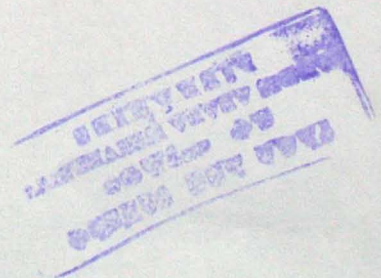


**A THEMATIC STUDY OF
SELECTED PROSE FICTIONAL
AND NON-FICTIONAL WRITINGS
OF ETHIOPIAN DIASPORA IN
ENGLISH**

by Mesfin Adinew

*A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of
the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Foreign Literature*

Department of Foreign Literature
Faculty of Humanities
Addis Ababa University



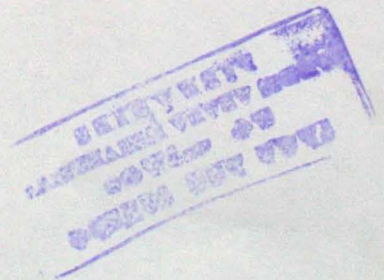
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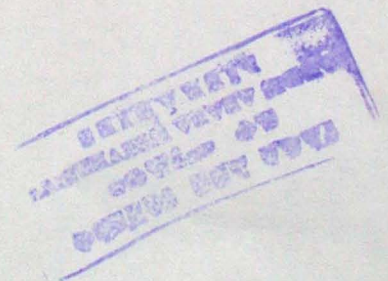
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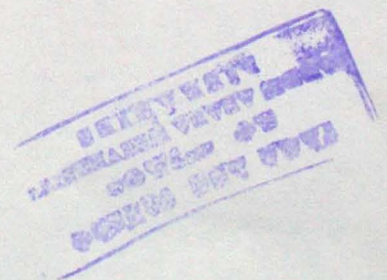
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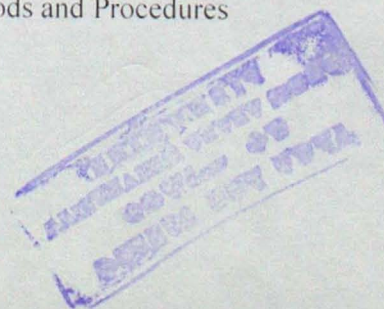
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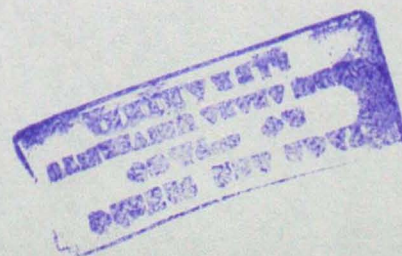
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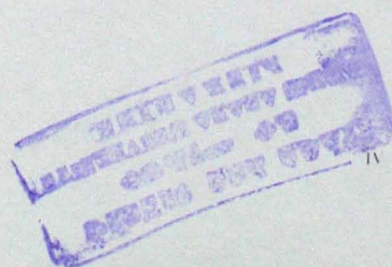
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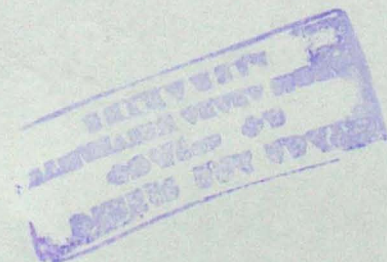
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Abstract

Written literature in Ethiopia has a long history. Religious writings in the ancient liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church, *Ge'ez*, constituted the bulk of the literary production until the late 19th and early 20th centuries. On the other hand, written secular literature in other indigenous languages (particularly in Amharic) has also been in the picture since the turn of the 20th century. By contrast, according to studies conducted in the area, Ethiopian literature in English language came into existence in late-1950s and early-1960s. Since then, a number of literary works of various qualities and genres have been published by Ethiopians both within and outside the country (by the diaspora). However, while research into Ethiopian literature in the vernacular has never been lacking, research on Ethiopian literature in English language has remained quite meagre, or nearly non-existent in the case of literature of the Ethiopian diaspora. This has led to knowledge gap in the area, anonymity/obscurity of Ethiopian literary works in English both locally and externally, and failure to utilize these works. Thus, cognizant of these problems, this study set out to critically analyse six representative literary writings of the Ethiopian diaspora in English, published in the period between 2000 and 2010, by using the Post-colonial theory as its theoretical framework.

The thematic analysis followed the descriptive and comparative analysis methods, used both concurrently and sequentially. Hence, the selected texts were assessed and compared both individually and in an intra and inter-group manners in order to identify their thematic preoccupations as well as existing thematic convergences and divergences.

The findings reveal that there is a good deal of thematic convergence as well as a few divergences among the narratives analysed in this study. In general, five subject matters emerge as the most dominant themes that traverse the Ethiopian diasporic writings selected in this study. Viewed from the perspective of the Post-colonial literary theory in general, the prevalence of these subject matters (in spite of the authors' certain peculiarities in terms of socio-historical and cultural background, including non-colonisation contexts, *vis-à-vis* diasporas from other African countries), and a number of specifics that are typical of the Postcolonial/Diasporic literature paradigm in the selected narratives, rightly classifies literatures of the Ethiopian diaspora under the general domain Postcolonial/Diasporic literature. The study also reveals that their literature, by and large, is a literature of ambivalence rather than of certainty, a voice of privilege *vis-à-vis* denial, and of a journey to



rediscovery of the self. Finally, the study recommends three strategies vis-a-vis the problems, and the objectives it set out to achieve: i) incorporating them with the syllabuses of African literature in English language, and using them in the teaching/learning of African literature courses in higher institutions in Ethiopia; ii) disseminating or publicising all newly released publications using all media both locally and internationally in collaboration with the writers/their agents, and relevant ministries and institutions in the country; and iii) the Ministry of Education or the Agency for Relevance and Quality of Higher Education should take steps to make selected works of Ethiopians in English (both at the diaspora and locally) and critical works as well available and easily accessible. This will help alleviate the current problem of paucity in Ethiopian literary works in English and serve as good resources pertaining to Ethiopian literary works in English language needed by researchers, academicians, students, and institutions both within and outside Ethiopia. Similarly, both students and instructors should be encouraged to read and to encourage others to read Ethiopian diasporic literary works in English as they are doing works of other African diasporic writers. In the end, these actions, in addition to integrating works of the Ethiopian diaspora with mainstream Ethiopian written literature, will contribute greatly to the overall development of literature in Ethiopia that is on par with that of other African countries.

The present thesis is structured into five major chapters, with each consisting of separate sections and sub-sections. Accordingly, Chapter One presents the background, problem, objectives, scope, significance, as well as methods and procedures of the study. Chapter Two makes a review of relevant literature in the area. Chapter Three introduces the theoretical framework of the study, and discusses why it was chosen. Chapter Four presents synopses of the plots, followed by the thematic and comparative analyses of the selected texts individually as well as comparatively. The thesis concludes by presenting Chapter Five, which consists of the conclusion (summary of main findings) and recommendations of the study.

Definition of Key Terms

Alterity:- Lack of identification with some part of one's personality or one's community, differentness, otherness.

Anglophone:- Consisting of or belonging to an English-speaking population especially in a country where two or more languages are spoken.

Diaspora: - (without capitalization) is generally used to refer to any people or ethnic population forced or induced to leave their traditional ethnic homelands, being dispersed throughout other parts of the world, and the ensuing developments in their dispersal and culture.

Derg (or Dergue):- The military regime that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 2001 AD.

Eurocentrism:- The practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing emphasis on European/Euro-American (and generally, Western) concerns, culture and values at the expense of those of other cultures. It is an instance of ethnocentrism, perhaps especially relevant because of its alignment with current and past real power structures in the world.

Ge'ez: The ancient liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

Globalisation:- Describes the process by which regional economies, societies, and cultures have become integrated through a global network of political ideas through communication, transportation, and trade. The term is most closely associated with the term 'economic globalisation': the integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration, the spread of technology, and military presence. However, globalization is usually recognized as being driven by a combination of economic, technological, sociocultural, political, and biological factors. The term can also refer to the transnational circulation of ideas, languages, or popular culture through acculturation. An aspect of the world which has gone through the process can be said to be globalised.

Hybridity:- An important concept in post-colonial theory, referring to the integration (or mingling) of cultural signs and practices from the colonizing and the colonized cultures. The assimilation and adaptation of cultural practices, the cross-fertilization of cultures, can be seen as positive, enriching, and dynamic, as well as

oppressive. "Hybridity" is also a concept used for breaking down the false sense that colonized cultures are monolithic, or have essential, unchanging features.

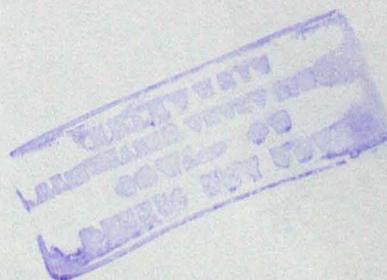
Imperialism:- The policy of extending the control or authority over foreign entities as a means of acquisition and/or maintenance of empires, either through direct territorial control or through indirect methods of exerting control on the politics and/or economy of other countries. The term is used sometimes to describe the policy of a country in maintaining colonies and dominance over distant lands, regardless of whether the country calls itself an empire.

Neo-colonialism:- Refers to economic domination; the domination by a powerful, usually Western nation of another nation that is politically independent but has a weak economy greatly dependent on trade with the powerful nation.

Neoliberalism:- A term used for describing a market-driven approach to economic and social policy that stresses the efficiency of private enterprise, liberalized trade and relatively open markets. 'Neoliberalism' is often used interchangeably with 'globalisation'.

New World Order:-In conspiracy theory, the term *New World Order* (or NOW) refers to the emergence of a bureaucratic collectivist one-world government. But in the present context, the term denotes the current geopolitical and economic status-quo of the world which is dominated by Western countries and is characterised by new forms of colonisation.

Otherness: - In general terms, the 'other' is anyone who is separate from one's self. The existence of others is crucial in defining what is 'normal' and in locating one's own place in the world. The colonized subject is characterized as 'other' through discourses such as primitivism and cannibalism, as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view.



Abbreviations

AD:- A Latin abbreviation for *Anno Domini* 'in the year of our Lord,' or, 'the year of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

ADPC:- African Diaspora Policy Centre

BC:-The counterpart to *Anno Domini*, stands for "Before Christ."

IOM:- The International Organization for Migration

TPLF:- Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front

UN:- United Nations

UNHCR:- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

US/USA:- United States of America

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.0 General Introduction

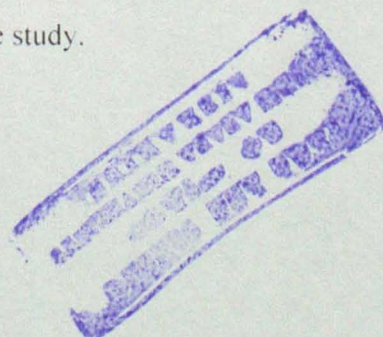
As an opening section to the study, this introductory chapter presents basic geopolitical and historical facts, as well as relevant background information on Ethiopia. It thus aims to provide the context into which the study is set and prepares the way for the discussions in the subsequent chapters.

Known as Abyssinia until the 20th century, Ethiopia is the oldest independent nation in Africa. It was home to the powerful Christian Kingdom of Axum that flourished from around the first century AD. After the 1500s, Ethiopia was divided into a number of small kingdoms, which were reunified by Menelik II in the 1880s.

In 1895 the Italians launched the first Italo-Ethiopian War against the mainly Orthodox Empire of Ethiopia. But by 1896, the war had become a total disaster for the Italians and Ethiopia was able to retain its independence. Ethiopia remained independent until Italy invaded her again in 1936. However, the Italian occupation of Ethiopia ended in 1941 during World War II as part of the East African Campaign. Eritrea, which had been part of Ethiopia since the 1950s, broke away to become an independent nation in 1993 (Microsoft Encarta World English Dictionary 2008; Wikipedia 2008; Merriam-Webster's Geographical Dictionary 2001).

Of the 70 or more languages spoken in Ethiopia, most belong to the Semitic and Cushitic branches of the Afro-Asiatic family. The language of the Ethiopian church liturgy, *Ge'ez*, gave rise to the Semitic cluster of languages: Amharic, Tigrinya, and Tigre. Amharic, the country's official language, is spoken by more than half of the population. English and Arabic are also spoken by many people. Currently, the country is divided into nine major regions, one for each of its main ethnic groups (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia 2009).

Since the end of colonialism, the East African region in general and Ethiopia in particular, has been passing through numerous civil unrest, wars, and cross-border armed conflicts, affecting almost all the population in the region. This has worsened the already weak socio-economic and political conditions of the region and resulted in displacement and migration of local communities and individuals. And particularly, beginning from the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, the worsening socio-political and economic crises have precipitated the migration of Ethiopians of all socio-economic groups to various destinations that has continued to this day. It is a period that saw (and is still seeing) the exodus of Ethiopians *en masse*; it is also the period in which most of the Ethiopian diasporic writers or their descendants living in North America and Europe passed through and their writings (some included in this study) were produced. What is more, it represents the period or socio-political and historical context some of the writings under study are set in. This post-revolution period will be reviewed in more detail in the following section because of its critical significance to the study.



1.1 Organisation of the Study

The present thesis is structured into five major chapters, each consisting of separate sections and sub-sections. Accordingly, the remaining part of this introductory chapter is comprised of seven main sections. These are: i) A Brief Survey of Post-1974 Revolution of Ethiopia and the Birth of the Ethiopian Diaspora, ii) A Brief Survey of Ethiopian Written Literature, iii) Statement of the Problem, iv) Objectives of the Study, v) Scope and Limitations of the Study, vi) Significance of the Study, and vii) Methods and Procedures. In the subsequent part, Chapter Two deals with a review of related literature. Chapter Three discusses conceptual and theoretical issues; and Chapter Four presents the thematic and comparative analyses of the texts selected in the present study. The thesis concludes by presenting Chapter Five, which consists of the conclusion and recommendations of the study.

Thus, in line with this arrangement, the following sections of this chapter begin by presenting the general background to the study and conclude with discussion of the Methods and Procedures followed in the study.

1.2 A Brief Survey of Post-1974 Ethiopian Revolution and the Birth of the Ethiopian Diaspora

The influx of Ethiopians into other countries, particularly the USA, which houses the largest concentration of Ethiopians abroad, is believed to have essentially started far back in the 1930s, following the invasion of Ethiopia by Italian fascists. However, the rate of Ethiopians migrating to Europe and North America has been

assuming unparalleled proportions particularly since the 1970s due to various interrelated factors and through both legal and illegal means of entry.

This flight of Ethiopians is attributed to a series of natural, social, economic, and political factors. These include search for religious or political freedom, better economic or career opportunities or professional/academic purposes, or due to political reasons. The latter is mainly as a result of violation of their human and democratic rights in their home country and thus fleeing persecution. But the year 1974 was a turning point in the history of Ethiopians migrating abroad. The bloody revolution of 1974 that swept across the country, and the socio-economic and political crises that followed sparked off the exodus of Ethiopians in an unprecedented manner whose impacts seem to have continued to be felt even today. As such, given the fact that a huge number of the Ethiopian diaspora (or their offspring) currently residing in North America and Europe belong to this time-period, it might be worthy to say a few things about this particular period.

Although no official statistics or current data seem to be readily available, the number of Ethiopians living abroad is estimated at over one and a half million. The Ethiopian immigrant population living in the United States alone at the turn of the new century was estimated in the upwards of 450,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). Shinn (2002) states, "The environment created during the *Derg* government as a result of political persecution, and the Red Terror was a defining moment. It caused a significant emigration of highly skilled Ethiopians particularly to the USA and Western Europe that continues to the present day, although the reasons for the

exodus have changed somewhat". Reflecting on this period, Melakneh (2008:41) also says, "Coupled with the reign of 'White Terror' and 'Red Terror' under the military rule were lack of good governance and economic crises. Such nation-wide issues are known to have triggered novice Ethiopian writers like Nega Mezlekia and his contemporary Eyasu Alemayehu [a.k.a Hama Tuma] who have published widely acclaimed satirical novels". According to Selamawit (2004), Shinn (2002), and The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (cited in Dodson and Diouf 2005a), half of Ethiopians who travelled abroad for training in the early 1980s never returned home. As well, many earlier students remained permanently in the United States even though they had to show that they intended to return to Ethiopia on the conclusion of their education. But contrastingly, prior to the 1974 revolution virtually all Ethiopians who attended university in the country remained in Ethiopia after the completion of their work and the vast majority of those who studied overseas returned to Ethiopia. The dramatic surge in the number of foreign-born black population settling in the US is more noticeable by the swelling population of Ethiopians. The number of Ethiopians in 2005 was 13 times the number in 1960. The Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery scheme introduced by the US government in 1995 is one of the legal or official means through which Ethiopians have been voluntarily emigrating to the USA. In relation to this, Rebecca (2007: 184-185) states:

The immediate consequence of the revolution, the *Derg's* rise to power, turned thousands of Ethiopians into political, social and economic refugees and created, for the first time in Ethiopian history, a huge diaspora

population that has continued to grow under the TPLF. Now, many of these immigrants have established themselves in their new countries and are beginning to re-establish ties with Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian diaspora (or Ethiopian-Americans, as they are officially called) in the US is a collection of several sub-groups of various ethnic groups, religious denominations, individuals of differing (sometimes warring) ideological orientations, and of an equally varied background, and experience/ history of exile. A substantial number of them belong to the category of diasporas who emigrated to the USA and Europe in search of a 'greener pasture'. Perhaps interestingly, the Ethiopian diaspora also comprises a considerable number of "first generation" Ethiopian elites. Most of the Ethiopian diaspora maintain close ties with their folks back home. They are, to a large extent, engaged in practicing and introducing to others their cultural and historical heritages in various forms and occasions; and they also play an active role in the socio-political and economic dynamics of their host country. Commenting on the Ethiopian diaspora in the US, Ireland (2008:14) remarks: "The first generation of Ethiopian exiles becomes a 'temporary' community, politically active, [and] wanting to go home. ... Second and third generations assimilate. In terms of cultural impact, the Ethiopian diaspora remains a gathering of adults who long for home and the children they raise – who gradually feel at ease with the adopted culture".

To sum up, it was this phenomenon that essentially provided the momentum to the eventual birth of Ethiopian literature in the English language – both at home in general, and in the diaspora in particular – as shall be demonstrated in the analysis

chapter (Section 1.3.1.2) later on. The following section makes a brief survey of written literature in Ethiopia.

1.3 A Brief Survey of Ethiopian Written Literature

1.3.0 Introduction

To begin with, African literature by and large is believed to be oral and to have passed from one generation to the next through memorization and recitation. However, although Africa has had a long literary tradition, very little of this literature was written down until the 20th century because of widespread illiteracy. The best-known literatures in African languages in East Africa include those in Amharic, Somali, and Swahili (Microsoft Encarta World English Dictionary 2008). Documented studies (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2008:61; Microsoft Encarta World English Dictionary 2007; Hodd 2002:37) in the area confirm that, with a few exceptions, literacy came to eastern Africa from elsewhere, along with the introduction of the Islamic religion, and of Christianity. The major exception to this rule is Amharic, which for centuries has been used in written form in Ethiopia.

The history of written literature in Ethiopia dates back to 1st century B.C. Religious writings in the ancient liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church, *Ge'ez*, constituted the bulk of the literary production until the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Today, the function of the *Ge'ez* language is almost exclusively confined to liturgical purposes, mainly to religious rituals. On the other hand, written secular literature in indigenous languages other than *Ge'ez* (particularly in Amharic) has also been in the picture since the turn of the 20th

century. Today, Amharic literature is the most dominant domain of Ethiopian written literature, with an ever-increasing number of literary works in diverse genres being showcased. Correspondingly, the number of critical studies in the area is also showing a marked increase from day to day (Melakneh 2008; Bahru 1996; Bowen *et al.* 1976; Pankhurst 1974).

By contrast, Ethiopian literature in English, which is relatively a recent phenomenon, owes its birth to the introduction of the English language into the country in mid-19th century, particularly following the adoption of English as an official language by the country and a number of related steps taken by the government towards the expansion of the language. Since then, Ethiopian literature in English has formed, albeit a minor, part of mainstream Ethiopian written literature, and a number of literary works of various forms by Ethiopians have been published both within and outside Ethiopia.

1.3.1 The English Language and Ethiopian Literature in English

Generally, it is obvious that historical, socio-economic, cultural and political dynamics of a country have a direct bearing on the overall life of its people—socially, culturally, politically, and the like. This, naturally, includes the state of a given language(s) in the country as well as the literature produced in the language(s) by its people both internally and externally. With this in mind, this subsection explores the historical background for the introduction of English language into Ethiopia and the subsequent emergence and development of English literature in the country. This is believed to help provide the necessary context, and serve as

a lead up to the subsequent discussion of the Ethiopian diaspora and their literary works— a topic that underpins the present study. Although many of its geographical, economic and socio-political features, including linguistic and ethnic diversities, could be said to be typical also of other African countries, Ethiopia nonetheless also differs from most African countries, as is indicated below. Therefore, it would be erroneous or impractical to ignore these facts or to discuss Ethiopia within the general context or assumptions true of Africa at large or other African countries that were once colonies of European powers.

Ethiopia is historically and culturally unique in Africa in at least two important respects. Firstly, although not untouched by European colonialism, it is the only African country that was not colonised by a European power during the nineteenth-century Scramble for Africa. Secondly, it happens to be the only African country where the dominant religion is an indigenous form of Christianity dating back to the 4th century A.D, a fact that had concurrently brought to existence the tradition of written literature or its own writing system— the Ethiopic script. These factors have, predictably, also played a crucial role in the linguistic profile of the country, including English and other foreign languages (Bloor and Wondwossen 1996).

1.3.1.1 The Place of English Language in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, despite its pervasive influence at present, and unlike the case in other African countries, the history of English is quite neoteric.

Missionaries of various creeds and denominations had come to Ethiopia and been introducing or spreading their languages since early 17th century. However,

practically none of them was able to supplant, dominate, or even reshape the local languages of the country, as was the case in many colonized nations. The socio-cultural and historical peculiarities of Ethiopia and Ethiopians were the active agents that weakened, discouraged or blocked the expansion and development of missionary activities and schools throughout the country (Fekade 1979; Bender 1976).

Similar studies (Bahru 1996: 108; Fekade 1979:9; Bowen, Cooper, and Ferguson 1976) indicate that, the English language was one of the eight foreign languages that have been in varying degrees of use at one time or another in the country. These languages – Arabic, Hebrew, Portuguese, Greek, Armenian, Italian, French, and English – have had, at one time or another, a role to play in the country's geo-political, social, religious, and economic affairs and systems. The circumstances that led to the presence of these languages in the country could be linked to, among other things, the geographical position, and the political, military, religious and commercial settings of the country at the times.

However, there are assumptions that tie the introduction of foreign languages mainly with the introduction of Western style "modernisation" in the country (Daniel 1998:113). The general consensus is that it was during and following the reign of Emperor Tewodros in mid-19th century that foreign languages, most particularly English, had assumed greater proportion and role. As Bahru (1996: 37) points out, among the multinationals, "it was towards the British that he [Emperor Tewodros] manifested a special, almost affectionate regard". And with

the dawn of the 20th century and the diminishing role of most of the foreign languages, only two languages – French and English – emerged to the top, with English eventually taking over French and becoming the principal foreign language in the country.

As observed by Bowen, Cooper, and Ferguson (1976:10) and Pankhurst (1974), when French was the medium of instruction when the first modern school was set up in 1908, English was then taught as an additional foreign language mainly due to the dire need at the time for interpreters. Bloor and Wondwosen (1996:321) establish that, the English language, though not exactly an official language, has for many years had a special status in Ethiopia, especially since the liberation from Italian occupation in 1941. In addition, “in so far as any official publication uses a foreign language, it was likely to be English, [which] appeared on currency and postage stamps alongside Amharic” (*Ibid.*). These developments helped English to take root and spread further its sphere of influence, commencing mainly from the post-war period.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that the emergence and eventual takeover of the English language was not a swift process, and that there were a range of factors underlying the development of the language in the country. These included, among other things, a) the feeling of indebtedness by the Ethiopian government to the British government for their help in expelling the Italian army; b) their administrative and financial assistance in the post-war period; c) the presence of government officials with English background as students and their feeling of

loyalty, and d) lack of trained teachers and textbooks (*Ibid.*:321; Markakis 1975:174).

