hardworking and visionaries. These are rare gifts of the creator. Maaza's fictitious character Gash Hailu and Rebecca's hero Engineer Tadesse are the outstanding characters in their stories. These are the kind of individuals whom you wish to imitate and be just like them.

They are constantly striving for the economic and political freedom, the well-being, and progress of the society at large. They think beyond self-promotion and their ethnic identity, and act accordingly. They are friends to the marginalized and the needy. They have national vision and toil toward that noble agenda. In other words, these individuals have no agenda of their own; rather they promote the agenda of the oppressed, the outcast and the needy.

### **3.7. The Idiosyncrasy of Both Writers**

In this section, the peculiar or distinguishing characteristics of Maaza's and Rebecca's works will be identified and evaluated. It also helps us to comprehend the preference or emphasis of each writer.

So far, it has already been discussed that the two Ethiopian-American Female diasporic writers' works exhibit common themes. Simultaneously, a close reading of these works will help us to identify that the major concern of Maaza might occasionally be the minor concern of Rebecce. The converse is true either. Except the mode of presentation, both literary works focus mainly on the civil war, famine, genocide, military coup, bad memories of torture. For instance, Rebecca made an in depth treatment on the following issues. In other words, the themes under this section are the themes that are relatively better brought out in only one of the two novels. These themes may be found in both novels but are well developed in only one of the two works.

Rebecca precisely narrated how she and her family succeeded in overcoming traumatic experience and rebuilt their immensely productive lives in the Diaspora while they

remain connected to the motherland. Indeed, she included the history of dislocation, migration, and her rediscovery of her motherland after a revolutionary turmoil and change.

Besides, she gave due attention to retrace historic north, and dynamic religious and cultural institutions. She wanted to delete the distorted picture of Ethiopia from the minds of the Westerners and the Americans, and paint the right picture. Of course, she is passionate to do; and never faint. Ethiopia is a land of fortune, historical heritage and land of ancient civilization and so on. Of course, there is something wrong somewhere. One day, we will rediscover the real Ethiopia, regain our original status. Famine cannot represent Ethiopia nor define it. The truth is that Ethiopia like some 14<sup>th</sup> century European countries were starved. We have absolute conviction that one day, we will share others out of the overflowing abundance of Ethiopian blessing.

## Chapter Four

### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

#### Conclusion

Both Maaza and Rebecca dedicated themselves to serve their nation as though someone holding a mirror that reflects the horrific events, situations and amazingly remarkable historical sites in a specific period and place in history. Maaza in her debut literary work *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* seems to say *Never Ever Again!* Ban terror-filled, communist dictatorial regime! Rebecca's response to this terror-filled regime is not far from this. However, Rebecca prefers to communicate something specific which she thinks most relevant, and actually is not the focus of Maaza. In her thoughtfully crafted, insightful autobiographical, historical, and diasporic narrative, *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*, she chooses to re-inform and re-define Ethiopia for those Westerners and the Americans who frequently associate Ethiopia with famine and war. Of course, Ethiopia remains to be synonymous with poverty and warfare for so long. As a result, she was determined and passionate enough to change the distorted picture of Ethiopia. And she did it through her widely read (i.e, by non-Ethiopian) literary product that shines a bright and unique light on Ethiopia. The author has absolute conviction to alter the long held erroneous perception of Europeans and Americans.

Terrifying political violence and its impoverishing outcomes, strength of family bond, most cherished traditional values and prevalence of national icons or courageous remnants are the major themes which Maaza and Rebecca share in common. Except its

mode of presentation, area of emphasis and depth, as readers you feel as though you are reading similar story.

However, significant differences stand out as well, especially it is clearly visible in its mode of presentation. For example, Maaza employed carefully crafted fictitious characters, and narrates the story through one family and relatives; whereas Rebecca tells us the horrific events through her extended real family members (i.e, her parents and relatives). Both authors employed their own style to communicate the reality. Maaza's fictitious character, Gash Hailu and Rebecca's hero, Engineer Tadesse are among the national icons that both writers gave enough space to re-educate and inspire their nation.