Consequently, as was the case in many African countries that once were colonies of Great Britain too, the English language was accorded the status of *lingua franca* or the second official language of the country, was included into the curricula as a subject, and was made the language of instruction in most subjects beginning from the fifth grade (Pankhurst 1974, cited in Daniel 1998:113-46). Understandably, these developments anchored the English language on a firm ground and ensured its eventual rise to prominence. This laid the foundation for the beginning of literature in English in Ethiopia, as in many other (Anglophone) African countries.

However, critics argue that, in view of the small proportion of the population exposed to secondary education, it would be grossly misleading to list English alongside the major indigenous languages. Schmied (1991:27), for instance, observes that calling African nations 'Anglo-phone' is obviously a great exaggeration since, with the exception of Liberia and South Africa, English is spoken by only 'an educated minority'. Phillipson (1992, cited in Bloor and Wondwosen 1996:322), also makes a similar point. Apparently, this situation is changing as education becomes more widespread and more children are exposed to English (though the question of what standards are attained may still be an open question).

But the minority factor seems to be more marked in the case of Ethiopia than in most other African nations where English is a medium of education. The main

reason is that the role of English outside the education system is considerably more limited than in most so-called Anglophone countries in Africa. Schmied's (1991:5) analysis of domains of English in East African states shows Ethiopia to have the smallest number of domains: 5 out of 15, compared with Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Uganda and Kenya, each of which has 14. The five domains where Schmied identifies English is being used in Ethiopia are: secondary school, mass media, local novels and business correspondence. He also stresses that, except in secondary schools and to some extent business correspondence, the use of English even in these few domains is enormously outweighed by that of Amharic. But this difference may not be surprising, particularly given the colonial history of other African countries.

In sum, notwithstanding the minority factor, the truth is that the establishment of English as one major language in the country also laid the foundation for the beginning of literature in English in Ethiopia, albeit not in a manner or magnitude comparable to that of other Anglophone African countries. Against this backdrop, thus, the following section takes a brief look into the emergence and development of literature in the English language in Ethiopia.

1.3.1.2 A Glimpse into Ethiopian Literature in English

According to studies (e.g. Fekade 1985; Debebe 1980; Beer 1975; Huntsburger 1973) conducted in the area, it was in the mid-twentieth century that literary writings in English by Ethiopian writers had begun to appear. Most of these works were by initial phase graduates of Addis Ababa University (the then Haile Sellassie

I University College) and those returned from university education abroad. Since then, Ethiopian literature in English has formed, though a minor, part of mainstream Ethiopian written literature, and a number of literary works of various forms by Ethiopians have been published both within and outside Ethiopia. But still, when compared to other Anglophone East African countries', the corpus of Ethiopian literary works in English appears to be quite small. It can be said that Ethiopia has not had a pool of writers in Western languages until recently, in part a consequence of not having been colonized.

Ethiopian literature in English (or more properly, literature produced in the English language), although generally believed to have come into existence in the 1950s, the period of its actual debut which scholars by and large agree on is the late-1950s and early-1960s (Fekade 1985 and 1979; Beer 1975; Huntsburger 1973). So it follows that these periods ushered in a new era when the new elite, who had come to the fore on the wake of the extermination of the Ethiopian intelligentsia by Italian fascists during the Italian invasion, were trying their hand in composing poems and writing stories in English. Most of these post-Italian invasion writers were well familiar with known works of world literature, and this had had undeniable impact on their development as writers as well as the development and direction of Ethiopian literature in both Amharic and non-Amharic languages. The spirited literary activity of the time gathered momentum and the number of literary works in different genres and qualities appearing in English publications reached its peak in the late 1960s. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, there were

scores of English periodicals, some of which were published by various bodies of the then Haile Sellassie I University College, which provided the much-needed forum and opportunity for the new elite to produce literary works of varied genres and qualities. Fekade (1985:7) states:

Although literary journals and magazines are absent in the country their task seems to be partly taken by the weekly and daily government newspapers and magazines. These sources served as important media for creative works and literary opinion. Private and government newspapers and magazines still publish short creative works, oral literature pieces, and critical opinions.

One interesting factor worthy of notice here is that, most of these writers were among the first post-war generation of Ethiopians to benefit from modern higher education within the country and abroad; and thus, apart from laying the ground for literature in English within the country as well as outside as diasporas, they have also greatly influenced the direction and growth of Ethiopian literature in the vernacular too.

On the forefront of the Poetry genre were avant-garde writers, such as Tsegaye Gabre Medhin, Solomon Deressa, Eyasu Gorfu, Daniachew Worku, Tadele G. Hiwot, Eshetu Chole, and Baalu Girma, to mention but a few. Some of these have continued writing to this day and have left their indelible marks on the history of Ethiopian literature in English. But unfortunately, among the numerous poetic works of these writers, it appears that only the works of two poets have been published in book form. These were Solomon Deressa's anthology of poems, *The*

Tone of Silence, and Eyasu Gorfu's two volumes, *Wild Oats* and *Poems of Thoughts and Solitude*, both published in 1974. The poems of the other individual poets have possibly remained confined to and scattered over those English periodicals in the 1960s in the archives of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies as the present researcher was able to witness. Thus, although it is difficult to give precise figures, there is a strong reason to assume that a number of poems by Ethiopians have been published in both Ethiopia and abroad.

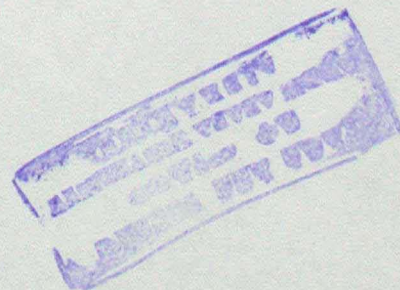
The trend in the Prose Fiction genre has been no different from that in the poetic genre, at least initially. In the Short Story genre, the year 1960 saw the flourishing of unconventional or experimental story pieces of various length and quality by different individual writers of same generation. However, as was the case with works in the poetry genre, most of these works are assumed to be still left in their original publications, i.e. the English periodicals of the 1960s. At present there are indications that, although perhaps sluggishly, the trend has picked up, particularly since the early-1990s, and some volumes of short stories have been published.

In the category of the Novel genre there have been a number of works. Most of these were written by authors of the same generation, in the years between 1960s and 1970s, and by other Ethiopians in the later periods. Among early works of novel published in the period are found Ashenafi Kebede's *Confession* (ca. 1962), Sahle Sellassie Birhane Mariam's three novels: *The Afersata* (1968), *Warrior King* (1974), and *Firebrands* (1979); Wolde Haile's *Defend the Name* (ca.1969), Abbe Gubegna's *Defiance* (1975), and Daniachew Worku's *The Thirteenth Sun* (1978).

The trend in this regard is assumed to have picked up since the 1990s after a period of lull, and more works of novel are being produced by Ethiopians, mostly the diaspora (see Ch. 2, Sec. 2.1 for list of some of the writings of the Ethiopian diaspora).

The history of the Drama genre in both English and Amharic languages in Ethiopia appears to be closely intertwined with one single person. Put differently, Ethiopian drama in English owes its birth and development to Poet Laureate Tsegaye Gabre Medhin, the most prolific and widely-acclaimed playwright who, almost exclusively, has dominated the picture for a period of over half a century beginning from 1951. Of his known plays in English (so far as the awareness of the present researcher goes), *Azmari*, *Oda Oak Oracle*, *Tewodros* (all in 1965), and *Collision of Altars* (written in 1971 and published in 1977), the last has been translated into many languages and staged in various countries abroad. Another work of drama in English language is *The Savage Girl* by Abbe Gubegna (perhaps the only other playwright so far) which was produced in 1964.

To summarise, Ethiopian literature in English language, which came into being against this backdrop and seems to be passing through alternating periods of lull and rise, appears to have taken up again in the 1990s. And since then more and more works of various genres written by Ethiopians living inside and outside the country have been appearing.



The following sub-section deals with theories and concepts that have to do with the notions and state of the African diaspora in general and the Ethiopian diaspora in particular in the Western world. It is intended to provide the general background for the review of literary and critical works in the area in the subsequent chapter.

1.3.2 A Brief Review of the Notion of Diaspora

1.3.2.1 Defining the Concept of Diaspora

The notion 'diaspora' basically derives from *dispersal* of people, particularly that of the Jewish diaspora, which is the etymological and epistemological source of the term 'diaspora', and is closely intertwined with concepts of slavery, and migration of various types, causes, and means. Due to this, arriving at a single, consensual definition or interpretation that caters for all its intrinsic features has not been easy. This, naturally, has led to the appearance of various interpretations of the term diaspora, which either tend to singularly focus on one of its features, blur the distinction between its various elements, or totally ignore how dispersed populations become self-conscious diaspora communities.

In this regard, Zeleza (2006: 15) remarks:

Contemporary theorizations of the term diaspora tend to be preoccupied with problematizing the relationship between diaspora and nation and the dualities or multiplicities of diasporic identity or subjectivity..... In many cases, the term diaspora is used in a fuzzy, ahistorical, and uncritical manner in which all manner of movements and migrations between countries and even within countries are included and no adequate attention is paid to the historical conditions and experiences that produce diasporic communities and consciousness.

Hence, according to some scholars (Singh 2008; Zeleza 2006; Safren 1991) diaspora also refers simultaneously to a *process* (the continuous processes by which a diaspora is made, unmade, and remade); a condition (the changing

conditions in which it lives and expresses itself); a *space* (the places where it is moulded and imagined); and a *discourse* (the contentious ways in which it is studied and discussed). As can be easily understood, the latter three have a close connection with the study on hand.

This clearly shows how, the difficulty in coming to terms with 'diaspora' inevitably involves conceptual categories with a variety of meanings the word brings into play. However, most appear to take into account certain basic issues like slavery, forced migration, and dislocation. *The Macmillan English Dictionary* (Macmillan Education 2005: 381) defines the term 'diaspora' as originating from the Greek "dispersion" or "to disperse" and signifying: a) "the movement of a large group of people from their home country to other countries in the world", and b) "a large group of people who come from a particular place and are now living in many different parts of the world". In other words, diaspora could generally be viewed as the results of forcible or voluntary movement of the people from their place of birth to new regions. The African Union (2005: 2), on the other hand, defines the African diaspora as "[consisting] of people of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union".

Another interrelated controversial issue is the nomenclature of the term itself, i.e. whether it should be written as 'Diaspora', or 'diaspora'. It seems that, while the term *Diaspora* (with capital 'D') is conventionally used to denote the dispersion of

the Jewish people in biblical times and is thus used in connection with the Jewish communities living outside Israel. *diaspora* (with lowercase 'd') is used to generally refer to people who live in countries outside their traditional homeland, or expatriate minority communities whose members share common characteristics. *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Oxford University Press 2003: 379), for example, in its definition of diaspora maintains that the term 'Diaspora' now also refers to "anybody of people living outside their traditional homeland". Again, we find the term in *The Macmillan English Dictionary* (Macmillan Education 2005: 381) written with a small 'd' and without restriction in all its meanings or usages – which is also the way the term is used in this study. However, one thing that is true is that, as a social construct, the term has shifted its meaning and coverage over time, and is currently used to refer to any community of individuals living outside their homeland who identify in one way or another with the state or peoples of that homeland (Shuval 2000: 41-44). Accordingly, it refers to much wider categories which reflect the process of politically motivated uprooting and moving of populations, voluntary migration, global communications and transport. As Safren (1991: 83) points out, this meaning of diaspora includes, "expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities". As well, Melakneh (2008: 72) underscores this fact when he says: "Other peoples abroad who have also maintained strong identities have, in recent years, defined themselves as Diasporas, though they were neither active agents of colonization nor passive victims of persecution, presumably out of cultural incongruence. For that matter, all Diaspora communities acknowledge that the

memories of their natal territory buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore haunts them intermittently". To wrap this issue up, suffice it to state here that the latter inclusive definitions represent the understanding and application of the term in this study, and the terms 'diaspora', and 'immigrant' mean the same thing and are used interchangeably.

Diasporas could be categorized into several groups. By accounting for nine features that are perceived to be common to diaspora, some scholars (like Cohen 1997: 4-6) classify diasporas into six categories. These are:

- 1) Victim Diasporas (Africans and Armenians);
- 2) Labour Diasporas (Indians);
- 3) Imperial Diasporas (British);
- 4) Trade Diasporas (Chinese and Lebanese);
- 5) Homeland Diasporas; and
- 6) Cultural Diasporas (the Caribbean).

Nonetheless, the most outstanding feature common to diasporas of almost all forms is the fact that they are people who live outside their "natal (or imagined natal) territories", and recognize that their traditional homelands are reflected deeply in the languages they speak, the religion they adopt, and the cultures they produce. Each of the categories of diasporas underline a particular cause of migration usually associated with particular groups of people. Africans, for example, through their experience of slavery have been noted to be victims of extremely aggressive transmigrational policies (Singh 2008; Cohen 1997).

In sum, by and large, the African diaspora is understood as representing the result of the movement of Africans and their descendants to places throughout the world –predominantly to the Americas, then later to Europe, the Middle East and other places around the globe. Thus, it can be said that much of the African diaspora is descended from people who were shipped to the Americas during the Atlantic slave trade, with the largest population in Brazil (Wikipedia 2008; Hall 1997). Although the main concern of the study is the Ethiopian diaspora, it might be necessary to briefly review first the development and state of the African diasporas of the contemporary period in general because of its close relationship with the context in which the Ethiopian diasporas also fall. In keeping with this notion, the following sub-section reviews the African diasporas of post-colonization, or of globalization period from various perspectives, with the focus being on the Ethiopian diaspora.

1.3.2.2 The 'New' or 'Contemporary' African Diasporas

The diasporas of the late - twentieth century are known to have been even more globalized than their predecessors were in terms of the multiplicity of their destinations and networks. This is mainly owing to the opportunities and advantages the revolutions in telecommunications and travel today offer contemporary diasporas. These diasporas also have now a lot of opportunities at hand that enable them to maintain ties with their homelands. As such, diaspora discourse today reflects a sense of being part of an on-going transnational network that includes dispersed people who retain a sense of their uniqueness and interest in

their homeland. As already noted, the sense of connection to homeland at any given moment in time must be strong enough to resist forgetting assimilation or distancing. So much so that, that today, diaspora theory is linked to the theories of transnationalism and globalisation (Shuval 2000).

These African diasporas of the voluntary group now thus form a significant portion of the immigrant population in Western Europe and North America (Encyclopædia Britannica 2008; Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2009). Zeleza (2006) divides these modern-day (or "new" or "contemporary", as they are sometimes called) African diasporas into three main waves: the *diasporas of colonization, of decolonization, and of structural adjustment* that emerged out of, respectively, the disruptions of colonial conquest, the struggles for independence, and Structural Adjustment programmes imposed on African countries by the international financial institutions from the late 1970s and early 1980s onward.

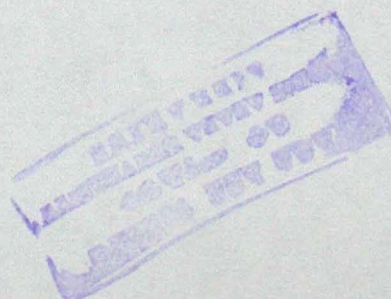
Currently, people of Sub-Saharan descent, who constitute at least 800 million in Africa, number over 140 million in the Western Hemisphere, which translates into around 14% of the world's population. About 1.7 million of the people in the United States are descended from voluntary immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Egypt, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and South Africa are recorded as countries with the most immigrants to the U.S., followed by immigrants from Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Kenya, and Cameroon (Dodson, Howard and Sylviane 2005b; U.S. Census Bureau 2001). According to Dodson, Howard and Sylviane (2005a), the Sub-Saharan African diaspora are the

most educated population group in the United States – 50 per cent have bachelor's or advanced degrees, compared to 23 per cent of native-born Americans. The steady increase in the number of migrants—particularly of skilled/professionals—from Africa to the West that has resulted in increased brain drain on the continent could be attributed to a number of push and pull factors both at home and destination countries in Europe and North America. Finally, and correspondingly, this dual feature of the African diaspora (i.e. migration of African intellectuals to the West and its incapacitating impact on the continent on the one hand, and their actual as well as potential economic contributions to the continent on the other) has been increasingly drawing the attention of the international community.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

The present study stems from the need to redress two major and interconnected concerns (problems) in the domain of Ethiopian literature in English in general and Ethiopian diasporic literature in English in particular. The first one is a glaring knowledge gap in the area. The second is anonymity or obscurity of Ethiopian literary works in English at local level, along with an apparent disregard or general indifference of some people to Ethiopian literary works in English at large, as shall be illustrated below, and hence its unused state.

To begin with, literary works in English produced by Ethiopians, and particularly those by the diaspora, have so far generally received little or no critical attention of scholars and researchers in the area. In other words, while research into Ethiopian literature in the vernacular has never been lacking and still continues attracting



scholars and students both within and outside Ethiopia, research on Ethiopian (including Ethiopian diasporic) literature in English language has remained relatively meagre. Worse still, except for two recent studies (see the Review of Related Literature in the next chapter), and a few reviews or limited coverage in some publications in Europe and North America, there have not been other critical studies that focused exclusively on writings of the Ethiopian diaspora. Commenting on this paucity of research in the area and the potential contribution of his study, Endalkachew (2008: 12-13) notes:

The Ethiopian diasporic novels did not become subjects of literary research in Ethiopia and this research tries to initiate such research by analysing two diasporic novels....except for works on *Confession*, which shows the life of a been-to and cannot exactly be called Diaspora literature, there are no research works on Ethiopian diaspora novels in Addis Ababa University.

This phenomenon, which leaves the literatures of the Ethiopian diasporas as the forgotten or practically unknown body of mainstream Ethiopian written literature, has, naturally, resulted in a knowledge gap or deficiency in the pool of knowledge on Ethiopian literature in its entirety. Put another way, no study or knowledge of a country's literary tradition and state can be said to be complete or whole without a comprehensive and continuous study and documentation of its literatures in the various languages and categories. This scenario clearly underscores the need for addressing the existing gaps in knowledge of Ethiopian literary writings in English. This will help concurrently address the existing need for re-examination of the trend, and reviving and refocusing the scope and interest of research pertaining to

Ethiopian written literature in general, and literatures of the Ethiopian diasporas in particular, and putting them to use.

Second is the conspicuous – and perhaps no less disturbing – absence or rarity of Ethiopians' literary works in English in major international as well as local publications and in literary discourses by and large – raising the question 'why?' Among existing general reference publications, most of them, while duly acknowledging Ethiopia's long literary tradition in the vernacular, generally tend to simply bypass creative works of Ethiopian authors (of both within and without Ethiopia) in English. This problem is clearly manifested in discussions, anthologies, and/or bibliographic annotations dealing with contemporary African or East African literature in English (e.g. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *Encyclopaedia of English Literature*, and *Encarta Encyclopaedia*), literary journals, and 'Who is Who?' publications, among others.

It may be argued that there is a certain amount of "recognition" of or familiarity in the West with some of the works of the Ethiopian diaspora, given the intermittent coverage they seem to get. But the fact remains that, apart from its being far too small, the treatment is at the same time limited largely to very few literary circles and institutions, further compounding the problem of obscurity of the works. In addition to this is the existing tendency of viewing these works as a separate entity. In other words, works of the Ethiopian diaspora are generally perceived in isolation, and there has been no visible attempt to link them with other literary works of same language produced locally, or to regard them as one component of

Ethiopian written literature in general. Added to this is the poor and almost nonexistent visibility of these writings locally. This has resulted in a visible gap in knowledge regarding the voices of diaspora and their experiences in their adopted countries as reflected in their writings, and how their writings fit within the domain and prescriptions of the post-colonial theory.

The problem of exclusion or absence of Ethiopian literary works in English from global literary forums and publications in general could be linked to several factors, including: the attitude of many critics of the Eurocentric school of thought who categorically dismiss Anglophone literature in Africa in general as "parochial," "immature" and mediocre, "primarily concerned with colonialism, the consequent erosion of African values and disruption of traditional society", or as one that is aimed at "rediscovering lost values" at best and "a non-existent phenomenon" at worst. In addition to this persistent misperception, there also appears to be a divergence of views on the classification of African literature in English within the domain of contemporary Anglophone literature: a general nonchalance or (probably deliberate, though misguided) indisposition to acknowledge its existence in its own right, dissimilar or non-conforming to the prescriptions of the literary dogmas of the West, and its growing prominence globally as a distinct, postcolonial genre. Though it would be impossible to be conclusive at this stage (due to the need for more in-depth research), the impact of these problems in undermining Anglophone literature in Africa in general and that of the African (Ethiopia included) diaspora cannot be dismissed easily.



A concomitant problem is an apparent unawareness and/or tendency to depreciate Ethiopian literary works in English among academicians, researchers, as well as students in higher education institutions in Ethiopia. In the preliminary assessment stage of this study, the present researcher has had the opportunity to informally interview fifteen (15) instructors and twenty (20) fourth-year students at three universities (Addis Ababa University, Bahir Dar University, and Unity University) in Ethiopia. This was done in an attempt to gauge the extent of their awareness about or familiarity with Ethiopian literary works in English published in Ethiopia and abroad. Of these (35) respondents, nineteen (54.3%) revealed their complete ignorance about works of the Ethiopian diaspora; ten (28.6) reported having a somewhat vague familiarity with one or two texts published locally, and six (17%) admitted their general lack of interest in Ethiopian literary works in English.

This related problem (i.e. lack of knowledge or seeming nonchalance) currently being observed among Ethiopian tertiary-level students and scholars at large appears to have been long in existence, and even to be much broader than is assumed by many. As noted by Fekade (1985):

A good number of my literature students at the Addis Ababa University today not only have not read any of the renowned literatures of the world, they have not even read the popular works of Haddis Alemayehu, Baalu Girma, Berhanu Zerihun in Amharic. They honestly admit they do not recognise the names Mengistu Lemma, a well known poet, and Tesfaye Gessesse, a famous actor, director and writer (*Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. XVIII: 41).

Several factors might be responsible for this state of affairs, including the possible influence of the dominant Eurocentric view, and the unavailability and/or inaccessibility of both the old and recent publications locally. This may also have, in turn, contributed to the prevailing absence or rarity of Ethiopian literary works in English in libraries, as well as in lists of readings in literature courses offered at higher education institutions in the country.

Thus, in view of the above-mentioned problems, it stands to reason that one, and perhaps the only, way of redressing the situation would be carrying out more research and employing every available means and tools to “rediscover”, critically analyse, bring out of ‘obscurity’, and put to use literary writings of the Ethiopian diaspora.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

Within its main objective of uncovering and critically assessing selected literary works of the Ethiopian diaspora in English language, and contributing to filling of the knowledge gap in the area, the study had the following specific objectives:

- i. Critically analyse the selected writings of the Ethiopian diaspora in terms of content and establish any commonalities/divergences among them, along with establishing the reasons behind;
- ii. Evaluate the degree of conformity/divergence of the selected literatures of the Ethiopian diaspora to and from the general Post-colonial literary theory;
and

- iii. Find feasible strategies and options for bringing to light and integrating selected works of the Ethiopian diaspora into mainstream Ethiopian literature in the English language, and for using them in the teaching/learning of literature courses in higher institutions in Ethiopia.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

As can be inferred from the title, the present study is confined to prose literary writings of the Ethiopian diaspora. In terms of type and genre of works, the selection is limited to *original* works written by first or second generation of the Ethiopian diaspora in the English language, and classified under the category of the prose genre. As such, the selection consists of the novel, memoir/travelogue, and political satire genres. Concerning periodization, the study exclusively focuses on works published in the period between 2000 and 2010. More specifically speaking, the study concentrates on the following six writings:

- i) *Give Me a Dog's Life Any Day- African Absurdities II* (2004), by Hama Tuma;
- ii) *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (2007), by Dinaw Mengestu;
- iii) *The Texture of Dreams* (2007), by Fasil Yitbarek;
- iv) *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia* (2007), by Rebecca G. Haile;
- v) *How to Read the Air* (2010), by Dinaw Mengestu; and
- vi) *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* (2010), by Maaza Mengiste.

The study is limited in that it excludes works of other genres (e.g. poetry, drama, etc.); translations rendered into English from vernaculars; works of religious,

philosophical or purely historical nature and of specific disciplines and orientations; writings (albeit they deal with Ethiopia or Ethiopians) by authors of non-Ethiopian nationality or descent, and works published outside of the period 2000-2011 (see Chapter 1, Section 1.8.3 for criteria of selection). The study has its own limitations also as it is not as extensive and inclusive of all available literary works of the Ethiopian diaspora and covering stylistic aspects as was originally intended. Aspects of style are raised only when necessary or in relation to the thematic analysis. Finally, it is worth noting here that although the selected books are prose works of various genres, the terms 'narrative', 'text', and 'writing' are used in this study interchangeably for variation purpose and for ease of presentation. As well, the term 'literary' is used in its broadest sense and covers all the writings irrespective of their generic peculiarities.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The results of this study are believed to be relevant for both individuals and institutions and can be used for various purposes. These include the following:

- i) To make people and institutions – both internally and externally–aware of the existence and state of literary works of the Ethiopian diaspora in particular, and by extension, Ethiopian literature in the English language in general;
- ii) For researchers, academicians, scholars, students, libraries and institutions both within and outside Ethiopia: (a) looking for recent source of

information on Ethiopian literature in English language in general and literary writings of the Ethiopian diaspora; (b) who might be specifically interested in comparative studies dealing with writings of the Ethiopian diaspora *vis-à-vis* those of the diaspora from other African countries; (c) as a reminder of the need for a paradigm shift, to move away from the beaten track, Eurocentric theories of the West, to fresher, polyphonic theories like Post-Colonialism in order to view things from a new perspective; and (d) as an initiative for policymakers at the Ministry of Education, higher education institutions, relevant departments and instructors at universities and colleges in the country to include (or consider to include) literary writings of the Ethiopian diaspora in English language as course materials or requirements in syllabuses of English literature and African literature courses; and

- iii) As a good starting point as well as inspiration for Ethiopians interested in writing in English (or in other foreign languages, for that matter), and in post-colonial theory and approaches, thereby contributing to the overall development of literature in Ethiopia that is on par with that of other African countries.

1.8 Methods and Procedures

1.8.1 Research Method

This research, owing principally to its area of concern and objectives, falls within the general domain of qualitative research. In more specific terms, the reasons underlying the adoption of qualitative method for the present study include:

- a) the nature/type of problem under study which is more suitable for the qualitative method of enquiry; the aims and objectives of the study that are best met with the qualitative approach; and the intrinsic questions in the study (constituting 'what', 'how', 'where', and 'when' questions)— thus calling for detailed enquiries and a rigorous approach in terms of selection, analysis, and interpretation of first-hand data;
- b) the requisite for applying an exploratory, interpretative, and comparative approach; and
- c) the need to write up the study report (thesis) in an engaging way befitting the area and type of the study.

Thus, the study was conducted in keeping with the assumptions and procedures of qualitative research methods. Concurrent with this are also used the general principles and literary approaches of the Post-colonial theory.

1.8.2 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Data is basically qualitative and of primary sources, mainly constituting the selected six texts indicated under "Scope of the Study" (Ch.1, Sec. 1.6) above. The few additional data of secondary sources include relevant documents, periodicals, archive records, previous studies, and web sources pertaining to Ethiopian literature in English in general and that of the diaspora who either lived or are currently living in Europe and North America. The collected data (textual information) was categorised according to the theoretical framework, which informed the data analysis and enabled a meaningful reading of content under scrutiny at the end. Thus, data gathered from both primary and secondary sources was recorded mainly in the form of written notes, and classified, transcribed, and catalogued accordingly. While on the subject, given the kind of huge textual data and complex analyses that would have been involved had the study kept to its initial wider scope, the advantage in terms of timely awareness gained from the pilot assessment, could not be underestimated.

1.8.3 Basis of Selection

As already indicated, six literary writings were selected, out of the dozen or so of prose works of the Ethiopian diaspora in English that the present researcher was able to identify in the course of this study. The reasons for limiting the number of works to be studied to six, and for selecting these particular works were mainly due to: the similarities in genre and subject matters across most of the other diasporic works, hence their inclusion leading only to duplication; the relative success

(acclaims and wider readership) most of these works have achieved: their contemporaneity; the interest on the part of the present writer to make the study as inclusive as possible in terms of genre (thus representing at least three genres: the novel, memoir/travelogue, and political satire), and lastly, constraints of time and resource, which would have made it impossible or impractical to take up more works simultaneously.

Temporally speaking, the periodic delineation of the study to the years 2000-2010 was obligatory for three reasons. First, the decade 2000-2010 represents the time in which Ethiopian diasporic literature seems to have come of age and saw the publication of unprecedented number of works. Second, the study was meant to focus on contemporary or recent writings, and this, obviously, entails contemporization of the works to be studied to the said decade. Third, it is a period in which the Post-colonial theory and discourse, like diasporic literature and discourse, has flourished across the world; has become increasingly popular as one of the most practical perspectives for understanding and interpreting colonialism and neo-colonialism in all its forms, explaining imperialism and globalisation in the context of the contemporary world order, and has gained acceptance into the curricula of many universities worldwide.

1.8.4 Methods of Analysis and Interpretation of Data

As established by many scholars in the area (e.g. Creswell 2003; Rossman and Rallis 1998; Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998; Caracelli and Greene 1993), as a process dealing with making sense out of text and image data, data analysis

typically constitutes the processes of organising and preparing the data for analysis, "carrying out different analyses, moving deeper into understanding and representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data" (Creswell 2003:190). At the same time, the choice of the particular type of analysis determines the mode of inquiry (descriptive, correlative, comparative, etc.) which will be instrumental to achieve the research objectives. In keeping with this notion, this study employed two forms of analyses – Descriptive (and at the same time critical) and Comparative – used concurrently and sequentially. Just to elaborate a bit further, descriptive analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative types of research, such as the present kind, in that it allows for a detailed description and critical assessment of the object under study and generating a dominant impression or features of the object (Withen 2008). A comparative analysis, on the other hand, explains how something is like or unlike something else. As a matter of rule, the items for comparison need to have some factors in common – which could be similarities or differences, depending on where the focus is – to warrant a comparison. As Wellek and Warren (1997: 46) assert, "the comparative approach is illuminating not only parallels and affinities, but also divergence between literary developments of one nation and that of another".

Thus, the choice of these two types of analyses (i.e. descriptive and comparative) stems, understandably, from the need to describe in detail and compare/contrast the subjects in the selected narratives in terms of content and also of generating a

comprehensive (representative) profile of emerging issues pertaining to the problem, scope, and aims and objectives of the study.

1.8.5 Application Procedures

The thematic analysis and interpretation of textual data was conducted in three major, interrelated stages. As stated in Section 1.8.2 above, the first stage comprised initial activities, such as identification, classification, coding and indexing of data and related literature, and a systematic classification/categorisation of gathered data under selected, relevant categories. This was followed by developing thematic assessment criteria and codes, checklists, and establishing frequency and degree of their occurrence in the texts, and recording of the same. These activities, together with the testing of the research tools, paved the way for the critical and comparative analyses of results in the subsequent stages.

The second stage was devoted to doing further reading on the historical background of the English language and literatures produced in the language in mainly in Eastern African countries, Ethiopia included, and the historical background of African diaspora in general and the Ethiopian diaspora in Western Europe and North America in particular. The survey of background and related literature was deemed important to capture the spatio-temporal backdrop which is also closely related to the texts under study. Similarly, the comparative re-reading on methodology and adopted approaches was found useful to further modify or refine the specific approaches, thereby ensuring the soundness of the approach

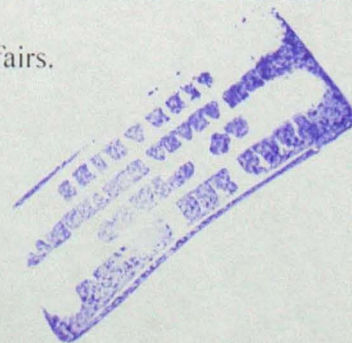
being applied. This step was followed by synthesising, profiling and indexing of what has been read or analysed up to that point, including the findings from the pilot study; and developing a format or guideline that consists of all the essentials as a lead-up to the descriptive analysis and subject-by-subject comparison of the study materials in the third stage. It was at this stage that readjusting (narrowing down) the original scope and focus of the study (which was much wider and over-inclusive) became necessary as it proved to be impossible to find works of diaspora from other East African countries (particularly Kenya and Tanzania) meeting the selection criteria.

The third and final stage consisted of three consecutive phases and procedures: i) dividing the texts into two categories and conducting descriptive and critical analysis and interpretation of the texts under study according to the pre-set criteria (initially the three texts selected for the pilot analysis) with a concurrent coding process; ii) comparison and contrast of emerging results among the selected texts in intra and inter-group manner, and iii) re-evaluation, cross-checking, and refinement of findings against the research's objectives, and drawing conclusions and coming up with practical recommendations on the way forward. Following the discussion of methods and procedures applied in the study, the next chapter makes a survey of selected literature relevant to the study.

CHAPTER II: A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

Available literature on diaspora (ADPC 2008a; Mercer, Page and Evans 2008) indicates that most of the literature on the potential of diaspora in the realm of migration and development focuses on the influence of remittances or the financial significance of the activities of diasporas and migrants. However, there is growing evidence showcasing the significant social and intellectual contribution of diasporas to the development of their homelands as well as to their host countries in other aspects also. This close correspondence or attachment, needless to mention, includes the contribution of diasporas in the domains of literature, music, motion picture and drama, painting, and literary criticism. This can be observed, among other things, in the growing interest in the study of literatures of the diaspora across the world and in the increasing conferences, courses, PhD programmes, book prizes, and the growing number of scholars specialising in the area globally and particularly in the developed countries. Zeleza (2008:4-5) attributes this primarily to the very demands of the diaspora condition: that diasporas are more likely to reflect on their diasporic identities than non-diasporized populations; and to the fact that, institutions of higher learning are stronger and far better resourced in the host lands of the global North than in most African countries. Another cause for the rising attention on diasporas and their engagements is their ever-growing attachment with and involvement/role in their homeland's socio-political and economic affairs.



As Shuval (2000: 50) points out:

They do not only have memories or myths about the homeland, they maintain links with the homeland on the basis of cultural, linguistic, familial, religious, social, economic, political or other interests. The degree of identification with and strength of the links with the homeland varies depending on the length of time they have been away from the homeland and the conditions in the host land.

Meanwhile, although no accurate or current data has been available, there are a number of literary and critical works written in English by the contemporary African diaspora, Ethiopians included, in Western Europe and North America. A selection of these works now make up among major literary works of the African diaspora written in English language, and occupy an important place in literary discourses and tertiary-level institutions in many countries across the world. Accordingly, this chapter makes a review of known prose writings of the Ethiopian diaspora in English language, followed by an assessment of studies that have to do with Ethiopian literature in English in general.

2.1 A Survey of Major Ethiopian Literary and Critical Works in English

2.1.1 Literary Writings of the Ethiopian Diaspora in English

Of known prose works of the Ethiopian diaspora in English, the majority was produced in the last two decades, particularly in the period between 2000 and 2010, and most of them were published in North America by the Ethiopian diaspora living there. Of these writers, one Ethiopian (whose real name is said to be Eyasu

Alemayehu but who writes under the pen name Hama Tuma, as will be referred to in this study), leads the list as the most prolific writer, as well as the most prominent satirist. An ardent advocate of democracy and justice since his student days, he now lives in Europe. The major literary works of the Ethiopian diaspora in English language that the present writer managed to find include the following (presented in the order of date of publication):

- 1) Hama Tuma, *The Case of the Criminal Walk and other Stories*. Heinemann, 1993;
- 2) Hama Tuma, *The Case of the Socialist Witchdoctor and other Stories*. Heinemann, 1993;
- 3) Nega Mezlekia, *Notes from the Hyena's Belly*. Toronto: Penguin Books, 2000;
- 4) Nega Mezlekia, *The God Who Begat a Jackal* USA: PICADOR, 2002;
- 5) Hama Tuma, *African Absurdities: Politically Incorrect Articles*. Florida: Good Reads, 2002;
- 6) Hama Tuma, *Give Me a Dog's Life Any Day: African Absurdities II*. Trafford Publishing, 2004;
- 7) Hama Tuma, *Democratic Cannibalism: African Absurdities III*. Infinity Publishing, 2007;
- 8) Dinaw Mengestu, *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2007;
- 9) Fasil Yitbarek, *The Texture of Dreams*. Illinois: Nyala Publishing, 2007;
- 10) Rebecca G. Haile, *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*. Illinois: Academy Chicago Publishers, 2007;
- 11) Dinaw Mengestu, *How to Read the Air*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2010; and
- 12) Maaza Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. New York: W.W Norton & Company Ltd., 2010.

As is often the case with writings of diasporas from other nations, these works of the Ethiopian diaspora too come from authors of dissimilar cultural, socio-economic and professional backgrounds and experience. Accordingly, any important features (similarities or dissimilarities) these works may hold, particularly in terms of subject matters raised, are topics investigated in the analysis section, Chapter Four. By the same token, this aspect is one major factor that distinguishes this study from previous, however few, studies in the area.

2.1.2 Studies on Ethiopian Literature in the English Language

As pointed out above, relative to Ethiopian literature in the vernacular that has increasingly been the focus of researchers, Ethiopian literature in English in general, and Ethiopian diasporic literature in particular has, by and large, been under-studied. This section reviews these available studies in the area in their chronological order.

On the whole, research works dealing with Ethiopian literature in English have been appearing since the beginning of the first decade of 1960, subsequent to the introduction and expansion of the English language in Ethiopia. While the pioneers in the field were foreigners, their works on the whole were smaller in quantity, intermittent in their appearance, and were either selective in their dealings (i.e. focusing on selected works of selected writers), or limited to bibliographic (or annotative) compilations.

According to available records, Paul Huntsburger's *Highland Mosaic: Critical Anthology of Ethiopian Literature in English* appears to have been the earliest attempt on the general domain of Ethiopian literature in English (Fekade 1985; Debebe 1980; Beer 1975).

Huntsburger's 120-page compilation which was published in *Africa Series* (No.19) in 1973 consists of contents broadly divided into two groups, "The Written Tradition" and "The Oral Tradition". The first part constitutes two sections which respectively deal with "Ancient" writings (consisting mostly of translations of royal chronicles originally in *Geez*) and "Modern" writings (constituting both original as well as translations of creative writings). "The Oral Tradition" provides a cursory review on collections of tales, wedding and war songs and a few proverbs from various Ethiopian ethnic groups. However, despite his claim of having made a thorough research, Huntsburger's listing of "Modern" writings which are basically limited to a few novels and one play, appear to have overlooked a number of creative works published in both prose and verse at the time.

Reacting to this apparent negligence, Fekade (1985:36) wrote:

He [Huntsburger] would have been overwhelmed had he gone, at least through the catalogue of the IES library and searched for material that befits his definition of "Ethiopian Literature in English..." Huntsburger's anthology therefore is more of an introductory collection, which should be given credit for its "popularising" intentions rather than for its specialised concern as "... a critical anthology of Ethiopian literature in English".



But overall, Huntsburger can be said to have fulfilled one of his aims, which was "to give prominence to Ethiopia's complex history and culture as reflected in its literature" (Huntsburger 1973: xi). Thus, its shortcomings notwithstanding, his attempt remains to occupy an important place in the history of Ethiopian literature and literary criticism in English, especially in its ground-breaking and 'popularising' role.

The next critical work to follow Huntsburger's was David F. Beer's *Ethiopian Literature and Literary Criticism in English: an Annotated Bibliography*, which was published in *Research in African Literature* (vi,1) in 1975. Beer's 13-page compilation was not, like his predecessor's, strictly limited to creative literature and includes translations from Ethiopian languages, mainly *Ge'ez* and Amharic. However, it differs in that it is more comprehensive and incorporates more genres (short stories and poems) and works of criticism that had been overlooked in Huntsburger's. Nevertheless, his anthology also seems to suffer from some omissions, anachronisms and mismatching entries.

Following the above mentioned two pioneering works which apparently laid the ground and generated interest among Ethiopian scholars, subsequent studies on Ethiopian literature in English have been done mostly by Ethiopians.

As far as the awareness of the present researcher goes, serious scholarly discussion of Ethiopian literature in English was begun in MA theses, the first of which was Fekade Azeze's "The Novels of Sahle Sellassie" (unpublished MA thesis, 1979, Addis Ababa University). This work critically examines Sahle Sellassie Birhane

Mariam's three novels: *The Afersata*, *Warrior King*, and *Firebrands* both thematically and stylistically, and provides a survey of Ethiopian literature in the vernacular and the historical development of the English language in Ethiopia.

Succeeding study of a similar category was Debebe Seifu's "Ethiopian Literature in English" (unpublished MA thesis, 1980, Addis Ababa University), which can be considered as the most extensive and nearly complete work in the area to date. In this study Debebe has critically and thoroughly examined seven English novels, probed into the poetics of avant-garde and prominent poets (Tsegaye Gabre Medhin, Solomon Deressa, and Eyassu Gorfu), assessed five English plays, and reflected on the state and prospects of Ethiopian literature in English.

Probably the only gap observed so far in this study is the omission of literary pieces in the short story genre, which he attributes, understandably, to the fact that, "...there is not a single book of short stories so far". However, he seems to have jumped to a hasty conclusion when he said: "The short story is not a popular genre with Ethiopian writers in English" (Fekade 1985: 40.). Because the fact is that there were many Ethiopians, including those whose novels and poems he examined, who had a number of short stories of various sub-genres and qualities published in the various periodicals of the times. Nonetheless, Debebe's work still remains to be so far the most important (and probably also the latest) contribution to the study of Ethiopian literature in English, covering the period up until 1980.

There have also been other dissertational studies by Ethiopians, most of which bear only marginal relationship to the specific topic of Ethiopian literature in English

and none with Ethiopian diasporic literature in English. These include: Berhanu Zerihun's *A Bibliography of Critical Works on Dagnachew Worku's Writings* (unpublished MA Thesis, 1980); Berhanu Matthews's, *English Poetry in Ethiopia: The Relevance of Stylistics in an EFL Context* (unpublished PhD Thesis, 1994); Abiye Daniel's *African Literary Texts and Language-based Approaches in ELT: A Study of Motivation* (unpublished PhD Thesis, 1998); Teklu Minas's *Dagnachew Worku's Writings: Three Plays and Two Novels* (unpublished MA Thesis, 1983); Yimer Kifle's *Pedagogy and Ethiopian Writing in English: An Activity-based Approach to Teaching Literature in EFL* (unpublished PhD Thesis, 1990), and Tewodros Bogale's *Major Themes in Ethiopian Poetry in English from 1944-1967 E.C* (unpublished MA Thesis, 2004), among others.

On another level, of existing studies outside of dissertations, Fekade Azeze's "Ethiopian Creative Writing and Criticism in English: A Review and Bibliography", which was published in the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* (Vol. XVIII) in 1985, appears so far the most recent and equally important compilation of Ethiopian creative writings and criticism in English in general. This compilation, in addition to accounting for most works published until the early 1980s, includes critical reviews, translations from indigenous languages, and comments on the state and prospects of Ethiopian literature in English.

Relatedly, among the remaining few critical discussions that were featured intermittently in some periodicals most were brief reviews or commentaries, often focusing on specific work(s) of selected writers, and limited in their scope. As

Fekade (1985: 37) points out, the poetic works of Tsegaye Gabre Medhin and Solomon Deressa were the most recurrent subjects in these critical essays. Notable in this regard is William Prouty, whose critical reviews of Tsegaye's poems, the play *Oda Oak Oracle*, and Abbe Gubegna's *The Savage Girl* were, published successively in *Menen* and *Something* magazines in 1965, 1966, and 1967 respectively.

2.1.2.1 Studies on Ethiopian Diasporic Literature in English

Broadly speaking, there have been a number of internationally renowned critical works (books, encyclopaedic compilations, discourses/essays, and reviews published in journals and periodicals) dealing mainly with African literatures in English, produced by both diasporic and non-diasporic Africans in many countries. Of these, only a few dealt directly with works of the African diaspora in general and that of the Ethiopian diaspora in particular. Further, even most of the works dealing with African diasporic writers tend to be either annotative compilations, focusing on certain issues or angles (cultural, sociological, political, etc. aspects) and examining the texts in relation to first and second generation black immigrants in the specific countries (e.g. USA or Great Britain), and/or against certain contexts prevailing in the countries in certain periods. Other studies have mainly been articles published in periodicals and handling a specific work within a framework of postcolonial, modernist/post-modernist, or deconstruction theories. In the specific context of Ethiopia, there have been noticeable gaps in terms of critical studies directly dealing with literary works in English produced by Ethiopians both

at home and abroad. So this was one of the factors that prompted the undertaking of the present study.

Thus coming to studies done on writings of Ethiopians or descendants Ethiopians living abroad specifically, it can generally be said that there have been a number of critical studies done on some novels individually. Apart from that, at least as far as the present researcher's awareness is concerned, *there have not been many serious studies that dealt directly with the narratives in question jointly and concurrently, nor in a manner or perspective similar to this study. By the same token, this is the one major aspect that differentiates the current study from previous studies conducted in the area.* As well, as already indicated, most of these previous works were articles that are smaller in size, selective in their dealings (focusing on certain thematic and/or stylistic issues), or limited to exploratory surveys or bibliographic/annotative compilations. (The exceptions are two dissertational studies that more or less (respectively) directly handle literary writings of the Ethiopian diaspora in a scholarly manner as shall be seen shortly).

Further to this, practically all of the critical discussions on the majority of the works selected in this study have mainly been reviews published in major periodicals and literary journals in the West, as well as posted on the Internet by individuals - both established writers and ordinary readers in general. The sources include, *Chicago Tribune, The Washington Post, San Francisco Chronicle, Publisher's Weekly, Entertainment Weekly, Kirkus Reviews, and People* magazine, among others. However, since none of these pieces has thematically analysed the

writings in an in-depth manner or comparatively, or on par with the objectives or scope of this study, they hardly offer anything significant worth discussing here.

2.1.2.2 Most Recent Studies

As mentioned above, there have so far been only two studies, both of which were done in partial fulfilments for the requirements of an MA and a PhD degree in literature at Addis Ababa University in 2008. The first of these is “The Predicaments of the Diaspora as Reflected in *The Texture of Dreams* and *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*”, by Endalkachew Hailu which was done in partial fulfilment for the requirements of an MA degree in literature in 2008, and deals with the two works of the Ethiopian diaspora mentioned in the title.

This study is aimed at identifying and analysing the various challenges the diaspora are facing and their impacts as revealed in the two novels. Likewise, by employing textual analysis, it attempts to establish any existing similarities or differences in terms of thematic preoccupations between the two novels. Concerning thematic parallels, the study identifies nine parallels under three categories of “Woes of the Homeland”, “Woes in the Host land”, and “Sub-themes” that are shared between the novels in question, and marks out two “divergent” themes. Remarking on the major ‘woes’ depicted in the novels, Endalkachew (2008:31) states:

[T]he homeland, Ethiopia, has given various woes to the protagonists and narrators of the novels, Yosef and Stephanos, and these woes are among the major themes in the novels. These include, among others, impoverishment

and deprivation, the horrors of war, and misuse of power. However, this does not imply that there are not economic and political woes in the host land...

And he cites relevant passages that support his claim from the respective novels. Endalkachew sums up his analysis by outlining the thematic similarities and differences he finds dominant in the two novels. Probably the first, and very important contribution in the area so far, this study differs from the present one in at least three major aspects: its objectives, its scope, and the type of theoretical framework and approach employed.

The second study, "Post-colonialism and Mainstream Anglophone African Novel" (a thesis submitted for a PhD degree in Literature, Addis Ababa University, 2008) by Melakneh Mengistu, is so far the most recent and much broader study that has basically to do with Anglophone African literature in the English language.

Melakneh's study, guided by the Post-colonial theory, attempts "to determine the post-colonial trajectories as reflected in the contemporary novel from across mainstream Anglophone Africa". Divided into four major parts constituting eight chapters, this study begins by providing the socio-historical background to the study of modern African literature, followed by a "contrapuntal reading" of selected novels from Anglophone East, West and Southern African countries published in the years 1970-2000; and a comparative analysis of the novels in question "with a view to determine their thematic and stylistic intertextuality as an expression of political resistance and cultural renaissance"(vii).

Accordingly, a total of eight novels (comprising three from East Africa; two from West Africa; and three from southern Africa) are critically examined and existing thematic and stylistic parallels determined. The study also takes a brief look into the profile of Ethiopian literature in English separately, owing to the obvious social, historical and political peculiarities that set apart Ethiopia from other African countries. In this section Melakneh provides brief surveys of known works of major Ethiopian writers both at home and in the diaspora. *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, *The Texture of Dreams*, and Hama Tuma's trilogy are among the diasporic works mentioned in this section.