However, there are also themes which are distinctively Rebecca's not of Maaza. Similarly, there are relevant themes uniquely treated by the gifted novelist Maaza Menguiste. Hence those themes which deal about retraces historic North, and its dynamic religious and cultural Institutions, economic woes and predicaments of the diaspora in the host land are distinctly treated by Rebecca. On the other hand, themes such as fatalists psychology and value of acknowledging people for what they have done in the past are vividly presented or better treated by Maaza. She taught us a lasting lesson lest we ought to be the same again.

On top of this, there are times where the major concerns of Maaza might occasionally be the minor concern of Rebecca, or vice versa. For instance: culture religion, dynamic religious sites can be taken as the minor concerns of Maaza; on the contrary, these are relatively the major concerns of Rebecca. The reason behind her big concern is that the

majority of foreigners have a much distorted and badly painted picture of this fortunate land, and she was determined to take the initiative with courage, and willingness to change it. They knew the changing power of literature, and use literary text as a platform to inform, educate and even to persuade anyone to think a certain way. They use their carefully written and well researched literary works even to provoke response and speculation.

Maaza's historical novel is more challenging and even more excitingly educating than entertaining. Through that impossibly courageous and determined family, the writer has shown an overwhelming desire to re-educate her nation how to resist and struggle against all sorts of leadership problem in Ethiopia for about half a century. In addition, she did want to pass without making a humble meaningful comment on the constant shameful failure to acknowledge individuals for what they have contributed in the past for the development and sovereignty of their country. The writer believes that the majority of Ethiopians, especially those who come to the position of leadership ought to learn granting recognition to individuals for all the good they have done in the past. You need not to worry; it can easily be acquired. What we need is willingness to change. The author knew what "*Beneath the Lion's Gaze*," supposes to yield. She also knew what role this literary work plays, particularly in the lives of her nation and the generation to come.

Maaza sometimes appears as charismatic preacher who can easily persuade his/her audience for action. No matter how hard you try to stop thinking about the story, you can hardly escape from contemplating it. In this respect she has achieved her goal. Even in motivating and influencing others to far better action and bright future ahead of

them. She seems to say: don't give up! Many Hailus, many Dawits, many Saras, Solomons and many Selams are coming; be determined and courageous enough to make Ethiopia a better place to live in; no ifs and buts. What courageous, bold ideal generation is she drawing in the minds of her readers? A generation, even in the midst of confusion never faint. Instead, they were encouraging each other as true revolutionary.

Beyond the thematic parallel and divergence, each work exhibits amazing similarities. Gash Hailu of Maaza and Engineer Tadesse of Rebecca's hero have extremely amazing self-less personality. These individuals are impossibly concerned about the well-being and progress of their nation. They are passionate enough to bring some meaningful change, and are not hesitant to pay a price for the good of their people.

Maaza is so proud about her traditional values. Is she the traditionalists? Though one cannot boldly claim that maaza is a traditionalist, He/she can assume that she is in favour of the traditionalists. Is she against the intergenerationalists? I don't think so, because she sometimes seems to share their ideas.

There are textual evidences; however, about cultural conflict. Although Maaza, throughout the story used Amaharic expression such as "*abbaye and emaye*" as *substitute* to father and mother respectively, she occasionally deviates. For instance, the expression: "*please, don't let them take my daddy or abbey.*" (194,298); and the expression: "*I want my mommy.*"(163).Unless, Maaza has some other sound reason, most diasporic theoreticians agree that such deviation occurs as one torn between

her/his parent's culture and the majority or host culture. Of course, it can be taken as one of the features of diasporic literature.

Whatsoever the night is long, these visionary authors are optimistic that the day will come. And Ethiopia will arise and shine. The entire globe will have the right picture of this country. Nevertheless, we still need tenacity, unshakeable hope and faith, and perseverance.

### **Recommendations**

Overlooking to diasporic writing is a great failure among literary scholars, and any sort of excuse would be unacceptable and invalid. Despite its resourcefulness, we have given migrant literature little, very little attention. Overall, this could be taken as strange omission.

First, international diaspora studies have developed and gained significance in recent times. Diasporic studies and post-colonial theories have become a major methodological approach in the study of culture and literature. Thus any interested researchers, who has a passion to do research such on society and culture, transnational communication, identity diffusion, and others, are highly recommended to consult these rich resource materials. It is also essential to encourage and even award those who show tremendous interest in this specific area of study; thereby, promote this recently introduced, but resourceful genre.