While Melakneh's study again differs from the present one mainly in its scope, direction, and focus as well as objectives, it is nonetheless an impressively huge undertaking, by all standards, and most likely the first of its kind in the tradition of research in Ethiopia on mainstream Anglophone African novel both within and without Africa.

To conclude, the selection of the works reviewed above was mainly based on their immediate relationship and relevance to the present study (particularly the two most recent studies), and in acknowledgement of their scholarly contribution to the field of knowledge in Ethiopian literature in English in general. At the same time, discussing them has enabled to simultaneously show how they differed from the concerns of the current study. Finally, as the list of previous studies discussed herein is based on resources available at the time of the study, it may not be exhaustive or cover works published since then.

CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.0 Introduction

Literary and critical theories come in various shapes and aims and there are many schools of thought. These include: New Criticism, Archetypal/Myth Criticism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Marxism, Existentialism, Phenomenology, Russian Formalism, Surrealism, Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction, Postmodernism, Postcolonialism and Feminism, to mention but some. Nonetheless, it must be born in mind that most of the approaches are not entirely distinct or mutually exclusive, and there is a lot of borrowing from one another. One thing most of these theories have in common, however, is their direct or indirect leaning toward adopting singularly western-oriented perspective and approach.

Thus it is obvious that, in choosing the best approach, aiming at the one that proves the most illuminating is the more practical strategy. Accordingly, the process of selecting the most appropriate theoretical framework (as opposed to routinely adopting or subscribing to the traditional or canonized Eurocentric paradigms of the West), and deciding on the most suitable critical perspective (approach) commensurate with the study's aim and objectives, has been given the due emphasis in this study. As a result, the Post-colonial theory was chosen as the guiding theoretical framework for this study. It was chosen over the numerous other, mainly Eurocentric theoretical and conceptual paradigms mentioned above, because of its unique perspectives, and its conformity with the type of topic

(problem) in hand and with the aim and objectives of the study (see Section 3.3 below). Thus, as a study guided by the post-colonial theory, it naturally employs post-colonial concepts and perspectives. The following sections will attempt to illuminate this theory and the specific critical model chosen, followed by the rationale for the choice.

3.1 The Post-colonial Theory

Post-colonial theory (or *Postcolonialism*, as it is sometimes referred to) in general is a type of discourse encompassing various theories that are applied in various disciplines, including philosophy, political science, and literature. Post-colonial theory is believed to have come into existence mainly in response to the cultural legacy of colonialism, specifically that of Great Britain and in her former colonies, and the failure of most of Eurocentric theories to adequately explain the fluid socio-political and economic constructs in the age of globalization, as shall be further discussed hereunder. As a literary theory, Post-colonialism essentially deals with literatures produced in countries that once were colonies of European powers—particularly of Great Britain— and may extend further to include countries still in colonial arrangements, after the dissolution of the modern European empires (*ca.* 1950-1980). It also covers literature written in colonial countries *about* and *by* people from the colonized countries, and literatures of the diaspora. As such, when seen strictly from this last angle, literatures of the Ethiopian diaspora that are written in English language can, arguably, be subsumed under the domains of the Post-colonial literary paradigm (this issue is discussed more in Section 3.3 below).



Coming to the designation and form of the term postcolonialism (or post-colonialism), arriving at a single, definitive definition of post-colonial theory that accounts for all its features and concerns has proved problematic. Similarly, the scope and boundaries of post-colonialism, along with deciding on the exact orthographic form of the label itself (i.e. *post-colonial* (with a hyphen), or *postcolonial* (as one-word), and with either capital or small 'p') have been equally contentious, and subject to various interpretations. In connection with the problems pertaining to the concept and application of the term, Gilbert and Tompkins (1996: 12) state:

The term postcolonialism— according to a too-rigid etymology—is frequently misunderstood as a temporal concept, meaning the time after colonialism has ceased, or the time following the Independence Day of countries.... Postcolonialism is rather an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies... A theory of postcolonialism must, then, respond to more than the merely chronological construction of post-independence, and to more than just the discursive experience of imperialism.

Also, the renowned Post-colonial theoreticians, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989: 2; *passim*) expound this point further by saying:

The semantic basis of the term 'post-colonial' might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power. We use the term 'post-colonial', however, to *cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations*

throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted. In this sense [it] is concerned with the world as it exists during and after the period of European imperial domination and the effects of this on contemporary literatures (emphasis added).

Taken in this sense, then, Post-colonialism becomes much broader and extensive than is generally assumed or is inferred from the direct (colonised/coloniser) and temporal (after the end of colonisation) interpretation of the term. Moreover, it is incontestable that the official ending of colonialism or declarations of independence by former colonies in Africa and South-east Asia have not brought in the social, economic, and cultural independence as anticipated. What followed in the wake of colonialism, instead, were neo-colonialism and societal disintegration, civil unrest, balkanization, and non-stopping intra- and inter-country conflicts, especially in Africa. Most of these wars and clashes are living examples of colonial Europe's machination which *drew borders discounting peoples, ancient tribal boundaries and local history.* The current depressing state of affairs in most of the "developing" world (Ethiopia included) is directly associated with colonialism and imperialism, now replaced and perpetuated even more strongly by neo-colonialism under various guises and new actors. In fact, most of the currently popular terms, such as 'globalization', 'neoliberalism', 'development assistance/partners', 'cooperation', 'modernisation', 'new world order', etc., are nothing but euphemisms for modern-day colonialism, or neo-colonialism. Edward Said (1978),

one of the pioneers of postcolonial criticism and studies, discloses in *Orientalism* the way in which the colonizing "First World" has invented stereotypical images and myths of the "Third World" that have conveniently justified Western exploitation and domination of non-western cultures and peoples. Bhabha (1994) has also shown how certain cultures and literary and critical theories of the West misrepresent other cultures, with the end result of extending their political and social domination in the current world order (Murfin and Ray 1998). In other words, the creation of binary opposition in most Euro-centred theories shapes the way one views others. Thus, in most Eurocentric theories the Oriental and the Westerner, for example, are distinguished as different from each other (i.e. the emotional, decadent Orient vs. the principled, progressive Occident). This opposition thus justified the "white man's burden", his "destiny to rule" subordinate peoples. In contrast, post-colonialism seeks out areas of hybridity and transculturalization- an aspect that is particularly relevant in today's processes of globalization. Postcolonial writers and critics, as a rule, object the depiction of colonized and/or "third world" peoples as hollow "mimics" of Europeans or as passive recipients of power.

Therefore, the postcolonial theory emerges from the inability of Euro-American theory to escape false notions of "the universal", or its failure to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural origin of post-colonial writing. It has hence proceeded from the need to address this different practice, and attempts to *decenter* such assumptions- not only through contesting them but also through

developing (or rediscovering) indigenous theories of value, language, etc. Put differently, it aims to accommodate the differences within the various cultural traditions as well as the desire to describe in a comparative way the features shared among traditions across nations under the current neo-colonial world order (Lye 2008; Zabus 1997).

Eagleton (1996: 204-6) succinctly captures the essence, as well as the evolution and current concerns and boundaries of the post-colonial theory in today's world *vis-à-vis* other theories. He says that, similar to Feminism and Postmodernism, but in contrast to Phenomenology or Reception theory, post-colonial theory is *directly rooted in historical developments* (emphasis added). According to him, thus,

the collapses of the great European empires; their replacement by the world economic hegemony of the United States; the steady erosion of the nation state and of traditional geopolitical frontiers, along with mass global migrations and the creation of so-called multicultural societies; the intensified exploitation of ethnic groups within the West and 'peripheral' societies elsewhere; the formidable power of the new transnational corporations: all of this has developed apace since the 1960s. ... Post-colonialism, in short, has been, among other things, one instance of a rampant 'culturalism' which has recently swept across western cultural theory, over-emphasizing the cultural dimension of human life in understandable overreaction to a previous biologism, humanism or economism. Such cultural relativism is for the most part simply imperial dominion stood on its head.

In the sphere of literature, as alluded to in the above excerpt from Eagleton (*Ibid.*), Post-colonial theory particularly focuses on "the way in which literature by the

colonizing culture distorts the experience and realities; the way it justifies colonialism and *Western hegemony, and inscribes the inferiority of colonized peoples* and their cultures. The literatures of colonized peoples, in contrast, attempt to *articulate their identity or the challenges inherent in forging a national identity after colonial rule*; the way in which literature in colonizing countries appropriates and uses the knowledge of colonized (subordinated) peoples to serve the colonizers' interests as well as the West's cultural hegemony (Lye 2008; Wikipedia 2008).

In this connection, English is one of those languages through which the omnipresent hegemony of the West (specifically of Great Britain, the old imperial power, and of its successor, the USA) has been maintained. The historical moment which saw the emergence of 'English' as an academic discipline also produced the nineteenth-century colonial form of imperialism (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989: 3; Batsleer *et al.* 1985: 14; 19-25).

Further along the lines of languages and literature, the cultural hegemony of the West has been kept alive through canonical assumptions about literary activity, and through attitudes toward post-colonial literatures (including diasporic literatures in English) which identify them as "isolated national off-shoots of English literature", and thus relegate them to marginal and subordinate positions. However, as the reaches and popularity of these literatures began to grow, a process of incorporation has come into place. Thus by employing, again, Eurocentric

standards of judgment, the centre has sought to claim those works and writers of which it approves as British (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989: 2-7).

Post-colonialism, by contrast, as Jean-Marc Moura (1996, cited in Mongo-Mboussa and Menash 1999: 2) asserts, "...in reality... enables us to consider literature in terms of centre/margin relations, which are an essential element in today's world. This criticism insists on the specificities of each of these literatures within this imperialist ensemble". And this is what, perhaps most importantly, distinguishes post-colonialism from other theoretical paradigms.

In light of this, then, the discussion of the writings in the present study is, in effect, a discussion of the process by which the English language, with its power and its signification of authority, has been seized from the dominant Western (particularly Britain and the USA) culture and used as a weapon for the rejection of Western mentality and assertion of identities by people from poor, 'Third World' nations.

To conclude, the terms 'Post-colonial' and 'postcolonial' (with or without a hyphen and either with a capital or a small 'p'), and 'postcolonialism' are understood in this study to mean the same thing and are used interchangeably. Conceptually also, the term is taken and applied here in its broader sense, as "covering all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day throughout the world" (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989: 2).

This understanding/application becomes even more pertinent in view of the immediate concerns of the study that aim at examining literatures of contemporary



Ethiopian diaspora against the backdrop of current hegemony of the West and its multifarious impacts on 'third world' nations and societies in various aspects. (See 'Contextualizing Postcolonialism', Section 3.3, for further discussions).

3.2. Critical Models of Post-colonialism

The critical approaches of Post-colonial theory are generally divided into five (sometimes also into four) main models, as discussed below in brief:

- i) *National or Regional models*: These emphasize distinctive features of the particular national or regional cultures. Examples are the Subaltern Studies group (India), which reinscribes history from the position of previously silenced indigenous peoples, and many types of Caribbean studies, which look at shared features—namely, the legacy of plantation slavery—that have shaped literary culture in neighbouring islands. According to Lye (2008), although almost by definition "theory" is impossible if research and interpretation remain focused on local particulars, scholars using 'national or regional models' believe that comparative studies and [that] 'theorizing' can proceed most responsibly from area-specificity.
- ii) *Racial/Ethnic models*: "Not necessarily tied to an essentialist view of race but rather to 'the idea of race'", these models identify certain shared characteristics across various national literatures. A typical example is the common racial inheritance in literatures of the African diaspora, often addressed by the 'Black Writing model' found in the Negritude movement

and earlier works of Pan-Africanism; and the "Black Atlantic" concept which is said to have been put forth by Paul Gilroy, one of many coming from "Black British" writers (*Ibid.*).

- iii) *Comparative (or Wider Comparative) models*: These models consist of three main types of comparisons of varying degree of complexity, and generally deal with linguistic, historical, and cultural features across two or more post-colonial literatures. The first type focuses on comparisons between countries of the white diaspora. The second type represents comparisons between areas of the black diaspora. Post-colonial critics, such as Griffiths (1978), Ngugi (1972), and Moore (1969), who employ this model address issues of exile, focusing on similarities between writings within the Black diaspora (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989: 20). The third is a critical model that uses a combination of methods drawn from the first two and bridges the gap between the former two.

Thematically, Comparative studies generally focus on concepts such as exile, education, and treatment of women. Highlighting the concerns of the Comparative models, Ashcroft *et al.* (*Ibid.*: 29) note, "Accounts of comparative features in post-colonial writing need to address the larger issues of how these literatures bear the imprint of the material forces of politics, economics, and culture which act upon them within the imperial framework, and of how this is bound up with the re-placing of the imposed language in the new geographical and cultural context". Language is one of

the major concerns common in these models; and the other is the struggle against oppression (*Ibid.*).

- iv) *Colonizer and colonized model* (sometimes subsumed under the Wider Comparative model) concentrates on the imperial-colonial dialectic itself, and subjects the act of writing texts in post-colonial areas to the political, imaginative, and social control involved in the relationship between colonizer and colonized. Whether de-colonization is ever possible, or if native intellectuals could escape the hegemony of colonizing (and/or neo-colonizing) culture is one key question that theorists of this paradigm raise. So much so that, writers like Spivak (2000: 37) ask if 'third-world intellectuals' who are educated in (and often teach and write in) 'first-world' countries, were not in complicity with and "co-opted by 'first-world' assumptions, values, prejudices, and exploitative practices".
- v) *Hybridity/Syncreticity models* argue for features such as hybridity and syncreticity as constitutive elements of all post-colonial literatures ('syncretism' here represents the "process by which previously distinct linguistic categories, and, by extension cultural formations, merge into a single new form" (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989: 16)). This inevitably brings along the complex issues of culture, representation and meaning, which, unfortunately, cannot be dwelt upon here at length because of its marginal importance for the immediate concerns of this study.

Correspondingly, of the five critical models of the postcolonial theory, the Comparative model is the approach that is used in the present study. This, needless to mention, is owing to the design of the study, which is comparative, and hence requires employing a comparative approach. It might also be worth noting here that the five critical models are all components of the Post-colonial notion, and not separate, self-contained paradigms that necessarily function independently. Highlighting this issue, Ashcroft *et al.* (*Ibid.*: 16) posit that, "the models by which texts and traditions in post-colonial literatures are discussed, often operate as assumptions within critical practice rather than specific and discrete schools of thought, and a number of them may intersect or operate at the same time", as shall be explained further.

3.3 Contextualizing Post-colonialism

As already indicated, the choice of the post-colonial theory over many others in the present study, apart from its having unique perspectives, and compatibility with the type and design and strategy of the study, was founded on a number of, some of which interrelated, factors.

To begin with, the writings selected for the study are written in the English language– the most prominent of all imperial/European languages both during and after the days of colonialism– which is characteristic of post-colonial literatures (i.e. written mainly in the language(s) of colonial/imperial/ powers).

In the context of Ethiopia, the time of the appearance of literary works in English (or the official adoption of the language in the country) coincides with the period marking the formal ending of colonialism in many colonized countries and the birth of neo-colonialism. *The Macmillan English Dictionary* (2005: 949) defines neo-colonialism as chiefly having to do with economic domination: *the domination by a powerful, usually Western nation, of another nation that is politically independent but has a weak economy greatly dependent on trade with the powerful nation* (emphasis added).

Thus, it can be argued that we are now in the era of post-colonialism, a new form of world order or neo-colonialism, and the Western hegemony that prevails today, now spearheaded by the USA. In the context of Anglophone African countries too, as was the case with most of Great Britain's colonies across the world, this period saw the shift towards Western mode of education, governance, and way of life in general at the expense of the indigenous ones; the creation of new (mostly artificial) political boundaries, sowing the seed for perpetual internal political unrests and tribal and border conflicts that have still continued to plague practically all African countries.

In terms of the socio-political, traditional, as well as economic constituents Ethiopia shares with other African countries with direct colonial experience, there could be no doubt that the similarities by far outweigh the differences. The fact that Ethiopia was not colonized *per se* by European imperial powers during the

"Scramble for Africa" is, perhaps, the only major factor that distinguishes Ethiopia from the rest of African countries.

However, the truth is that, Ethiopia, just like colonised African countries, has been affected and continues to be affected by the aftermaths of colonialism, alias neo-colonialism, 'Coca-colanization', or 'globalisation', the term currently in vogue; is not immune to the seemingly inescapable global influence of the westernization (or 'modernisation') process that is evident in practically every aspect—from the way people eat, drink, dress, and speak to what and how they think and live by. Perhaps interestingly, the aggressive cultural hegemony of the West, and particularly of the USA, is not confined only to poor and/or colonized countries. Elements of Western culture—from Pop music, Hollywood movies and denim jeans, to Coca Cola and hamburgers—have pervaded and affected both non-colonized (and/or economically developed) and underdeveloped societies equally. In describing this scenario, Brians (2006) states:

Lenin's classic analysis of imperialism led to Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" which distinguishes between literal political dominance and dominance through ideas and culture (what many critics of American influence call the "Coca-Colanization" of the world). Sixties thinkers developed the concept of neo-imperialism to label relationships like that between the U.S. and many Latin American countries which, while nominally independent, had economies dominated by American business interests, often backed up by American military forces (<http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/anglophone/index.html>).

What is more alarming is the fact that the invasion and appropriation of the West is growing steadily and continues supplanting or, at its best, hybridizing indigenous languages, cultures, values and norms as mentioned above. The indiscriminate after-effects of colonialism and the corollary arrangements in neo-colonialism, again, transcend the dichotomies of political boundary and of the coloniser/colonised paradigms. This can be clearly witnessed in the state of affairs in Ethiopia and Liberia, which are the two non-colonised countries in Africa, in the last 2-3 decades. Political upheaval, countless *coup d'états*, tribal and border wars and general unrest, abject poverty, erosion and/or supplantation of traditional, social and moral values and assets, as well as poor and dysfunctional governance systems and structures that currently characterize Africa or much of the so-called 'Third World' countries— are all also, inarguably, traceable to either/or colonialism and neo-colonialism. These malaises are still evident in practically all “developing” countries in various degrees and shapes.

Thus, and in light of the scenarios discussed above, it can be argued that Ethiopia is also a victim of the by-products of colonialism and neo-colonialism like other developing nations in virtually all aspects. This broader perspective lends credence to the position of the present researcher that Ethiopia's cultural and literary products, like those of other African countries, could be examined from post-colonial perspectives and approaches. In conjunction with this, it might be interesting to note that most of the African diaspora, including most of the renowned writers, are immigrants who left behind their home countries in the last

two-three decades for various reasons, most of which have to do with post-colonial or neo-colonial arrangements and the new world order.

Further still, some of the writings of the African diaspora (sometimes referred to as 'African-American' literature, 'literature of émigrés' or 'Black literature' mostly in the USA) are classified as literatures of the diaspora or diasporic literatures. Therefore, as diasporic literatures rightly fall within the domain of post-colonial literature, it makes the application of the post-colonial theoretical framework and its critical models all the more logical.

Equally important is the question of 'place', which is a crucial concept in post-colonial literatures. Viewed from this point, we find that the texts under the study are produced in Western Europe (former colonisers and current cosmopolitan powers), and the USA, a country known for its imperial ambition and is regarded as the epitome of the West's modern-day hegemony and the global superpower.

Similarly, comparing the traditional (Euro-American-centred) approaches with postcolonialism, Palmer (1979: 2) emphasises the need to move away from unquestioning adoption of Western literary canons, and the growing popularity of post-colonial theories as follows:

The view is gaining ground in African literary circles that African literature should not be judged by the criteria which have so far been used in the evaluation of western literature. The reasons for the objection to [the] use of western criteria are not always literary or cultural; to a very large extent they are complicated by nationalistic and ideological considerations...In the

colonial days African culture was adversely affected by the imperialist experience since everything was judged by western cultural standards and there was a tendency, in fact, to suppress those aspects of African culture which could not be reconciled with western culture.

In conclusion, the choice of the post-colonial theory for the present study stemmed mainly from: a) the present writer's understanding or argument on the broader as well as contextualized interpretation of the post-colonial theory; b) the bounds and concerns of post-colonial theory which directly apply to diasporic writings written in European languages by diasporas from developing nations; c) the shared similarities or thematic preoccupations between the writings of other diasporas and those of Ethiopian (e.g. dislocation and relocation, alienation, nostalgia, hybridity/acculturation, crisis of identity, etc.); d) its compatibility with the present study's topic and its convenient comparative approaches; and e) its broader as well as unique critical approaches that go beyond singular interpretation of texts from absolute paradigms or perspectives of black/white, colonised/coloniser, along with its currently growing popularity and utilization among literary scholars and critics the world over. Hence, the methods of application and the procedures followed herein (discussed under Chapter 1, Section 1.8) were in line with this understanding. The next chapter thus presents the thematic analysis of the selected six texts, also in keeping with the theoretical perspectives and procedures discussed in the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER IV: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED TEXTS

4.0 Introduction

As already indicated, this chapter, which represents the core part of this thesis, deals with the thematic analysis and interpretation of the texts in question. The six works selected in the present study are divided into two groups (labeled Group-A and Group-B respectively) and will therefore be analysed in two separate and at the same time interrelated processes. The categorization of the narratives into two groups is mainly based on certain specifics or peculiarities in terms of setting, genre, and thematic concerns exhibited in the narratives, as is the reason for conducting both independent and collective analyses. Thus, the rationale for performing the analysis of Group-A texts in group (instead of text-by-text) springs from the overwhelming convergence of themes in the narratives of the said group, which makes carrying out individual or separate analysis redundant or repetitive. On the other hand, the investigation of Group-B texts will be done separately because of some degree of variation thematically, as well as for the sake of adding some colour to the presentation (ensuring variety). Accordingly, the composition of the two groups will be as follows: Group-A is comprised of Dinaw Mengestu's two novels (*The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (2007) and *How to Read the Air* (2010)), Fasil Yitbarek's novel, *The Texture of Dreams* (2007), and Hama Tuma's anthology of articles, *Give Me a Dog's Life Any Day- African Absurdities II* (2004); and the second set (Group-B) consists of the remaining two narratives,

Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia, by Rebecca G. Haile (2007), and *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, by Maaza Mengiste (2010).

Accordingly, the chapter begins first by presenting the synopsis of each of the selected works in the respective groups. This will be followed by thematic analysis of the narratives in the two groups respectively, in the order of importance. The chapter concludes by presenting the comparative analysis of all the texts contained in the two categories in two sequential and interrelated processes: intra-group and inter-group analysis.

4.1 Plot Synopsis and Thematic Analysis of Texts in Group-A

4.1.1 Plot Synopses

4.1.1.1 Plot Synopsis of *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*

Written in the first-person point of view, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* is a story of an Ethiopian diaspora, who, together with two fellow African immigrants, is struggling to make sense of his life in a strange land.

The protagonist, Sepha Stephanos, is a passive, complacent character. He had fled the Ethiopian Revolution seventeen years ago after witnessing soldiers beat his father to the point of near death. He manages to settle in Washington, D.C, United States, and now runs a small grocery store in Logan Circle, an apparently poor African-American neighborhood.

Sepha's only companions are the two fellow African immigrants- Joseph (or Joe) from the Congo who is a waiter at the Colonial Grill, and Kenneth, a former

engineer from Kenya. They meet regularly, support one another, and share their ups and downs as well as their disillusionments as they assimilate with the society of their host land. It is observed that of the three of them each has his own unique view on adapting to their host country from their chats in their get-togethers. Sepha's life, together with his neighbourhood, begins to change by the arrival of new neighbours –Judith and Naomi, a white woman and her biracial daughter-who become his friends. But soon the neighborhood's peaceful life is disturbed by a series of racial incidents, which also involve Sepha's new white friend. This leads to growing tensions and conflicts in the neighbourhood, culminating in the crumbling of his business, moving out of his new friends (Judith, and her daughter, Naomi), and the sad ending of his up-and-coming relationship with Judith. At the end of the day, when Sepha opens his shop on the Christmas day he finds himself alone, with no family near to celebrate with. The story comes to an end by Sepha's going to his long-shunned uncle's house to take stock of his life situation, reflect on his dilemmas and what the future may hold for him. In other words, the novel concludes by signaling Sepha's awakening to the reality of his being torn between two worlds, in neither of which he finds the happiness he has been constantly searching for so long.

4.1.1.2 Plot Synopsis of *How to Read the Air*

One September afternoon, Yosef and Mariam, two Ethiopian immigrants, set off on a road trip from their home in Peoria, Illinois, to Nashville, Tennessee, in search of another possible place to relocate with new identity and a new beginning. A few

months later their son, Jonas, who is the main character (and the narrator) in the novel, is born in Illinois.

Thirty years later, after the death of his father, a new chapter begins in the life of Jonas Woldemariam, the son of the two Ethiopian immigrants who have had a turbulent relationship in their life in America. Now a high school teacher in New York, Jonas muses about his solitary American childhood, and starts to wonder about his parents' past that has so far remained mysterious to him. He is desperate to make sense of the volatile generational and cultural ties that have forged him and his own soon-to-flounder marriage. Thus leaving behind his wife Angela and his job in New York, Jonas sets out to retrace his parents' trip (a honeymoon trip they made from Peoria to Nashville 30 years earlier). In this trip, he begins to understand the haunting sense of displacement and isolation that has shaped his family. This search reveals to him his parents' hidden past and present, beginning with his father's months-long and arduous journey from a jail in Ethiopia that involves long trekking through a desert and stowing in a cargo ship in Sudan, to Europe, and finally the United States- his long-held and cherished haven. By using various narrative (plot) techniques and alternating between the past and the present, Jonas jointly recounts the story of his parents and that of his own. His story depicts the social and psychological traumas of immigrants, the dilemma and identity crisis or the sense of rootlessness experienced by first and second generation Ethiopian as well as African diasporas at large in the USA.

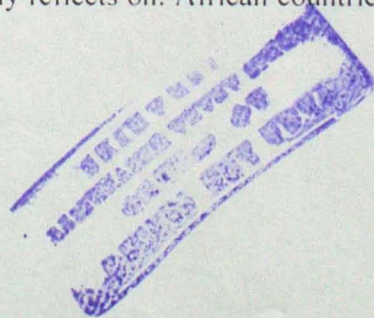
4.1.1.3 Plot Synopsis of *The Texture of Dreams*

In this novel Fasil Yitbarek tells the story of an Ethiopian immigrant in USA. Yosef, who is a recent arrival to New York City, is the protagonist and who narrates the story in first-person point of view. Yosef migrated to the USA fleeing political and economic upheaval that swept Ethiopia following the fall of the military (known as "Dergue") regime in early 1990s. Armed with only a Bachelor's degree in English and some experience in teaching, Yosef is forced to undergo some frustrating months before he finally finds a job of teaching English to newly-arrived immigrants from Russia. As he grows accustomed to the life in the strange land, he realizes the importance of education, and particularly the crucial weight advanced degrees have for success in his life as a teacher. This prompts him to pursue his study and get a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). But this opportunity (his learning experience) also proves to be a major turning point in his life as he falls in love with one of his classmates, Helen, "a petite woman with dark hair and brown eyes" who, unfortunately, happened to have a boyfriend. Helen is only interested in a platonic relationship with him. So the gentle rebuff he receives from her becomes hard for him to accept and he is engulfed with despair, loneliness, and a constant longing for the comforts of his homeland. He is seen constantly reminiscing about his childhood, adolescent adventures, and the bitter-sweet memories of campus life back in Addis Ababa as a diversion from his frustrations. The only person he finds kind enough to unburden himself on is Mrs. Hanson, his elderly, widowed landlady. And so, the evening hours become the most important moment for the two lonely souls to have

someone to talk to and listen to. But Mrs. Hanson's unexpected death induces yet another painful experience in him and prompts him to reflect on his eight years of empty life in America and his prospects. As a result, he reaches a decision to go back to visit his homeland, and thereby relieve himself of his haunting homesickness and sort out his thoughts. But by a strange quirk of fate, just as he was about to leave the country, he gets a call from Helen, who confesses to him her 'awakening'— and her decision and readiness now to reciprocate his true love. The story comes to an end with Yosef being filled with overwhelming optimism in his future with Helen, and euphoric about his approaching reunion with his family in his homeland. His concluding remarks were: "I will be with my family in a week from now. The countdown has begun. I will be back in the midst of the people who are near and dear to me.... And when that is over, who knows what a budding romance could bring". In a nutshell, this novel successfully depicts many of the experiences that are common to the vast majority of immigrants to the U.S.—from the difficulties they face in communicating in American English to the various challenges and the confusion over where true home is.

4.1.1.4 Plot Synopsis of *Give Me a Dog's Life any Day- African Absurdities II*

Give Me a Dog's Life Any Day, the second book of the trilogy *African Absurdities* by Hama Tuma, is a collection of short satirical essays focusing on the state of socio-political affairs in Africa and the world at large. This book, which is comprised of forty-five articles (not counting the Preface and the Epilogue), explores and critically and satirically reflects on: African countries suffering under



dictatorial rules, the endless anguish and subjugation of the people by these dictatorial regimes and their equally never-ending systems of ruthless suppression, the seemingly bleak future of the continent, the hypocrisy and double standards of the West and its current hegemony, as well as the plight of African immigrants who live suspended between two worlds—that of their own and that of the Western world. From the follies of governments and politicians and of citizens to the double standards of the West, Hama explores them with a mixture of parody and bitter resentment, without passing any opportunities to poking deadly fun at the pompous African leaders, their greedy and hypocrite patrons in the West, and at life in general in the contemporary world.

Following the synopses of the four books in the first group, the next section provides the thematic analysis of the texts in question.

4.1.2 A Thematic Analysis of Group-A Texts

4.1.2.0 Introduction

Generally speaking, a range of issues covering political, historical, psycho-social, and economic aspects are raised in the four works included in this group. But the themes of disillusionment, social and psychological trauma, isolation and racial discrimination or segregation, the hypocrisy of the West and its double standards, and dilemma and identity crisis as well as coping mechanisms of immigrants stand out as the most principal issues shared by the four books. Thus, the analysis first deals with these emerging themes as they are dealt with in the four texts, with

frequent references to and citations from the concerned texts as necessary. The analysis concludes with summary of the findings, putting forward the possible factors responsible for the predominance of the concerned themes among the narratives of this group.

4.1.2.1 Disillusionment

Disillusionment—in all its forms and aspects—is the leading and most recurring topic in all of the texts in this group. The major aspects of this disillusionment include disillusionment with past dreams and ambitions, including the reality of life for immigrants caught up in the struggle of chasing the rainbow, the perennial “American Dream”, with one’s long-held beliefs and worldviews, as well as one’s place/status in society, and disillusionment with the West and its hypocrisy. These are the major aspects that are addressed directly and well particularly in three of the books, and in an indirect manner (or mostly in association with African diaspora in Europe) in the fourth book, Hama Tuma’s *Give Me a Dog’s Life Any Day*. Accordingly, the characters in the three texts, i.e. Dinaw Mengestu’s two novels (*The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* and *How to Read the Air*), and Fasil Yitbarek’s *The Texture of Dreams*, are seen becoming, slowly but surely, disillusioned as they come to terms with their failure to achieve the success and happiness they came searching for or have been dreaming about for long. And in Hama Tuma’s essays, albeit presented in a different literary format, the disillusionment of African immigrants with Western values and its hypocrisy particularly in the context of the current post-colonial world order are found in nearly all of the 45 essays.

In *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* the disillusionment of Joseph and Kenneth with their respective aspirations to fulfil their dream of higher education (getting a master's and a doctorate degrees, respectively) from top universities is probably the most representative case in point pertaining to disillusionment of most immigrants with past dreams and ambitions. At the end of the day both Joseph and Kenneth are forced to accept the reality— the reality of their shattered dreams and ambitions. As Sepha the protagonist recounts, it had been nineteen years since Joseph came to America, and he had “tried to see each and every one of those years in the best possible light. Michigan and the PhD are now *idle dreams of a restless young immigrant*” (99). Later on Joseph shows his disillusionment when he admits his failure and even try to console himself when he tells Sepha, “You don't need a PhD anymore; *anything you want to learn in this world, you can learn in this city for free*” (169) (emphasis added).

The expressions “*idle dreams of a restless young immigrant*” and “*anything you want to learn in this world, you can learn in this city for free*” are loaded and much poignant statements than they appear on the surface. First, they carry or depict the typical perception Westerners, by and large, have towards black immigrants. Secondly, they show how the immigrants themselves have come to, consciously or unconsciously, accept this view. Thirdly, they convey the final awakening and acquiescence of the characters to the fact that all their dreams about getting higher degrees have been mere illusions or distant mirages, and that their life in the city

has taught them or awakened them more about the harsh realities of life as an immigrant than any university education could.

Similarly, in Dinaw's second novel, *How to Read the Air*, the disillusionment with the "American Dream" in general, along with his ambition of getting a PhD degree is seen shattered beyond salvation as can be observed in the following dialogue that Jonas holds with his wife, Angela:

"What about going back to school?" she [Angela] finally asked me. "You've been there for two years. I thought you wanted to get your Ph.D."

"I don't think I'm ready yet" I told her. "I still have more reading I need to do. And more experience teaching can only help".

"And for how long are you going to do that. Two more years? Five, six? It's just a part-time job, Jonas. It's not supposed to become your life" (99).

Again at another time Jonas is heard confessing (or rather admitting) his failure in the conversation he holds with Angela. He says: "... That [to get his PhD] was always the plan but somehow I forgot that. I became so concerned about just holding on to what we had that I didn't want to take any chances..." (188).

Disillusionment of the diaspora with dreams and ambitions is not confined to aspects of education or material success in life. As it happens, the disillusionment with the "American Dream" is a multifaceted phenomenon and a reality that transcends differences of age and location of homeland. In other words, it is a phenomenon that cuts across boundaries and is experienced by immigrants of all generation and background. One example is Jonas' mother, and her disillusionment

with her notion of everything American, including even the landscape. The writer captures this feeling as related by Jonas, "...Even the meadow, which was flooded in light and appeared to literally glow from within, seemed hardly to be of any consequence [to her]. *Perhaps, she thought, this was the way everything in America actually was—all smoke and mirrors, with only illusions of grandeur* (141) (emphasis added).

As well, in Fasil Yitbarek's *The Texture of Dreams* the disillusioning experiences of Yosef come in various forms, the first one of which is the difficulty of getting a job in prosperous America. This comes in sharp contrast to his long-held perception of America as a land of milk and honey where life is supposed to be a bed of roses. But the reality is that he suffers months of desperate job hunting. All in all it can be said that literally every new day brings in a new disillusioning episode to Yosef in almost everything he observes and encounters. The very first day he arrives at the JFK Airport in Washington, D.C., he loses his confidence in his English language skill (after all he has a BA degree in the language and even been teaching it!) when confronted with the problems of understanding and being understood by the customs officer. Yosef recounts: "... I answer his questions, gleaning his meaning with difficulty, but I am baffled to see that he has trouble understanding me. "This could be what they call low-class English," I tell myself defiantly' (13).

But not all disillusionment is doom and gloom for Yosef. For instance there is the exhilarating experience of the sense of freedom that he observes everyone seems

to take for granted. For Yosef, an immigrant from Ethiopia who only knew decades of subjugation under dictatorial regimes, this comes as a shocking revelation and a gift to be fully enjoyed: "I relish the heady thrill of freedom: Sauntering into buildings without being frisked at the gate. Going out for a late night walk just to spit in the face of the seventeen-year-old curfew that I have left behind" (22).

He is struck by the same disbelief with the opulence he observes around. This is quite understandable given his background— a poor immigrant who used to live under constant scarcity of even basic items in a country of debilitating poverty and corruption. This affluence brings back the perpetual paucity he grew up with in his home land contrastingly, and opens his eyes to the shocking reality regarding the depth and extent of the poverty in his homeland and to the worthlessness of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution. He reminisces: " I recall the long lines I used to stand in outside the government owned store in my hometown. Hours of waiting in the scorching sun or soaking rain for a bag of spaghetti or a kilo of sugar.... We knew our rations had been smuggled out through the back door, but we would rather go home empty- handed than get into serious trouble by blurting that out.." (24). Fasil depicts several similar scenarios in the novel that bring to light Ethiopian/African immigrants' disillusioning experiences in various aspects in the West.

On the other hand, disillusionment in Hama Tuma's *Give Me a Dog's Life Any Day*, as mentioned earlier, is principally in connection with the West and its hypocrisy, its sole supremacy, and the current unfair geo-politics of the world it spouses.

But perhaps one of the most shocking revelations to Hama is that neither colonialism nor imperialism is yet dead but is rather much alive and even making a strong comeback under new guises. As such, Hama brings to light the West's uncontested supremacy and attacks its blatant ambitions to re-colonize the rest of the world under new labels. To underscore his point, he quotes an article by one Jackson Diehl that appeared in *Washington Post* of December 30, 2002 which calls the USA "The Accidental Imperialist", and observes that "nowadays too Imperialism has boldly or accidentally come out of the closet". He also goes further and cites Tony Blair's advisor, Robert Cooper who, he says, argues for what he presents as "New Liberal Imperialism". According to the writer, Robert Cooper has laid bare the hidden, yet-not-so-subtle agenda of recolonisation when he said:

The most logical way to deal with chaos, and the most often employed in the past, is colonization. But colonization is unacceptable to post-modern states (and, as it happens, to some modern states too). It is precisely because of the death of imperialism that we are seeing the emergence of the pre-modern world. What is needed then is a new kind of imperialism, once acceptable to a world of human rights and cosmopolitan values. We can already discern its outline: an imperialism which, like all imperialism, aims to bring order and organization... Among ourselves (i.e. the West) we operate on the basis of laws and, often, cooperative security. But when dealing with more old-fashioned kinds of states outside the post-modern continent of Europe, we need to revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era—force, preemptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary (7-8).

In another article, titled "In God We Trust", the author decries the hypocrisy and supremacy of Western powers, particularly the USA, in the context of

contemporary world order. He maintains that shattering war campaigns are called "humane", invasions "liberation", plunder can be presented as "occupational responsibilities" and even notorious *coup d'états* can now be labelled "regime change". So it stands to reason that "might is not only right but has the power to change our dictionaries". The following excerpt depicts his position in this regard along with the mocking style in which he conveys it:

.... Much crime has been committed for and because of the American dollar note that proclaims In God We Trust and it maybe perhaps time to speak the truth and assert publicly that we do not really believe in God or Allah. If we did believe, we will have hard time explaining all these crimes against humanity that are being committed in the name of God or Allah as a Crusade or a Jihad...This, my good friends, is no heresy but the honest attempt by a bewildered African to understand why people who say In God We Trust violate the sanctity of human life and commit such hideous crimes. All the above has been sent to both God and Satan via e-mail and I am waiting for a reply. Whoever replies to me first will get my allegiance. We do live in the fast world of the Internet and speed does matter. As concerns Africa, God's reply has been slow and Satan's fast and this is why most of our technologically advanced rulers are Satanists and very evil...(33-34).

In a nutshell, suffice it to mention that there are numerous passages in which Hama brings out his disillusionment with the double standards and malpractices of the West, spearheaded by the United States of America, its currently uncontested

supremacy, and the status-quo of the present world order in unreservedly critical and satirical manner.

In all of the essays, it is easy to see the author's single-minded stand against the ills and injustice committed by the superpowers on poor nations of the world, his ferocious attack on the duplicity and sheer arrogance of the West, which is spearheaded by United States of America, in the existing quasi-independent and globalized world. Hama also shines his critical and disillusioning light on today's socio-political formation of the world in which the fate of especially poor countries and of those who dare to oppose the American way is decided by the interest and whim of global superpowers, where words/concepts like independence and sovereignty have little, if any, significance. Melakneh (2008:42), in relation to the author and his writings, states: "Hama Tuma's anthology has made a significant contribution to surfacing many of the contradictions that affect the Continent from within—leader and political systems—and from without a colonial mindset and economic relationships—that still mirror the vestiges of imperialism and neo-colonialism, as well as globalization which has come back in a new dress". What is equally interesting in most of the essays is his approach of perfect blending of sincerity with humour that is exhibited in almost all of his essays. Correspondingly, this fusion of irony and reality is one of the styles common to post-colonial writings. It is similar to the strategy of mimicking (in a deliberately funny way) the colonial/imperial language and expression as it was used by colonial powers. As Homi Bhabha (1984:125), in his article "Of Mimicry and Man:

The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” states: “... In this comic turn from the high ideals of the colonial imagination to its low mimetic literary effects, mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge... [mimicry] problematizes the signs of racial and cultural priority, so that the “national” is no longer naturalizable”. So according to him, what emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a mode of representation that discards the significance of history, and makes fun of its power to be a model. He encapsulates the significance of mimicry by saying that, “Mimicry *repeats* rather than *represents* ... We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new” (*Ibid.*).

4.1.2.2 Social and Psychological Trauma of Immigrants

Social and psychological traumas of immigrants is another major concern tackled in the texts under Group-A. As such, traumatic experiences of varying degrees of complexity and intensity are seen invariably resulting in frustration and despair of immigrants in Dinaw’s two novels, *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* and *How to Read the Air*, Fasil’s *The Texture of Dreams*, and to some extent and in an indirect manner, Hama Tuma’s *Give Me a Dog’s Life Any Day*. These social and psychological ordeals are neither the outcome of single episodes nor do they manifest on one or two occasions. Each trauma is rather a sum total effect of accumulated disappointments, and finds expression in the characters’ everyday lives. As depicted in the narratives in question, chief among these social-

psychological traumas and their triggers are, among other things, immigrants' unfulfilled dreams or failed ambitions (one of which is advancing in their education), problems of adaptation (acculturation), the language barrier, homesickness, the monotonousness and emptiness of their lives as well as the haunting of their painful pasts— all impacting on their social as well as psychological wellbeing. These facets, together with the escape mechanisms employed by the victims as depicted in the texts, are examined as follows:

A) Unfulfilled Dreams

As can be inferred from the thoughts, actions and lives of the characters in the narratives, failed dreams and ambitions appear to be among the leading causes underlying traumatic lives of the diaspora. And among the various dreams and hopes immigrants characteristically aim at in their host land, pursuing higher education is among their top priorities list, its failure thus causing the most pain. In *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* the disillusionment of Joseph and Kenneth with their respective aspirations to realize their dream of getting master's and doctorate degrees, respectively, from top universities is probably the most representative case in point. As shown in Chap. 4.1.2.1, even after several years of life in the USA, the truth of their shattered dreams is too painful to accept easily and forget. It is something that is always at the back of their mind they keep talking about remorsefully.

In *How to Read the Air* too, this reality is captured repeatedly in Jonas's moving, albeit tacit, admissions of his giving up on his plan of getting advanced degree. In one of his admissions that come out during his conversation with Angela, he says:

The idea of me with a doctorate still held sway over Angela, even if I had quietly placed it on the same shelf where numerous other ambitions of mine now rested. It was part of her faith that this was one of the only ways that we could secure a bright and happy future, and in that regard she was no different from the immigrant parents I had known at the centre who were convinced that the only thing that would save and protect their children in America were advanced, specialized degrees (99).

On yet another occasion, Jonas himself is heard reminiscing, and although rather reluctantly, acknowledging his failure to himself. He says that after finishing college, he had thought vaguely of returning to school to get a PhD in English literature, and had often said as much when asked by people he said he was trying to impress. But it turns out that, decade after graduating, he still hasn't made any progress other than annually requesting a catalogue and application for the universities that he said he dreamed of going to (16).

As a matter of fact, failure in fulfilling the dream of attaining higher degrees is only one component of the wide-ranging problems that constitute the psycho-social traumas of immigrants. As alluded to at the beginning of this section, the traumas are rather results of a combination of several, interrelated disappointments that have to do with the collapse of most of their dreams and assumptions in many



aspects in general. In other words, the preconceived images they had of life in the West turn out to be in stark contrast to what they actually find. The following passage in *How to Read the Air* which relates the dreams of Jonas's father, and of most of first-generation African immigrants as well, prior to coming to America, helps illuminate this point further:

In Italy he [Jonas's father] was given asylum and set free. From there he worked his way north and west across Europe. He met dozens of other Abrahims along the way, men who promised him that *when they made it to London, the rest of their lives would finally resolve into the picture they had imagined. "It's different there," they always said. They placed their faith in difference, which is to say they placed their faith in the idea that there had to be at least one place in this world where life could be lived in accordance with the plans and dreams they had concocted for themselves...* That faith had carried them this far, and even though it was weakening, and needed constant readjustment ("Rome is not what I thought it would be. France will surely be better"), it persisted out of sheer necessity: By the time my father finally made it to London eighteen months later, *he had begun to think of all the men he met as being variations of Abraham, all of them crippled and deformed by their dreams* (289) (emphasis added).

In *The Texture of Dreams*, the devastating disappointment that results from the crash of one's dreams and ambitions in life in general, and its impact on exacerbating the psycho-social traumas of diasporas at large is caught in Yosef's touching account. He tells of his staying at home for the remainder of the day, trying to mend his fragmented hopes. And that, despite his friend's efforts to cheer him up, and his own battle to hold together his crumbling confidence, he feels

something heavy inside him that dampens his spirits. As he puts it, "By dusk my heart has become so heavy that I finally lock myself inside the bathroom and give myself a good cathartic cry. I felt lighter afterwards..." (38).

And later on, at the height of his desperation, Yosef comes out and declares his disappointment with his life in America as follows:

I have fought to ward off the thickening gloom of unhappiness and blamed myself for being overly demanding. I have ignored my dejections as the excesses of a spoiled, hard to please whiner who keeps asking for more as if God had nothing better to do than to wait on me hand and foot. But I can no longer go on pretending all is well when years are passing by as I slog through the days as dissatisfied and ill at ease as I ever was. How long can I keep fooling myself that I am doing alright and things will get better someday when they haven't for almost seven years? (215-6).

Further, the traumatic experiences felt by Africans represented in Hama Tuma's *Give Me a Dog's Life Any Day*, is represented mainly as resulting from dissatisfaction of the diasporic community with the poor state of affairs of the African continent on the one hand and the domineering, hypocritical West at large, which they see as responsible for the mass exile of Africans and their own deprived life in Western nations. In about a dozen of his articles the author raises this issue of broken dreams of Africa, long after the 'departure' of colonialists, and treats it in a bitter, sarcastic manner. He blames the senseless and endemic wars and famine, undemocratic governance and brutal oppression of dissent by dictatorial regimes, and rampant corruption that reign in most African countries for the embarrassing

and lowest position Africa is relegated to in the current post-colonial status-quo of the world. The following excerpt from one of the articles, "Of Lies and Fallouts" (165) which depicts Africa's contemporary state *vis-a-vis* the future in the context of the current global geo-politics, serves to show his (and by association that of the African diasporic community at large) stand on the issue and the feeling of bitter resentment underneath:

Take the reality of Africa. Of the world's ten countries with the most undernourished people, seven are African. Of the ten most illiterate, eight are in Africa, of ten of the most corrupt countries five are found in Africa and of the ten top countries with the highest death rate and low life expectancy all ten are African. The grim statistics can ... Africa is so absurd that all atrocities appear natural at least on the eyes of those who observe us from their vantage point of riches and luxury. Our tyrants can thus boldly assert that with all the wars they are engaged in they are actually helping the West... and that they are not war mongers but job or career creators. The atrocities reduce the number of black people on earth and that is also a good deed to warm the heart of many a Western political party (165).

As can be understood from the selected passages quoted above, the failure they encounter in realizing their hopes and aspirations in their host lands, as well as their frustrations by the lack of true freedom and progress in their home lands are among the core causes contributing to the social and psychological trauma of immigrants. There are also several related instances in the texts that depict the circumstances that usually result in frantic and desperate life of African immigrants in the West.

B) Problems of Adaptation

Like the frustration over failed dreams, challenges in adapting to the host country are also other aspects of immigrants' ordeals. In specific terms, a myriad of problems associated particularly with adaptation and language, with their attendant problems of loneliness and persistent nostalgia count among the main causes underlying the social and psychological traumas of African diaspora at large.

Acculturation, or assimilation with the cultures and traditions of the host society is one of the requisites for immigrants while they are living in another country. Acculturation in the West for Ethiopians and other fellow black immigrants has dual aspects: assimilation with the dominant Whites' cultural and traditional conventions, or following that of 'native' blacks or the diasporas of earlier generation from their own countries. But both options have their own setbacks as is shown in the narratives in question. Accordingly, although there are numerous instances that portray the problems of adaptation experienced by Ethiopian/African immigrants in all of the texts in Group-A, only a few will be cited here as representative. These are from Dinaw's second novel, *How to Read the Air*, and Fasil's *The Texture of Dreams* where the problems of acculturation are given more space.

In *How to Read the Air*, for instance, Jonas, the main protagonist and narrator of the story, reflects on the problems he has had in fitting when he says: "Without ever thinking about it, I had become one of those men who increasingly spent more and more of their nights alone, neither distraught nor depressed, just simply

estranged from the great social machinations with which others were occupied" (17). He laments that after his childhood, or what he calls the forced intimacy of childhood, was over and lost contact with the few college friends he had when they moved on to their own different lives, he found it increasingly difficult to make friends or to be close to others (*Ibid.*).