Second, more and more researchers should be motivated to carry out further study on the debate of national and transnational writings in the field of diasporic literature. Perhaps, this might help us to comprehend the contemporary global trend, or know



where it is heading. In other words, a serious recognition of difference in order to lead to a deeper understanding of different cultures seems to be the best way forward for post-colonial diasporic writers to achieve the aims of the genre. Furthermore, an extensive exploration of diasporic literature may help us to anticipate new community with its distinct identity.

Third, teachers at any level, and higher education instructors are highly encouraged to use historical fiction as teaching resource materials in their history and English classrooms. When the history teacher brings this kind of fiction into the classroom, he is providing the student with another understanding of the past. The historical novel uses imaginative and figurative language to entice students into a historical exploration. The character and drama interact with past events in such a way as to involve the student in a study of the past on an emotional level and cognitive level. This involvement of students is a logical reason why history teachers or instructors should be persuaded to use historical fiction.

## Bibliography

Alpers, E. A. (2001) *Defining the African Diaspora*. Center for Comparative Social Analysis Workshop. University of California, Los Angeles.

Cohen, R. (2008) *Global Diasporas: an introduction*. London: UCL Press

Endalkachew Hailu (2008). *The predicament of the Diaspora as Reflected in the Texture of Dreams and the Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University.

Hall, Stuart (1993) "Cultural Identity and Diaspora:" *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial theory*" Eds. Patric Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Harrison, Everett F. (1988) *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Michigan: Baker Book House Company.

Igor Maver (2009) *New Diasporic Literature in a Post-Ethnic Transcultural Canada* University of Ljubljana Slovenia

Maaza, Mengiste (2010). *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. New York: W.W Norton and company, Inc.

Mahelet Abraham (2006) *Colonization, Cultural Conflict and Identity Crisis: Joys of Mother Land and Nervous Condition*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University.

Oliver Bakewell (2008) *In Search of the Diasporas within Africa: New Journal African Diasporas: International Migration Institute* vol.1, University of Oxford.

Rainer Bauböck, Thomas Faist (2010) *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*. Amsterdam University Press.

Ramraj, vicror J. (1996) *Diasporas and Multiculturalism*. New York: Harvester Williamsheaf.

Rebecca Haile (2008). *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*. New York: Academy Chicago Publishers.

Safran, William. "Diaspora in Modern Society: Myth of Homeland and return." *Diaspora a Transnational Studies*" (Spring 1991:83-99).

Sahle Sellassie, (1970). *The Afersata*. Malt: St. Paul's Press.

## **Internet Sources**

Igor Maver (2009) <http://myuminfo.umanitoba.ca/Documents/2142/MaverI.pdf>

<http://ezinearticles.com/?Diaspora-Literature---A-Testimony-of-Realism&id=1362004>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Books/2010/apr/24/>

<http://www.entertainmentweekly.com>, February 23, 2007)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicalnovel>

Jenifer Reese on a book review of the novel on the Entertainment Weekly

Georgouris, Sath (2008). [www.eh.net/XIII Congress/cd/papers/ 10 Georgouris](http://www.eh.net/XIII_Congress/cd/papers/10_Georgouris).

Georgiou, Myria, (2001). [www. photoinsight. Org](http://www.photoinsight.org). UK theory/ theory/ pdf.

Mohammed, A. (2004) *Globalization, Identity, Politics and Social Conflict*. URL

Academon. Com/lib/essay/ Identity and Literature. html.

<http://madisonian.net/2006/12/20/defining-culture/>

<http://www.postcolonialweb.com>

<http://bookdragon.si.edu/2012/01/09/> Interview.

<http://www.nttimes.com/2010/01/o3/books/review>.

<http://www.octava.net/text/historicalFiction,htm>.

## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my work and it has not been presented before in any University. Moreover, I declare that all the sources of materials used for this thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Dereje Mulugeta

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

University: Addis Ababa University

Institute of Language Studies

Department of Foreign Languages & Literature

Date of Submission: May 5, 2012

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as a university advisor.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Date of approval: \_\_\_\_\_