Adopting, or at least coming to terms with, the customs and traditions of American society in which he was born and is a second-generation diaspora, continues to be difficult for Jonas even in adulthood, as in his childhood. He feels close to neither the culture of his parents' (first-generation immigrants) nor that of mainstream American society. This in turn pushes him even further and further away from society and social life and into a life of increasing seclusion. Contemplating on his persistent feeling of outsidership ('Otherness'), Jonas, now a high school teacher, watches closely his students standing by the windows in his classroom. He notices every minute detail, including when they take off their uniforms, 'ran their hands through their hair, and lit up cigarettes concealed in the bottom of their book bags'. As he confesses, this daily ritual always had a calm, soothing effect on him. "At their age", narrates Jonas, "I was so deeply invested in my own solitary world that not even my parents, with their relentless arguments and theatrics, could broach the shell I had formed around myself" (173). Thus he fails to take note of most of the important things that were happening around him, and later begins to see the whole thing as "some culturally important film" that he had missed to watch at the correct age. He is, of course, fully aware that these things had also happened during his

own childhood; but never seems to remember them as part of his youth memory or as something that is closely related to his life at the time. As he describes it,

Within two years of my leaving home most of what had occurred there had already begun to seem like a long-distant dream whose edges were funny and whose details had been washed away. And while it's obviously true that you can never go back in time and make up for what was lost, you can at the very least spy on it to get a sense of where you might have fit in had you been around to play the game (173-4).

Forging strong linkages or assimilation between the old and new diasporas has not been an easy task. Regarding the challenges inherent in creating a strong bond between first and second generation diasporas, Zeleza (2008: 13) says that relations between the old and new diasporas are marked by "antagonism, ambivalence, acceptance, adaptation, and assimilation". These often symbolise cumulative phases of acculturation, mediated by, among other things, the length of stay in the new host lands, their respective communications to Africa and the host lands, and the attitudes of the historic diasporas. Antagonism is often engendered by stereotypes and poor communication on both sides (*Ibid.*).

Concomitant with the adaptation problems is the sheer scale of diversity or contrariness of many practices in the host societies that many immigrants find as shocking or simply impossible to accept or even tolerate. For instance Yosef's (in *The Texture of Dreams*) constant incredulity in what he sees and hears serves as a



good example. His shocked reactions and experiences manifest, among other things, in relation to the 'huge' size of things and the people (especially the policemen he encounters for the first time at the airport), the people's mannerisms and attitude towards foreigners, particularly blacks, and their eating and clothing habits ("... There are even some who have near-private regions of their flesh on display. Women don't flaunt their navels where I come from, nor do they reveal much of what lies above their knees" (14). Apparently the reaction is mutual, as is seen in the 'natives'' reactions to his "Puritanical" manners, among other things. This is characterized especially in relation to his relationship with his one-time Peruvian girlfriend, Josephine, whom he breaks up with because of her "habit of spouting obscenities in bed". Josephine's angry, departing response to his objections, on her part, was: "...God! You're outta your mind. I can't believe this! I bet you don't know guys would give anything to hear a girl talk dirty like that to them. You're pathetic! Let me tell you Mister Proper. Maybe where you come from people don't even turn the lights on when they fuck. But I want you to know that I will do whatever makes me happy. I can't be what I'm not.... But you should know you're a fucking loser! Good luck!" she had ranted and stormed out. The last I saw of Josephine" (160). Of course it is easy to imagine Yosef's stunned reaction upon hearing such obscene words and expressions, which are unthinkable to openly say where he comes from, thrown at him.

Similarly, language seems to play a crucial role in problems of acculturation affecting immigrants of all sizes and shapes. It is obvious that having a good

knowledge of the language of one's host country is supremely important to succeed in life. But this necessity for 'mastery' of language is much deeper and complex than assumed on the surface as it involves also mastery of the dialects, the 'proper' accents and nuances inherent in any language. As a result most diasporas, however proficient they might be in the language, find it invariably challenging and one of the major impediments in getting what they want. This ranges from making friends or socialising to getting a job. For instance Fasil brings this to the fore in *The Texture of Dreams* when Yosef, the protagonist, is being ridiculed for his 'strange' kind of language or accent ("New Yorkers frown when they hear me speak..." (47). Yosef also recounts his frustration because of his inability to communicate in the 'standard' American English and the realization that the degree he holds in English is quite useless here – ("... several people who have interviewed me for various positions have hinted by words and looks that I spoke a strange brand of English") (31)—compared to the locally trained native Americans who, naturally, possess the required accent in addition to sufficient training in getting employment. One employer tells Yosef he could not hire him because, among other things, "...you talk kinda funny. No offence, but the kids around here don't speak that kinda English, ha ha! He chuckles dryly. "That won't do for teamwork, y'know. Good luck somewhere else, man..." " (29-30). The end result is that Yosef is completely stripped of his confidence in communicating in English, becomes quite exasperated and forced into seclusion. His account in the following excerpt suffices to illustrate the hardship he experiences in this regard:

I have already been two years on my job, but I am still as taciturn as I have ever been. Two years of hard work improving my English enough to allow me to engage in casual conversation, and yet, I am still not partaking in the noisy chitchats of my colleagues. My once rigidly formal speech is now devoid of pompous frills, but my confidence has decidedly taken a backseat. I have worked hard to dilute my "African accent"...But even that, it turns out, is not enough to dispel my dread of stumbling into the verbal morass of my first days at work...and in the end the fear of being laughed at has me isolated (101-102).

In fact, the issue (or rather the burden) of language is seen to occupy important place, just as in most diasporic narratives, in the other books in the present study too. Some sample extracts cited below from Dinaw's novels (*The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* and *How to Read the Air*) and Hama Tuma's anthology demonstrate this point more distinctively. They are narrated by both the father and mother of Jonas (first-generation diasporas) and their American-born son (second-generation diaspora), and show that the challenges of language, and by extension that of acculturation, are not limited to first-generation immigrants only.

While standing in front of the bathroom mirror early in the morning, she [Mariam, Jonas's mother] often told herself, in what she thought of as nearly flawless diction, "Men can be strange. Wives are different." It was an expression she had heard from one of the women at the Baptist church that she and her husband had begun attending. A group of women were standing in the parking lot after the sermon was over, and one of them had turned to Mariam and said, "Men can be so strange. Wives are just different." At the time she had simply repeated the words back, almost verbatim, "Yes. That is true. Men can be strange," because that was the only way that she could be

certain that what she said was understood by everyone. What she would have liked to say was far more complicated and involved a list of sizable differences that by any other standards would have been considered irreconcilable (3-4).

Thus the challenge was not limited to Jonas's mother only or particular to first-generation immigrants either. A first-generation diaspora, Jonas's father, like his own son who is American-born (or second-generation) diaspora, has also passed through his share of ordeals as the following extract, narrated by the son, testifies:

It had been almost a year since he [Jonas's father] had begun keeping track....and undoubtedly he failed by almost any measure to appear as a real American. Unlike the other men at the plant, he spoke very little while he was at work. He knew that too many words and sentences strung together on his part were an open invitation to be mocked. If he said anything more than "Mr. Henderson, I have finished with the task you have given me," he could expect to hear his words echoed back to him in a comical but perhaps not so far from the truth accent, and so he kept his mouth shut and spoke in grunts or, better yet, gestures when he could (86-87).

In terms of Jonas's worry and lack of confidence in the language, it may be quite surprising to hear a 'native'-born American say: "...Having grown up in the shadows of my parents' high-pitched accents and broken grammar, I had always hesitated before I spoke and often whispered my words in case they failed to properly impress whatever audience was before me..." (95). As the author himself confessed in an interview with the *New York Times* (2010), his situation had grown even more complicated in high school where he was the "target of racial epithets

from white students". And this made him face the issue of his authenticity, because, as he put it, "it was always really clear that you are the black kid who sounds white, the black kid who doesn't seem like he's black, and no one can figure out exactly why".

But viewed from the postcolonial perspective, it is not an unheard of phenomenon. As Ashcroft *et al.* (1989:10) explain, this kind of linguistic alienation is common among those whose possession of English is unquestionably 'native' ('in the sense of being possessed from birth') "yet who begin to feel alienated within its practice once its vocabulary, categories, and codes are felt to be inadequate or inappropriate to describe the fauna, the physical and geographical conditions, or the cultural practices they have developed in a new land".

In conjunction with this issue of language *vis-à-vis* immigrants, it is worth mentioning that, as noted in Chapter 3.1, language or control over language has been one of the main features of imperial oppression since the days of colonialism to the present day. Accordingly, the "imperial education system installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' as impurities". As Ashcroft *et al.* (1989: 7-8) point out, language serves as the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is maintained and the conceptions of 'truth,' 'order,' and 'reality' become established. But this status-quo is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice. "For this reason, the discussion of post-colonial writing is largely a discussion of the process by which the language, with its power, and the writing, with its signification of authority, has

been wrested from the dominant European culture" (*Ibid.*). Hama Tuma's writing could be taken as a typical example in this regard showcasing one of the various ways in which the language has been employed by different linguistic communities in the post-colonial world. One such instance is found in the Preface of the current volume, where the author reverses the imperial trend and convention and satirically mimics a speech made by Queen Elizabeth in 1596 as follows:

Queen Elizabeth the First proclaimed in 1596: "Her Majesty understanding that there are of late more balackamoores brought into this realm, of which kinde of people there are already too manie, considering howe God hath blessed this land with great increase of people of ourown nation these kinde of people should be sent forth of the land..."(7).

Loneliness or isolation and the associated homesickness are the additional factors fuelling the social and psychological trauma affecting immigrants, and thus constituting among the common features of diasporic literatures. This aspect of loneliness or isolation of immigrants could be voluntary or involuntary, arising as a result of both internal as well as external circumstances in their lives.

Accordingly, most of the major characters in the narratives under this group are seen leading lonely and secluded lives. For example, the reader is forced to witness the eerily cold and barren life of Kenneth when Stephanos recounts his experience in Kenneth's "oversized, barely furnished apartment" where he had spent two months to escape the winter storm three years before in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (145-146). Sepha the narrator himself is seen living a

lonely life amidst the hustle and bustle of his surroundings, always longing for the day he will return to his homeland. Again in *The Texture of Dreams*, as is depicted in the passage (101-102) cited earlier, Yosef resorts to seclusion out of fear of being laughed at. In *How to Read the Air* too, Jonas is a detached observer of events unfolding around him, always careful about keeping his distance as well as his anonymity.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the solitary souls in these novels seem to find solace or, however momentary, relief and contentment in an equally quite locations, deserted sidewalks and streets. This can be gathered from Sepha's habitual attitudes that regard *the emptiness as 'nice'*. Sepha narrates, "As I walk through the circle I decide to stop and take a seat on one of the new benches across from General Logan to listen to the birds chattering away loudly in the trees" (*The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, 35). In *How to Read the Air* again, as indicated in the passages cited earlier under *Problems of Adaptation*, Jonas acknowledges to himself his aloofness that persists both in adolescence and adulthood.

As alluded to above, homesickness – either in combination with isolation or singularly as a triggering factor – also adds to the psycho-social ordeal of immigrants at large. For this reason, it is counted as one of the typical features of diasporic literatures. Similarly, in *The Texture of Dreams*, the protagonist Yosef suffers from homesickness. At one point he even dreams that his mother was dead

and screams out before being awakened by Mrs. Hanson, his confidante landlady (105-106).

Sepha's friends, Kenneth and Joseph, in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* are also seen suffering from homesickness, the loss of their nearest and dearest and their cultural and traditional practices. As Sepha the protagonist relates, their conversations inevitably "find their way home": "Our memories," Joseph says, "are like a river cut off from the ocean. With time they will slowly dry out in the sun, and so we drink and drink and drink and we can never have our fill" (9-10). The three friends also engage in a seemingly simplistic game of their own they use as pastime about capital cities and names of the rulers of African countries (174). Sepha's remark captures beautifully this deep and often contradictory feeling that most immigrants harbor when he says: "There is a simple and startling power to that phrase: going back home....How long did it take for me to understand that I was never going to return to Ethiopia again? It seems as if there should have been a particular moment when the knowledge settled in...I couldn't remember at which point I understood that I had left home for good" (174-7). In these sentences, the persistent, almost magical, hold their homelands have on immigrants is clearly drawn out.

In *How to Read the Air* also, the constant longing and nostalgia for the homeland that crisscrosses the mind of immigrants of all size and shape is portrayed through

the feelings of Jonas's mother, as shown in the following statement by the protagonist:

While my father drove lost in his thoughts of history and Nashville, my mother was missing mountains. They had always been there, holding down all four corners of the city she had been born and raised in, neither imposing nor protective but significant nonetheless. It's baffling to realize sometimes what we miss and in fact have always loved, she thought. Whether it's a particular view of green-and-brown-clad mountains or a voice we assumed we had long since put to rest. They come back and find us whether we want them to or not... (88).

So in explaining the mystery underlying this facet of the diaspora (i.e. homesickness), Ashcroft *et al.* (1998:21) say that, "Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement, and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all post-colonial literatures in English". This is also in consonance with Singh's (2008) argument which maintains that diasporic literature is closely tied with the writer's attachment to the homeland, and is full of narratives of dislocation, exile, the push and pulls factors: the nostalgia and desire for the homeland on one hand and the multiple challenges of adapting to the host country on the other.

Similarly, scholars attribute the alienation and the resultant crisis in self-image of diasporas at large to dislocation and cultural erosion. For instance, Ashcroft *et al.* (*Ibid.*:9) posit that:

A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or 'voluntary' removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention, or a mixture of the two.

C) *Monotony and Emptiness of Life*

Another factor instrumental in the psycho-social dissatisfaction of many Ethiopian (as well as African, by and large) diaspora both individually and as a group is the feeling of monotonousness and emptiness of life in the host land. This aspect is depicted in the narratives in question with varying degrees of intensity.

In *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* the three friends are constantly engaged in questioning the meaning and purpose of their existence, trying to make sense out of their monotonous life situations, and seeking either justifications or escape routes—however transitory they might be. Once Kenneth finds Sepha has not yet opened his store as he should have and calls him asking why he wasn't at the store yet; Sepha replies to him saying that he was on his way there. But when Kenneth retorts and tells him that it was almost nine o'clock, Stephanos declares, rather philosophically, to himself: "There are already too many hours in the day; to worry about any one in particular is pointless" (35). This statement can be said to literally

epitomize the seemingly ubiquitous feeling of monotonousness of immigrants' life. The pervasive feeling of boredom with and hollowness of their life, naturally, leads them to despair and suicidal thoughts. This is revealed in Stephanos's reflection on his life— both in Ethiopia before and now in America – when he is almost driven to commit suicide. He recounts: "I couldn't believe that my father had died and I had been spared in order to carry luggage in and out of a room. *There was nothing special to death anymore.* I had seen enough lifeless bodies by that point to know that. *I thought long and hard about what it would be like to simply step off the edge.* I didn't know how to swim, nor would I have tried. The next day I quit my job at the capital Hotel" (142) (emphasis added).

In *The Texture of Dreams* too, the following selected passages about Yosef are believed to sufficiently capture the gloomy and dull life that aggravates the frustration of diasporas:

My days have become unbearably monotonous. Working only twenty-four hours a week, I am bored. Work has become a treadmill, and it is sucking me dry. The invariable routine of drilling for a living is filling my heart with yearning for something that I can't quite put my finger on. And it is this nameless craving that I try to satisfy by throwing money around on spontaneous binges..." (84).

I have fought to ward off the thickening gloom of unhappiness and blamed myself for being overly demanding. I have ignored my dejections as the excesses of a spoiled, hard to please whiner who keeps asking for more as if God had nothing better to do than to wait on me hand and foot. But I can no longer go on pretending all is well when years are passing by as I slog

through the days as dissatisfied and ill at ease as I ever was. How long can I keep fooling myself that I am doing alright and things will get better someday when they haven't for almost seven years? (215-6).

Yosef is even found examining his seemingly omnipresent boredom by comparing himself with St. Joseph of the Bible in yet another occasion: "The difference is that, unlike Joseph, who rescued his ageing father and his brothers from the famine stricken land of Canaan, our Yosef at times finds himself secretly longing to be plucked out of the cold emptiness his life is becoming in the land of milk and honey" (218).

Similarly, in *How to Read the Air* the tedious life style, the nagging feeling of purposelessness in life and the eventual despair most immigrants experience is found recurrently. For instance Jonas unburdens his feelings when he says: "If anyone knows what it's like to feel the world around you collapse in its entirety, to fully know that everything that stands before you is a mere illusion, and that the so-called fabric of life is in fact riddled with gaping holes through which you can fall and still be said to be alive, then it was my father at that moment..." (148).

The following two passages in which Jonas focuses the lens, this time on himself, and muses about his conditions serve to showcase this phenomenon, and to also conclude the discussion on this topic as well:

For the next few weeks I sought other distractions. I spent many hours on a bench in Tompkins Square Park watching a group of homeless teenagers

play guitar. I dug through used bookstores for early editions of collected poems that I had claimed to love while I was in college. And all along I told myself that I was fine and not in the least bothered by anything in life, even as I sometimes felt a gentle, almost palpable hum of danger. I had often felt something similar as a child, and I thought that I had buried that feeling as deep inside me as it could possibly go so that I would never know it again, but still it returned at the oddest hours....When the last week of August finally arrived, I entered my classroom literally humming (131).

And finally, near the end of his long, arduous and futile journey of self-discovery, just at the moment when he gives up in his struggle to blend in and make sense of his life (and so quits his job), and ends his story also, Jonas says reflectively:

There were vast swaths of my life that I knew if I looked at closely I would come to regret, and I was certain that soon enough I was going to find the time to do that. I'd regret and wonder, and then do so again until all known ground was covered. This was certainly part of the cost that had to be paid. Before that was forfeited, however, I had this repose, and it was important to take it. I didn't know when or if I would see the academy again, and I wanted to admire it briefly in its own right (271).

D) Memories of Past Trauma

Coupled with the challenges of adaptation, the anger or grievance over failed dreams, the problems of loneliness and homesickness, and the hollow feelings about life, is the haunting of the past that contributes to the traumatic lives of most contemporary Ethiopian diaspora. In other words, most immigrants' powerlessness to get rid of their harrowing experience(s) under dictatorial regimes in the past, along with their memories of conflicts, wars and poverty in their country or their

inability to stop their unrelenting intrusion in their current lives is another powerful ingredient underlying their psycho-social traumas. This applies to almost all Ethiopian diaspora, irrespective of their ethnicity, sex or ideological orientation, who passed through or at least witnessed similar experiences in Ethiopia. In keeping with this, this phenomenon and its impact on their present lives, as well as the various escape mechanisms they employ in order to cope with the resultant distress is found represented in the characters' lives mainly in three of the four books in this group.

For instance in Dinaw's second novel, *How to Read the Air*, these issues (or thoughts) of misfortunes, injustice, subjugation and horror immigrants experienced in the past are conveyed through the story of Jonas's father who typically represents the majority of the Ethiopian/African immigrants who usually pass through enormous hurdles and harrowing experiences before they arrive at their destinations. For example, the following excerpt depicts the hardship Jonas's father's experiences in his epic journey (which lasts to affect him to the end) while fleeing persecution by the military junta during the 1974 Ethiopian revolution and before arriving in America as a refugee:

...The man pointed to a group of small storage slots near the stern of the boat that were used for holding the more delicate cargo...There was a square hole just large enough for my father to fit into if he pulled his knees up to his chest... My father felt the man's hand around his neck pushing him toward the crate..... He crawled in on his knees, which was not how he would have liked to enter. Headfirst was the way to go, but he was too late

now. In a final humiliating gesture, the man shoved him with his foot, stuffing him inside so quickly that his legs and arms collapsed around him. He had just enough time to arrange himself before the man sealed the entrance shut with a wooden door that was resting nearby (285-286).

And thus begins the thousand miles journey of an illegal immigrant, squeezed between crates in a cargo ship. But the ordeal of Jonas's father does not end here. This in fact only marks the beginning of his endless woeful experiences as an immigrant. Going into the details of his father's tormenting voyage to the USA and the ordeals he has to pass in-between, what Jonas recounts in the following passage well encapsulates the experiences, feelings and thoughts of a huge number of African immigrants/diasporas by and large:

He [Jonas's father] arrived in Europe just as Abraham had promised he would, but an important part of him had died during the journey, somewhere in the final three days when he was reduced to drinking his urine for water and could no longer feel his hands or feet and was certain that if death came to him he would welcome it without the slightest hesitation. He spent six months afterward in a detention camp on an island off the coast of Italy. He was surprised to find that there were plenty of other men like him there, from every possible corner of Africa, and that many had fared worse than him. He heard stories of men who had died trying to make a similar voyage: who had suffocated or been thrown overboard alive. My father couldn't bring himself to pity them. Contrary to what Abraham had told him, there was nothing remotely heavenly about where he was held: ... The guards spat at their feet and made vague, animal sounds when they looked at them confused....(288).

Again in *The Texture of Dreams* the strong hold past traumatic experiences seem to have on immigrants is also found treated well. In fact the memory of hardships received from despotic regimes is often so strong and enduring that it negatively impacts on their sense of freedom and security, their social relationships as well as psychological makeup even when living in essentially free and democratic countries. This is evinced in Yosef's reaction, rather his excruciating dilemma and fear, in matters as simple as deciding on whether to join his co-workers in their strike for better pays and working conditions. Still under the psychological chain of subjugation and fear, he predictably backs off from joining his colleagues. It is easy to see that he does this out of sheer terror born of his past traumatic experiences that he still carries. As he himself confesses:

Seeing my colleagues confronting the bosses has filled with unease because it brings back memories of a great insurrection in my country.I can't help thinking that a strike is an ill-fated battle, a risky venture that nothing good will come out of. A monstrously distorted view on my part, you might say. But I can't help it; I am still in the shadows of the horror I had lived in from the age of nine. It is, after all, scarcely a year since I have walked away from the ruins of my country, a country battered and bleeding under a corrupt regime born of rebellion (99).

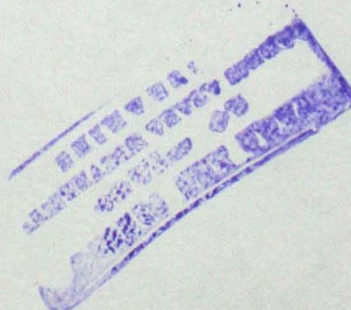
In *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (the title of which is a line taken from the final verse of *The Inferno* in which Dante glimpses at heaven as he emerges from the 'inferno', 'hell'), what Joseph, one of the main characters, says beautifully captures this sentiment. As Sepha the protagonist narrates: 'When he [Joseph] is

drunk, he likes to declare those to be the most perfect lines of poetry ever written. "Think about it", he says. "Dante is finally going out of hell, and that is what he sees 'some of the beautiful things that heaven bears'. It's perfect, I tell you. Simply perfect. I told my teacher that *no one can understand that line like an African because that is what we lived through. Hell every day with only glimpses of heaven in between*" (99-100) (emphasis added). Needless to mention, this statement is a metaphor for Sepha and many other African immigrants who never seem to get rid of the memories of anguish they underwent in the past nor the 'hellish' life they are seen leading now.

In conclusion, it should be noted here that there are many similar instances in the other texts too that depict the grip of past traumatic experiences and its debilitating impact on many African diasporas' lives many years later. Having discussed the major factors that either trigger or intensify the social and psychological traumas of Ethiopian immigrants living in the West, we now move to the third major theme represented in the narratives of the first group, racial discrimination.

4.1.2.3 Racial Discrimination

Race-based discrimination, although quite a common phenomenon also in many countries of the world, is another major topic that is represented in Group-A narratives study in association with Ethiopian/African immigrants in the West. The manifestation of racial discrimination and/or alienation, with its attendant feelings of being 'different', 'otherness' or inferiority, could be in overt as well as covert



forms. In the United States of America, which is dubbed as "the melting pot" of practically every nation and nationality on earth, racial discrimination is an everyday reality and an integral part of the country's socio-political and historical dynamics. Therefore, this racism, which is often activated or aggravated by the less-friendly environment, distrust and insecurity, chauvinistic attitudes and individualistic life style that prevails in the host land, the United States of America and the Western world at large, is found well drawn out in the three novels as well as in Hama Tuma's satirical essays in varying degrees of emphasis.

In Dinaw's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* this theme of racial discrimination is treated expansively and from multiple dimensions and perspectives, i.e. blacks versus whites, the 'haves' and 'have-nots', and as it manifests in both obvious and less-obvious forms. The initial glimpse into this reality in this novel is when Stephanos is first brought over by his uncle for employment at the Capitol Hotel. It is characterized in the exchange between the white employer, and Berhane and Stephanos, two African immigrants one of whom is seeking a job. Stephanos narrates:

My uncle introduced me as his nephew, Sepha Stephanos, although *he told the manager he could call me Sepha, or even Steven for short, if he found that more convenient.* The two men discussed my background while I stood there, mute. The manager, a solid, squat bald man whom I had been told to refer to only as "sir," didn't believe that I could speak English. He pointed to my skinny arms and asked my uncle if I had any problems lifting heavy

objects, if I had any objections to working late-night shifts, *if I could be trusted in general, not to steal from the hotel or its clients.* "No, sir," my uncle replied for me, "he has no problems. Perfectly honest. He has no objections to anything." The manager decided that I should begin that day so that he "could see what I was made of." *He squeezed my right bicep once for good measure,* and then held out his hand for me to shake. I remember wishing I had the courage and strength to crush every bone in his hand. After we walked out of the office, I heard my uncle mumble under his breath just loud enough so only I could hear, "*Fucking bastard.*" *Yes, it was a show of pride, half-hearted, but necessary nonetheless. It was one thing for him to "sir" his way through the day on his own, and an entirely different matter to have me there as a witness to it* (141) (emphasis added).

The inner feelings being experienced by Sepha and his uncle during the exchange quoted above more than symbolise the kind of master-slave relationship between the haves and have-nots and more strongly between blacks and whites that prevails in contemporary America. As can be inferred from the extract, particularly from the emphasized (italicized) lines, the dehumanizing and disparaging attitude of the white (or of the upper and upper-middle class whites) and the servile attitude of poor black immigrants toward the well-off whites, and their forced submission to their 'fate' in the socio-political construct of the host country is a common facet of American life. The exchange depicts the thinly-veiled racial discrimination, as well as the suspicion and distrust of whites towards blacks that is alive and functioning in modern-day America. The fact that Sepha's uncle was going the extra miles to appease the employer at the expense of his (and his nephew's) pride (note the offer to the employer even to anglicise Sepha's name) shows the powerlessness and

acquiescence (albeit seething in anger inside) of poor black diasporas, while their hurt feelings and “half-hearted” angry remarks later when alone betray the resentment and anger they are carrying within.

The next major case of racial discrimination in this novel is when Stephanos and Kenneth visit a car dealer’s establishment to buy a car. The shop is owned by a white man and apparently frequented by white customers. Stephanos recounts that episode as follows:

Our drive to the dealership was a slow one. He eased his way prematurely into fading green lights, and took a slow, extended route around the neighbourhood to reach the expressway. I didn’t mind any of it. *We had all suffered enough mockery and humiliation to last us well beyond our lifetimes*, and if my role now was to serve as a blind, unflaggingly devoted cheerleader through whatever challenges and victories lay ahead, then I was all the happier for it.

We pulled into the dealership cautiously, *as if every minor gesture of ours were being judged*. We got out of the car, and rather than walk around the lot or enter the main office, Kenneth grabbed me by the wrist and said, “*Wait, Stephanos. Let them come to us.*”..... As we stood outside and waited against the hood of the car, middle aged American men in white short-sleeve shirt came in and out of the main office, walked leisurely through the aisles of cars *and never once passed anything more than a brief, one-eyed glance in our direction. We waited ten and then twenty minutes before we finally realized that no one was coming to us, regardless of what we wore or how long we stood there.* “Come on, Stephanos, Let’s go,” Kenneth finally said. “They don’t have what I want’ (11-12) (emphasis added).

The barely concealed disparaging and discriminative ('Othering') attitude (termed 'Aversive racism' in Postcolonialism) of the white car dealer, and the feeling of humiliation and anger on the part of Kenneth and Stephanos is too plain to miss. In addition to verbal forms, race-based discriminatory attitudes manifest in various ways, including facial expressions and body gestures that may be both subtle and obvious. Several such instances that characterize the existing racial and class segregation in the United States of America are found in this novel. The shocked and disbelieving reaction of Joseph and Kenneth when Stephanos tells them that a white woman rented the house next to him (14-15) is one interesting case in point in this regard, as is the reaction of Stephanos's neighbour. Mrs. Davis, an old black woman who lives alone one floor below Stephanos and who appears to be nosy, also confronts Stephanos asking him about Judith, the white woman who had just moved in and whom she had seen exchanging greetings with Stephanos. She asks him: "Why do you think a woman like that would wanna live here? Doesn't seem right, does it?" And when he replies to her by saying, "It's a free country, Mrs. Davis. People can live where they like", she becomes enraged: "What do you know about free countries? You didn't even know what that was till you came here last week, and now you're telling me people can live where they like. This isn't like living in a hut, you know. People around here can't just put their houses on their back and move on" (23).

In this exchange it is plain to see not only the bigotry and suspicion black people seem to have towards the white, but also the condescending attitude that native

blacks seem to hold towards new black immigrants. Given the existing *status-quo* in terms of social and racial constructs that has put in place an invisible red-line demarcating the areas belonging to whites and blacks, the initially sceptical and later shocked reaction of the blacks (including of Kenneth and Joseph) on seeing and hearing about a white woman moving into their distinctly black neighbourhood has solid grounds. This is so, because, before Judith's arrival, the only reasons white people ever came into the neighbourhood were "to deliver official notice, investigate crimes, and check up on the children of negligent parents" (18). As can be inferred from the dialogue above, particularly from the stunned response of Kenneth and Joseph to the news, crossing the racial boundary or breaking the unwritten laws of racial segregation is seen as equal to committing a grave sin.

In *The Texture of Dreams* too, the theme of, bigotry and racial prejudice with its attendant alienation is found represented on a number of occasions. As such, Yosef, the protagonist, is seen coming across suspicious looks and often barely concealed alienating remarks and actions. After his initial experience of failure in employment, he laments: "*I have heard that employers are wary of hiring applicants from other countries. They often have doubts about the veracity of the claims immigrants made regarding education and experience. They prefer to hire native applicants, even those with ostensible inferior qualifications, because their backgrounds are verifiable*"(42). This alienation does not come only from whites but also from fellow black Africans, either because of his under-privileged background or his religion. The exchange between Clayton, a fellow African who

tries to befriend Yosef assuming he was a fellow African Muslim, during a job interview in the following passage brings this reality to light:

“When I spoke to you yesterday and you said you were from Africa, I said to myself, here is a brother from the motherland, a fellow Muslim who has left everything behind to make it in the U.S. I decided right there and then that you had the job ... Did you want to say something?”

“Just that I am not a Muslim. I am a Christian”, I say and see a shadow crossing his face.” (37).

Yosef cannot also help noticing the patronizing or distrustful attitudes and actions of whites he comes across. The author depicts this subtle prejudice in association with an incident Yosef encounters during a train ride as follows:

I see something in the guarded glance of some passengers, but I am not sure what it is. Is it contempt or pity? Could it be that they have taken me for a substance abuser? Could they be thinking that I might have ingested some drug that has caused my brain to abundantly squirt forth some euphoria-inducing chemical unleashing a burst of convulsive energy that can't be restrained? Let them think what they will. I don't care a straw! (53).

Yosef is not even spared from the scathing attack of Mrs. Hanson, his usually friendly landlady, who explodes on his 'barbarian' misuse of her microwave oven: “This is a microwave oven! You can't just throw anything you want in it. What do you think it is? A bonfire in the jungle?” (89). Here, while the reference to 'jungle' and its implied meaning is quite plain to see, her action also brings out to the surface her hidden prejudice towards blacks by and large and her unwelcoming intolerant attitude to newly-arrived black immigrants from poor African countries.

This kind of prejudice, which is expressed rather in subtler and indirect forms against minorities, is what Gartner and Dovidio (1986, quoted in Al-Issa and Tousignant 1997: 23) call 'Aversive racism'. According to them this type of racism is the most difficult one to cope with because it "tends to hide behind the legal system or is rationalized by some cherished Western democratic or Christian principles. Unless attention is given to the multiplicity of factors associated with prejudice, discrimination and aversive racism, contact between ethnic groups to create social and racial harmony in Western multi-cultural society would be doomed to failure" (*Ibid*: 28-9).

Thus in Dinaw's second novel, *How to Read the Air* also, racial discrimination and prejudice is a recurrent topic. Early on in the story, the main character Jonas Woldemariam appears for a job interview, only to be confronted upfront with the inevitable question about his 'queer' accent: "Where's that accent of yours from?" by the employer. But Jonas's reply, 'Peoria', only puzzles the interviewer even further. Reflecting on the early experience of racial intolerance and distrust he and his mother have had, Jonas says:

That meeting of strangers' eyes is something I've thought about often since—the confused, bewildered stares heading in both directions, passing one another along the way like two cars driving past each other on a highway; headed for similar but opposite destinations. The people on the other end of my mother's glare must have wondered what she was staring at so intently; if perhaps she was mad or in some sort of desperate trouble and searching for a friendly face to rescue her. I have a hard time picturing

any cruelty on their part. At that age my mother was too slight and pretty to have inspired any real hostility; but there was no doubt in anyone's eyes that she didn't belong here, and that, at least, is one point on which everyone in the diner could agree. If they shared anything, it was the common sense of relief that came when she opened the door and finally left (184).

On another occasion Jonas's mother reveals to her son the sense of fear and insecurity she and his father were experiencing because of their 'differentness' since they came to America:

I was only twenty-eight. I never used to be afraid of anything, but it was completely different once we came here. I was always afraid. I used to hate to leave the house by myself. What if someone yelled at me or hit me? I never knew what was going to happen. A little boy with red hair once swore at me. I think he called me dirty or something like that. I didn't understand it at the time, but I was very afraid of him, even though he was just a boy. What could he have done to me? I don't know. You don't know what that feels like. To be afraid of everything, even children. My English wasn't very good then. Most people were very nice and they would say, "Oh, where are you from?" but not everyone was like that. Some people would get very angry, and it wasn't just at me. It was at your father as well (276-8).

Jonas's wife, even though a native-born black, does not escape the racial prejudice that permeates American society at large. The following two passages, recounted by the protagonist and narrator, illuminate this reality:

It was a Friday afternoon and the restaurant was crowded with a dozen other couples in suits.

"Don't look now," Angela said, "but we're the only black people here."

She pretended to whisper to me from behind the menu.

"Don't worry," I told her. I covered the left side of my face with the menu.

"I don't think anyone's noticed."

"Someone is probably wondering why they don't see more black people here, especially since we've all supposedly come so far."

"I'm sure then that they're grateful to see us."

"As long as it's just the two of us, trust me. They're delighted" (73-74).

And later on, while they were chatting, remembering an incident in the restaurant in which she had made a silly, potentially embarrassing remark, Angela says: "If I was white, everyone would think I was joking, you know that. They'd laugh and say, Ha, ha, ha, Angela is so funny. Instead everyone thinks it's true" (49).

This theme of race-based discrimination against blacks as practiced in most Western countries is also one component of Hama Tuma's collection of articles, *Give Me a Dog's Life Any Day* too. A number of his articles treat the issue in a bitterly critical and at the same time satirical and humorous way. In one of his essays titled, "The Vote of Fear", for instance, he brings to light in his usual biting, satirical fashion the stereotypical view and prejudice whites by and large seem to have towards black colour—and thus to black people and non-white immigrants in general—in France and Western Europe at large, as follows:

To begin with, Mother Nature had given us the perfect means of being inconspicuous. Black as night we are mostly and this was to assure that we do not get seen, noticed. Out of sight, out of mind, worse than the morning dew, transient, unseen, unremembered. It was nature's way of rendering us feather-weight, quasi invisible and therefore less of a provocation to the descendants of Hitler wherever they may pop up. But, we violated this and crossed the fine line by claiming rights and equality. Boisterous in our villages (many times thanks to palm wine and "kill me quick"-local concoctions which make us forget our miseries and restraints), we have made the mistake of carrying it over to the Western countries where people have long lost the practice of laughter (specially in the face of misery), are grim and consider all those who are poor but happy (and laugh (loudly) as dangerous specimens. Thus, we disturb. Depressed old men and ladies nursing their arthritis and incontinence cannot bear the sight of us "foreigners" and cannot bear to hear (yes, most wear ear pieces and can hear a fly whisper as we say back in Africa) our loud laughter.... Black and brown are subdued colors, unobtrusive, dark , actually, inconspicuous and, if truth be told, considered as bad colors. Gangsters wear black, don't they? The devil is black, illegal and evil things are all black. Black market, the Black Continent, Black Sunday, as black as hell, black hole, the black plague, black cloth for mourning, etc. Brown is drab, boring. The French refer to light skinned Africans as having "saved colors" (escapees from being "charcoal black"). While we knew all this, we did not refrain from being visible but we even passed all limits by deluding ourselves that we are equal to anyone and all. It was not only Le Pen who said that our mental development was inferior, no. Chirac said we are noisy, we smell bad and we overbreed. Michel Rocard, the socialist former prime minister, said we are Misery personified and France does not have to tolerate us. Even French, Spanish and Italian Communist party officials have all riled against us. Left or right, they agreed on us and told us as it is: the message

was clear—Keep out, Keep away. But did we listen? No. We did the opposite and flocked to their lands as refugees, immigrants. Aren't we the provocateurs? (54-55).

Further still, in an article that carries the title of the book, "Give Me a Dog's Life", he hits in quite acerbic way on the colour-based prejudice that is directed against black Africans by comparing their status with that of dogs in the White-dominated world: "Yet, we note that for all the hatred and foul passion expressed against the African (and the immigrant) we have yet to be confronted by a serial killer of Africans in any western country. The dogs matter so much that they have their own serial killers while the African, irritant as he or she is, has not reached that level yet. Isn't this pathetic? ..." (71-72). Hama emphasises that intolerance toward black people by whites is an age-old reality. He substantiates this fact by quoting from a speech (7) made by Queen Elizabeth I of Great Britain back in 1596, which was cited earlier under *Problems of Adaptation* in 4.1.2.2. To sum up, in view of the scale and intensity of the hatred many whites hold towards blacks in their country, the frustration and bitter resentment expressed by Hama should not come as a surprise. As Fanon (1952: 44) aptly points out, "racial hatred is traumatizing because for a man whose only weapon is reason there is nothing more neurotic than contact with unreason".

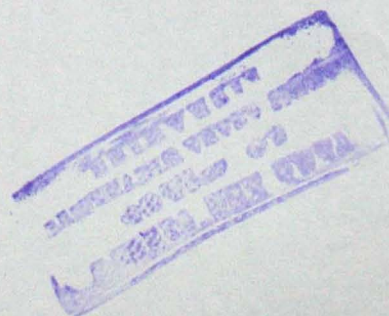
4.1.2.4 Dilemma and Identity Crisis

The feeling of uncertainty or dilemma about one's identity, that vague sense of rootlessness as to one's true belongingness, or, in today's conventional parlance, a crisis of identity, is one of the major features of postcolonial/diasporic writings. Existing literatures in the area indicate that this phenomenon is an integral component of the psycho-social makeup of displaced people. For instance, Georgiou (2001: 2) says: "Diasporas' identity implies multiple points of departure and multiple destinations, it implies instabilities and inequalities, not only in the meeting of two different cultures or populations...but within any of those cultures, group communities, as much as in-between". Similarly, Ashcroft *et al.* (1989: 8-9) associate identity crisis of the diaspora with displacement or immigration, and describe it as a "concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place...[the result of] conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model". As such, crisis of identity forms one of the major preoccupations of the texts under study too, as shown below.

In Dinaw's first novel, *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, all the major characters (i.e. Sepha, and his two fellow African immigrant friends, Kenneth and Josef), Jonas and his parents, particularly his father, in *How to Read the Air*, and Yosef in *The Texture of Dreams*, are seen being affected by and struggling with the problem. (This is without counting a number of powerfully sarcastic and both direct and indirect references Hama makes in his anthology). So on the whole, it

can be said that the characters in the three novels typify the countless Ethiopian/African diaspora who live torn between two worlds: the one they – either willingly, in search of the “greener pasture”, or unwillingly because of circumstances beyond their control– left behind and the one where they live in now. In other words, the texts under study, like most postcolonial writings, can be summed up as being stories of immigrants trying to blend together their cultural identities with that of the host country, or their often futile attempts to imitating the mannerisms and idiosyncrasies of the host population . But the irony is that, most often than not and as is seen in the lives of the characters in the narratives, they end up feeling confused, lost, and uncomfortable in neither options. This leads to marginalisation, one of the strategies inherent in acculturation. As Al-Issa and Tousignant 1997: 5) point out, “Marginalisation is when the group or individual loses contact with its own culture as well as the culture of the majority and is usually characterized by alienation and loss of identity”.

In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* the crisis of identity that afflicts many of the Ethiopian immigrants is manifested in many aspects—from their life style, manners of speech and appearances, to their attitudes and philosophy of life. As such, the three characters are found exploring the emotions of first generation immigrants and their reticence to the motherland, and their attempts at recreating that world among the displaced in America. Shopkeeper Sepha, for instance, appears to embody the American dream, but with his heart still in Ethiopia and his hopes exiled. The same is true of many of his fellow Ethiopian immigrants, and his



two friends from Congo and Kenya. They all seem to dwell in a state of perpetual limbo suspended and swinging like a pendulum between two worlds. This dilemma and crisis of identity comes to a limelight in relation to the main protagonist's life and how he describes it. Sepha, despite his seventeen years of life in America, is found still swaying between two worlds, sandwiched between the past and the present, and still caught up in the search for the illusive 'self'. He reflects: "What was it my father used to say? A bird stuck between two branches gets bitten on both wings. I would like to add my own saying to the list now, Father: a man stuck between two worlds lives and dies alone. I have dangled and been suspended long enough" (228). In the meantime, he bides his time selling beer and diapers, and drinking and playing a trivia game about African coups and current and past despots with his two equally lost fellow African immigrants. The following, perhaps a bit-too-lengthy, extract also illuminates the conflicting life style of the Ethiopian diaspora and their simultaneous struggle to maintain (and practice as much as they can) their customs and traditions in metropolitan Washington, D.C. (it is recounted by Sepha, the detached observer who himself has become estranged from all his fellow Ethiopians):

There are twenty-eight floors to the building, and of those twenty-eight floors, at least twenty-six are occupied exclusively by other Ethiopians who, like my uncle, moved here sometime after the revolution and found to their surprise that they would never leave. Within this building there is an entire world made up of old lives and relationships transported perfectly intact from Ethiopia. To call the building insular is to miss the point entirely. Living here is as close to living back home as one can get, which

is precisely why I moved out after two years and precisely why my uncle has never left. Hardly a word of English is spoken inside of these doors. The hallways on every floor smell of 'wat', coffee, and incense. The older women still travel from apartment to apartment dressed in slippers and white blankets that they keep wrapped around their heads, just as if they were still walking through the crowded streets of Addis. There are a few families who occupy entire floors. They run them like minor villages with children, grandchildren, grandparents, and in-laws all living within shouting distance of one another. There is a beauty and a terror to those floors. Only once did I ever step onto one of them and see it firsthand. *...Sometimes I think of my decision to leave this building as an escape, while at other times it seems more like an abandonment.* I try not to take the thought too seriously, but when every eye you catch seems to hold an accusation or question behind it, a decision has to be made. *Either I left to create a new life of my own, one free from the restraints and limits of culture, or I turned my back on everything I was and that had made me.* Each familiar face waiting for the elevator seems to want to ask the same questions: 'What have you done with yourself, where have you gone, and who do you think you are?' I know there would be a fair amount of pleasure behind the pity that would greet me if my life were ever laid bare before this crowd (116-7) (emphasis added).

Generally speaking, as can be understood particularly from the emphasised lines in the above passage, the author has successfully depicted two outstanding realities: a) the generational divide, and the strong presence (or at least reproduction) of Ethiopian life style in one of the groups (evinced by their crowded (communal-like) living style complete with the language spoken, the type of dressing and smell of Ethiopian food); and b) the apparently growing-chasm, bordering on animosity, brought about by various factors between the two groups of the

Ethiopian diasporic community. Although the above passage is particularly in relation to Ethiopian communities living in Silver Rock complex, where Sepha goes to visit his uncle, it is basically true also of most Ethiopian immigrants living in other American cities.

So from the graphic description of the building and its occupants at the beginning, ("There are twenty-eight floors to the building, and of those twenty-eight floors, at least twenty-six are occupied exclusively by *other Ethiopians* who, like my uncle, moved here sometime after the revolution... Living here is as close to living back home as one can get, *which is precisely why I moved out after two years and precisely why my uncle has never left*") the reader becomes aware of: a) the proximal state or their tightly-close living, which is characteristic of all immigrants, i.e. the natural bond between them that forces them to stay together or as close to each other as possible; b) the existence of two distinct groups of Ethiopian immigrants representing two generations. Sepha's uncle represents the older generation who is trying to keep their home land's customs and values alive in the new country, while Sepha symbolises the younger generation which embodies those trying to assimilate or are living in mixed worlds. On all of the twenty-six or so floors that the older generation inhabits, Ethiopian life is replicated in its all sizes and shapes. Here any stranger, even if an Ethiopian one, that does not belong to the group is easily picked out and regarded with wary suspicion. As Sepha relates:

...each [apartment door] one guarded by a young woman who stepped into the doorway and stared at me with *more apprehension and fear* than I've ever been greeted by. *I turned back to the elevator immediately, feeling as if I had intruded onto something sacred.* Something that I had no right to witness or speak of again..... I know that there's a curiosity surrounding me. There's an upturned glance behind every "salaam" and "tadias" that I exchange. *I'm being measured for everything. For my clothes, hair, shoes, for my readiness to offer a proper greeting and good-bye* (117) (emphasis added).

Conflict of identity or the troubles immigrants usually undergo in order to conform is also depicted in various aspects—from imitating the eating, drinking, and clothing habits to ways of talking and behaving of the host society even at the expense of their own tastes and personal mannerisms. The following account narrated by Sepha about Kenneth's forced efforts in conforming to the 'conventional' dress code shows this clearly:

He [Kenneth] comes straight from his job, his suit coat still on despite the early May heat. His shirt is neatly pressed, and his tie is firmly fastened around his neck. Kenneth is an engineer who tries not to look like one. He believes in the power of a well-tailored suit to command the attention and respect of those who might not otherwise give him a second thought. Every week he says the same thing when he walks in. He knows there's no humor in it, but he's come to believe that American men are so successful because they say the same thing over and over again (1-2).

Also in *How to Read the Air* the issue of dilemma and crisis afflicting immigrants is found represented in the feeling of rootlessness, among others, that persistently torments the protagonist. Jonas, despite his being born in and grown up in America,

the weight of rootlessness or ambiguity as to his belongingness still weighs heavily on him. This fact does not seem to escape his girlfriend Angela and her work colleagues as their exchange in the following excerpt illustrates:

When I later told Angela about the questions my students had asked, she laughed and said, "If they can get an answer to that, I'd like to know too".

"Meaning?"

"Meaning sometimes I think you're not from anywhere at all. Your parents are Ethiopian, or I assume they are, because I never met them. The only thing you've ever told me about them is that they didn't like each other, and none of you are close. I don't ask you for more than that because I figure you must have your reasons, but it gives you a cold, sometimes abstract air..." I had heard something similar before from Angela... (77).

Still on another occasion Jonas is confronted by Angela again, who tells him upfront that he lacked a clear sense of identity, saying: "You don't have any idea who you are, do you, Jonas" (100). As a matter of fact, given the degree of frequency and depth of treatment this theme of confusion over identity is given, coupled with the fact that the story begins and ends with the protagonist's search for his origins, this novel can be called a story of exile and immigrants' search for their roots and lost identities. Yosef Getachew Woldemariam, Jonas's father who is among first-generation immigrants, is not immune from this danger of losing one's identity either. In fact he is seen to have spent most of his life in a futile attempt to reconcile his past with his present, to blend in *really* and be a "true American" (or even be "more American than Americans" if possible) and redefine his identity or belongingness. As Jonas recounts about his now long-dead father:

He wanted other inroads into America, and his list of historical landmarks was his most recent one.... There were plenty of immigrants in D.C., New York, and Boston who could see towering skyscrapers or marble monuments out their living room windows, but where did that get them? Nowhere, he thought. It meant nothing to stand in the shadows of such buildings if you didn't know the history that preceded them, and if you didn't believe that as a result of that knowledge they belonged to you as well.

My father planned on rectifying some of that that afternoon. He had read about Laconte's fort in a small pamphlet [titled "A Brief History of Our Great State"] at the immigration office in Chicago.... this had been enough to convince him of the path he needed to seek out. Afterward he could say, "This is very similar to an early American landmark . . ." or "This reminds me of an old American fort that I visited," and anyone who heard him would be impressed and would think, Look how far he has come" (87).

Similarly, the way Jonas describes the kiss he exchanges with his long-absent mother says a lot about the sense of cultural limbo he is wallowing in, his belonging to neither the culture of his parents nor that of his current home: "She remained seated while I bent down to kiss her three times—formal, ritualized gestures delivered by *a culture that I had never really believed in...*" (262) (emphasis added).

Also in Fasil Yitbarek's novel, *The Texture of Dreams*, the confusion and crisis over identity, along with the adaptation efforts of the Ethiopian diaspora in the USA, is found well represented. This is characterized mainly through the confusion, dilemma and often bewildering sentiments and experiences Yosef

passes through especially during his initial years in America (discussed under "Social and Psychological Trauma of Immigrants", 4.1.2.2). Similarly, although he seems to be able to successfully adapt in many aspects eventually, it comes together with the persistent dilemma and uncertainty at the back of his mind. It also costs him some the erosion of his confidence in his true identity and his capabilities, if not much of the morals, and religious and social values that he grew up in. This concurs with what many studies say regarding the dynamics, strategies, and outcomes inherent in the issue of identity and assimilation surrounding immigrants, as mentioned occasionally in the foregoing sections.

Lastly, in Hama Tuma's *Give Me a Dog's Life Any Day*, the dilemma and identity crisis suffered by Africans both at home and abroad is found treated intermittently and in an indirect manner. Interestingly, Hama takes a unique departure from the conventional preoccupation or angle (identity crisis vis-a-vis African immigrants) and focuses his critical and sarcastic lens this time on 'native' blacks. These are black people who are legal citizens of Western countries by birth or naturalization but who seem to have confused feelings regarding their true belongingness. As a result they are usually and unnecessarily unfriendly or even aggressive toward fellow blacks. The following excerpt taken from the article titled, "Black on Black" serves as a good case in point:

...It is a conclusion based on years of experiences. Black policemen and women are harsh and ruthless towards their color kin. It all stems from their rejection of their own identity. Here they are wearing the white man's uniform, equal to the white at least in dress, pretending that all are equal

and that they, black as they are, have the same power as the whites and out pops a black civilian (!), darker than a winter's sky, loaded more often than not with several suitcases and trying to access into their paradise. "Documents, please?", "one moment, sir", "open your bags sir,", "now this visa of yours, madam/ sir, seems to have some problems" and so on and forth and the black policeman or woman constantly harass the hapless black traveller. With stern faces, clipped style of talking, contemptuous regards, the black police emerge as the guard dog par excellence of the White citadels. We just hate blacks, says their posture, their assumed disdain for the dark skinned victim... (112).

In short, the failure to fit in well in the host country or the challenges encountered in breaking through the racial, linguistic, cultural, as well as class barriers has long been perceived as one phenomenon affecting many first as well as second-generation Ethiopian/African diasporas. This has often led to erosion of self-confidence, feelings of anxiety or uncertainty about one's belongingness or one's expected role in life and society, or ending up being poor mimics of their surrounding in an effort to blend in get acceptance by the dominantly white population.

In connection with this concept of identity, Al-Issa and Tousignant (1997: 3-5) point out that, in the first place the tie that binds members of an ethnic group as one is basically either racial or cultural likeness, or both. Accordingly, "the greater the difference between the host culture and the immigrants' culture, the greater the culture shock and social isolation"—which is exactly what is depicted in the narratives in question.

To wind up, this uncertainty about one's identity and role in life and society among the diaspora, as indicated earlier (Ch. 4, Sec. 4.1.2.4), has resulted in hybridity and the subsequent birth of unique diasporic culture. Sepha's musing in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (228) at the end of his tale of unfulfilling life neatly wraps up the racial discrimination and feeling of loss of one's self that prevails among the diaspora. So, although cited before, it is believed that it can serve as a most fitting conclusion for this section too and thus worth quoting again: "What was it my father used to say? A bird stuck between two branches gets bitten on both wings. I would like to add my own saying to the list now, Father: a man stuck between two worlds lives and dies alone. I have dangled and been suspended long enough" (*Ibid.*).

4.1.2.5 Coping Mechanisms

What has been shown in the foregoing analyses is, basically, the experience of most Ethiopian and other African diasporas in the West that consists of a wide-ranging, interrelated issues cutting across social, political, economic, as well as psychological dimensions. As depicted successfully in the four texts of Group-A, most immigrants become disillusioned with their long-held beliefs, dreams and ambitions; they come to realize and be disappointed by their (and their country's) allotted lowest place/status in the West, and the hypocrisy and double standards of the Western world and its cultural as well as political and economic hegemony. They also go through social and psychological traumas that are invariably caused or aggravated by disappointments arising from a nexus of social, cultural,

economic as well as political factors. In general, as was shown in the analysis above, the grievance over their failed dreams and aspirations, the multiple challenges of adaptation, boredom with their life situations, constant homesickness, racial discrimination, and crisis of identity are the most prominent topics covered in the texts classified under Group-A. Thus, in view of the pervasiveness and gravity of these situations (particularly the problematic ones), the question of finding out the possible counter-mechanisms immigrants adopt to protect themselves from or mitigate their impacts becomes outstanding. The investigation reveals that, at the end of the day, Ethiopian as well as the African diaspora by and large are, inevitably, forced to resort to various options as a means of escape from the various challenges they face in host countries. These escape or coping mechanisms, as depicted in the narratives in question, include: loneliness and/or self-isolation, daydreaming, reminiscing, artificial pastimes, and almost everything and anything that gives them momentary escape or refuge from their social and psychological pains.

Accordingly, loneliness and self-isolation, either due to inability (or indisposition) to conform with and or as a last resort and a means of escape from the ordeals of the day-to-day reality, are often regarded as common traits manifested in diasporas' lives. One interesting aspect of this alienation is the fact that it could be either self-induced, externally-induced, or both. The case of self-inflicted alienation of the diaspora is represented well particularly in three of the novels. It is depicted through the protagonist/narrator Jonas (in *How to Read the Air*), the three major

characters (in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*), and Yosef (in *The Texture of Dreams*).

What Jonas says about his loneliness in the following excerpt serves as a case in point to show the employment of isolation as a means of escape quite vividly:

It's often said that a city, especially one as vast and dense as New York, can be a terribly lonely and isolating place. I had felt that before, even at the happiest points of my marriage to Angela, even when we deliberately hid ourselves nearly underground in the five-hundred-square-foot confines of our apartment, just the two of us, alone and with nowhere to go for days at a time. I felt none of those lost, lonely sentiments that night, not once as I walked down Riverside Drive, with the Hudson River and the rush of traffic pouring up and down the West Side Highway to my right (*How to Read the Air*, 186).

Apart from seclusions, aimless wanderings, and imaginative flights, the other major option Jonas uses to getting away from the realities is work, in which he buries himself. This can be easily seen in one of his recounts which reads as follows:

As Angela and I began to withdraw from each other, I found myself increasingly taken with my teaching; each new class was an opportunity to step farther away from what I thought of as my slightly bruised and sequestered self. Even if it was only for an hour and a half, after my first year at the academy was over, I knew that it was important to seize every chance to do so. I gradually began to transform myself from a quiet, seemingly sullen teacher, known primarily for my expensive black leather briefcase and the brown-bag lunches I carried to work, to a fully engaged and often dynamic lecturer who sometimes filled in his daily lessons with small digressions and slightly fanciful tales" (94).

In *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* too, the three immigrant friends—Stephanos, Kenneth, and Joseph— with no girlfriends or other male friends of black or white race or natives or fellow immigrants— seem to have shut themselves in and live in their own island, each silently craving for love and affection, the close companionship of fellow human beings, dreaming of their folks back home or trying to drown themselves in alcohol. This conforms with what Al-Issa and Tousingant (1997:3-5) say regarding the inevitable bond between immigrants of shared background: *“The concept of ethnicity refers to a social-psychological sense of belongingness in which members of a group share a unique social and cultural heritage...The bond that brings members of an ethnic group together may be defined in terms of either racial or cultural similarities or both....and the greater the difference between the host culture and the immigrants’ culture, the greater the culture shock and social isolation”*. But paradoxically enough, they have at the same time distanced themselves from other fellow African immigrants. They have no friends either at their work places or among the locals in their respective neighborhoods; in fact they even appear to pride themselves on their keeping at arm’s length of their own respective fellow countrymen.

Stephanos, although living in a populated part of the city, leads a totally secluded life like most people do in the west where individualism and privacy of one’s life are valued much more than communal life or living in closer, neighbourly relationship. Thus, in order to escape the reality or shield himself from the loneliness, despair and dilemma that seem to follow him everywhere and every

time like a shadow, Stephanos succumbs to self-alienation. He is seen shutting himself out in his uncle's house once (140-141); prefers the solitude and calm he apparently gets by sitting alone in the deserted Logan's circle in the evening or early morning hours; and generally distances himself from people, events, and his surroundings as much as possible. But unfortunately, his seclusion does not seem to relieve him of the homesickness and despair that relentlessly gnaw at him. The extremeness of his seclusion can easily be observed in his reaction to the sound of his doorbell chiming, which he describes as follows:

...Judith rang my doorbell at just a few minutes past eleven. I had forgotten what my doorbell sounded like. I couldn't even remember the last time it had been pressed. When you live alone for as long as I have, you forget your private world is only an illusion created by a door and a key. The sound of the doorbell, harsh and sustained like the shrill cry of an old man, seemed capable of shattering all the windows and glass and tearing down the roof over my head if pressed long enough. When it rung my heart pressed against my chest and stayed there until I caught my breath and reordered the world to allow for such things as guests and doorbells (82).

Kenneth, on his part, buries himself in his work, Joseph in the trivial game they invented and the never-ending poem he is composing about his country, and all three in their time together and their drinks.

Needless to say, the loss of families and loved ones or homesickness and/or the feeling of disconnectedness with one's roots and the feeling of being outsider in the

host country are, without doubt, among the powerful catalysts for the distress felt by the diaspora, and among the most common preoccupations of diasporic (postcolonial) literatures. This is precisely what Lye (2008) means when he says, "postcolonial literature is often (but not inevitably) self-consciously a literature of otherness and resistance, and is written out of the specific local experience". Thus to counteract the effects of these push and pull factors, diasporas employ various tactics in an effort to keep alive the selective memories of the life they had left behind, and at the same time, forget their frustrating life situations in the host land. Thus, indulging in daydreaming or self-induced hallucinations and reliving their memories are few of the best mechanisms often employed by many diasporas.

In *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, the experience of Stephanos, who seems to see, hear, and smell the images, sounds and scents of his country and its people everywhere in the American city, and his use of this daydreaming as an enjoyable escape from his frustrating life can be seen in the following excerpt:

For at least the first two years that I was here, I was so busy passing my mother, brother, father, and friends in the aisles of grocery stores, in parks and restaurants, that at times it hardly felt as if I had really left. ... I saw glimpses of home whenever I came across three or four roads that intersected at odd angles, in the squat glass office buildings caught in the sun's glare. I used to let my imagination get the best of me. My hallucinations of home became standard. I welcomed them into my day completely. I talked to my mother from across the bus; I walked home with my father across the spare, treeless campus of my Northern Virginia

Community College. We talked for hours.....I couldn't have asked for a better listener than my father.... (175-177).

The same goes with the protagonist Yosef in *The Texture of Dreams* who employs reminiscing as his best method. Hence he makes use of Mrs. Hanson as his sounding board and recounts to her (and thus *relives*) his childhood memories (his and his friends' stealthy acts of riding the mules and donkeys of country folks; his high school crush, especially with Mimi); about his country and families (how the women queue for water; the coffee ceremony in his mother's house; and his grandmother with her never-ending tales) (193-204). He does this in addition to his other escape routes—his addiction to watching TV (“Yes, I have become a TV freak!”), burying himself in books or the music he used to enjoy, and even seeking the divine intervention of God (219-22). He does all these in order to stop thinking about his dull life, “the colossal boredom” that seems to have engulfed him (215), and to get away from his social and psychological ordeals.

The method of alterity, that “lack of identification with some part of one's personality or one's community, differentness, otherness”, or the act of othering and distancing one's self from fellow countrymen as an alternative escape mechanism is a topic especially focused on in Dinaw's and Fasil's novels. As such, the actions of the Stephanos in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, Jonas in *How to Read the Air*, and Yosef in *The Texture of Dreams* are typical cases in point. As mentioned in the analysis under 4.1.1.2, these characters have a strong

tendency of distancing themselves as much from their fellow countrymen as from the dominant white community. Sepha remains aloof and out of touch even from the Ethiopian diasporic community who live both around him and in his uncle's city; Jonas steadfastly refuses to disclose his origins (identity) to everyone he meets, including his wife and his curious students. Instead he enjoys concocting new identities and stories every time he wants to; and Yosef circles himself with non-Ethiopian people and is never seen in the company of fellow Ethiopians or talk about Ethiopians who live near him or in the same city. In a nutshell, as pointed out before given the fact that the act of 'othering' the self constitutes one component of diasporic life, it may not be surprising that it is also found in Ethiopian diaspora's writings.

To summarise, this section has identified and discussed the major thematic preoccupations of the four books in Group-A. As can be understood from the analysis so far, there is an overwhelming thematic convergence in the three novels and, although in differing genre and with a differing style of presentation, the fourth book which is a collection of satirical essays. The investigation has revealed that, among the various topics treated in the volumes, the themes of disillusionment, social and psychological trauma of immigrants, racial discrimination, and dilemma and identity crisis as experienced by the diaspora at large are the most dominant ones in terms of both frequency and depth of treatment. These are followed by other interrelated (such as coping mechanisms of the diaspora) and relatively less prominent issues or sub-topics (such as the hypocrisy and double standards of the Western world). The exception in this

regard is Hama Tuma's collection of essays which dwells less on some of these topics, which can be attributed mainly to the generic difference (and so the writing style) of the work and the author's preferred focus area.

It can be said that, given the common characteristics of diasporic literatures that set them apart from literary writings of other categories, the overall dominance of these particular themes here may not be unique. What is more interesting rather is, apart from lending more credence to the practicality of the theoretical assumptions of the Post-colonial literary theory, it further confirms the appropriateness of its implementation for studying texts written by diasporas originating from non-colonized developing nations as well. Thus, the next section moves on to discuss the thematic concerns of the two texts in the second group.

This book, discounting the prologue and the epilogue, consists of three main parts, and an extended Introduction where the author provides the backdrop against which the whole story is set. The narrator tells of her innocent childhood that was violently violated by the then brutal Socialist regime; her family's escape from Ethiopia when she was 11 years old; about the thousands of Ethiopians that were massacred by the regime under the name of 'Red terror'; the birth of ferocious resistance internally and the eventual collapse of the regime after 17 years of rule by the EPRDF which currently runs the country. Summing up that period she says: "I left Ethiopia in 1976, two years after the army deposed Emperor Haile Selassie and sent a powerful wave of turmoil and state-sponsored violence crashing across the country. Along with countless others, my parents were swept up in that wave and soon the life they had built together had been completely washed away" (2). Rebecca also recounts how she and her family succeeded in coming-to-terms with their painful experience and managed to rebuild their shattered lives in a new country and at the same time remained connected to the motherland.

The first part, "Addis Ababa", focuses on the narrator's family and introduces to the reader the prominent members of the family that have had great impact on her life. She recounts her feelings – now through a 36-year-old woman's lens – in experiencing Ethiopia as the home that was stolen from her, and the sense of alienation she feels upon her return. Her uncle, who is an Engineer by profession, is one of the most important characters in the book that is given a broad coverage. Engineer Tadesse is portrayed as a resolute person who, despite the harsh and

dangerous environment in the Military regime, continues to build bridges and pursues his visionary project of using the Nile River agricultural development in Ethiopia. "The Historic North", Part Two depicts in graphic details the northern part of Ethiopia, its remaining monuments, and its socio-cultural and religious institutions. The final part, titled "Intersections", contains the narrator's reflections - comparing what she observes and feels here and now at her homeland with her life in the far-away Western world. Her husband, Jean, is another major character who is seen playing a vital part in the story.

4.2.1.2 Plot Synopsis of *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*

Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* is set in the time during and after the Ethiopian 1974 revolution. The story begins with a wounded student protester lying on the operation table in a hospital with a bullet in his back. It was the most turbulent and critical period in the country's history, with widespread student protests, military uprising, and the last days of Emperor Haile Selassie's six-decade rule. The doctor, Hailu, who is among the first generation Ethiopian intelligentsia who were educated abroad and highly regarded by the Emperor himself, is preparing to make the operation on the wounded student. The doctor perceives his patient, and by extension his own younger son who is also a revolutionary college student, as irrational and foolhardy. His older son, a 32-year-old history professor with a small daughter and a wife, also shares his father's contempt for the burning and looting, and the violent demonstrations.

The opening chapters describe the events surrounding and preceding Haile Selassie's fall from power. This is accompanied by detailed narration of other, interrelated events, including hospitalization of the physician's wife, of the history professor's 4-year-old daughter with serious injury, and a friendship that grows between the doctor's younger son and a poor neighbour. The chapters also contain reflective sections narrated through the perspective of Emperor Haile Selassie, who has become increasingly isolated, with only his pet lions for company: "Soldiers were posted outside his door, which was locked in triplicate and then chained. Their fear of him was heartbreaking, compounding his loneliness and the largeness of this empty space he was trapped inside..."(30).

Following the death of the ousted Emperor, the story focuses on the situation in the country under the *Dergue* regime, and describes the horror and upheaval that spanned many years. The conflict and growing rift that was prevalent among family members at the time because of little-understood ideologies is also vividly captured in the numerous heated arguments between siblings. In one incident, one of these main characters representing the youth in the story plot calls his younger brother, "Selfish and irresponsible" for which the other responds back by calling him: "Obedient as a trained dog".

4.2.2 Thematic Analysis of Narratives in Group-B

4.2.2.0 Introduction

Generally speaking, issues revolving around social, political, historical, as well as psychological aspects feature dominantly in the two works summarized above, both of which are set in Ethiopia. Nonetheless, within this general convergence of themes, the two narratives also bear certain peculiarities in terms of the exact nature/type of subjects raised or the extent of coverage the respective topic is given, as well as the specific localities (setting) used in the stories. Thus, due to these reasons as well as for the sake of convenience and variety, the analysis in this section first deals with each of the two texts respectively. This is done together with relevant citations from the books as necessary. The section concludes by providing a summary of the major themes analysed and a discussion of the possible reasons accounting for the emergence of these particular themes and any other divergences observed among the two narratives in this group.

4.2.2.1 Thematic Analysis of *Held at A Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*

The thematic preoccupations of Rebecca Haile's book, *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*, could be grouped into four categories. These are: self-discovery, past trauma, domestic racism, and concern over homeland state-of-affairs.

4.2.2.1.1 Discovery of One's True Home and Identity

The principal theme of self-discovery or enlightenment is conveyed through the author's historic voyage to, and re-discovery of her native land, along with her true identity that was stolen from her. As a thirty-six-year-old woman who returns to her native land she had fled from at the age of eleven, Rebecca becomes disillusioned with the stereotypical image of Ethiopia portrayed by the Western media that was synonymous with a backward, hopeless country full of abject poverty, illiterate people and constant warfare. Instead she rediscovers Ethiopia to be what it really is: a nation of rich cultural, traditional, religious and literary history spanning centuries, as well as a living testament to the glories of Black Africa. This reawakening, which resonates throughout the narrative, predisposes the author/narrator to re-evaluate the Western (neo-colonialist and/or imperialist)-oriented values and ideals she used to uphold until then.

Rebecca's major discovery of the family values and social customs that stands out in sharp contrast with that of the West she grew up in is depicted through her interactions with her grandmother and aunt in Ethiopia. These are revelatory moments when she becomes aware of the strength of family values and its extended system, and its capacity as well as obligation to care for all the family members, which she finds to be quite dissimilar with the American way of family life. And above all, she is euphoric about and relieved to see that these social traditions and values she barely remembers, together with their embodiments, have remained largely unaffected by the revolution, as shown in the following passage:

I have always equated the changes wrought by the revolution with loss, an equation not easily recalibrated by a traditional gathering at my grandmother's house or several weeks among my remaining family in Ethiopia. Whether or not I have idealized them in memory, the simplicity and sheer fun of those Sunday afternoon gatherings are pleasures I will not know again, just as I will never know the other pieces and promises of the pre-revolutionary life I associate with my extended family. ...I have associated the life we lost most directly with her [her grandmother], and yet she has accepted our dispersal and carried on, maintaining her old home and keeping to her lifelong habits. My grandmother's constancy and resilience thus open to me at least the possibility that my loss may not be as complete as I've imagined it to be. Pieces of that past remain in reach, vibrant and accessible (50-51).

Describing her stunned reaction she felt early on her arrival, Rebecca says, "For a moment, I stood frozen in the middle of the room. Everything was familiar; my memories of my grandmother's house were fully vindicated. But I found that familiarity disconcerting, for how could the physical embodiment of a way of life have survived so well when, as I believed, that life had disappeared? How could this house be fresh and whole when, not five minutes away, so many other buildings were battered and broken?" (43-44).

She is also deeply moved by her relatives' sustained concern for her and her family while they were in America, and by the love, care and adoration they shower on her and her foreign husband now. This is a huge revelation to her as it is quite unlike to what she knew and experienced in her life in the United States. The following excerpt highlights this aspect:

I was surprised by how closely people I barely knew had followed our lives in the United States— they all knew I'd won a scholarship to college and attended law school (my grandmother even had copies of the small- town newspaper clippings) – and felt embarrassed by their outsized pride in our successes. And I was especially touched at how welcoming they were of Jean. They were thrilled to hear of his Greek and Armenian background (“Tell him the neighbours used to be Armenian! And we will take him to the Greek church before you leave- it is just right here, on the piazza.”) and went out of their way to compliment his skill with *injera* and to prepare him *gurshas*, choice morsels offered to a favored relative or honored guest...(46).

Again, many of Rebecca's disillusioning experiences symbolise the countless number of African diasporas' disillusionment with the Western mind-set they had long adopted and their final rediscovery of the lost values, rich cultural and traditional assets as well as proud history of their countries. Rebecca narrates about her dislocation, resettlement, and initially confused feelings of identity in a typical post-colonial fashion:

Since I was so young when we left, I had not yet developed a sophisticated public Ethiopian identity, and to the extent I had a sense of self, it was formed by my family and our life inside the private setting of our home. The memory of our house, of our private space, became the foundation of the Ethiopian identity I developed. As I grew older, I described Ethiopia as a proud African nation that had resisted European Colonization, a country with an ancient history replete with literary and artistic achievement. This was the accomplished Ethiopia I let myself believe in, and central to this mental picture was an equally accomplished urban family who lived in a solid, well- built house...(27).

As such, the episodes in this regard depicted in this book become symbolic of the self-discovery not only of an Ethiopian diaspora living in Washington, DC. , Minnesota or New York *per se*, but also that of the contemporary African diaspora living in the United States as well as in the West by and large. They denote the coming-of-age of numerous confused and frustrated African exiles in their host lands who suddenly come face to face with the shocking reality of their glorious past.

4.2.2.1.2 Past Trauma

The gripping power of the past or the traumatic experience most diasporas from despotic regimes suffered and its haunting effects in their current lives is also found well portrayed in Rebecca Haile's *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*. Rebecca fled Ethiopia at the age of eleven when Emperor Haile Sellassie was deposed by a military coup and the subsequent turmoil that engulfed the country. As such, the book narrates in vivid details (interspersed with some pictures) the horrors inflicted by a brutal and murderous regime during the decades of political upheaval following the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia; the arbitrary arrests and killings of thousands of Ethiopians who disagreed with the *junta*'s ruling or dared to voice their opinions; the horrific outcome of it all, and the eventual collapse of the *Dergue* regime. Along with this, Rebecca brings out her and her family's struggle to overcome their traumatic experience (exile/dislocation) and rebuild their

lives (resettlement and adaptation) in another country as a diaspora. She narrates her distressing experience prior to and after exile as follows:

My sister and I were left to cope with my parents' departure by ourselves. My aunt and uncle tried to keep us to a normal routine of school and home, but nothing could shield the two of us from the anxiety that gripped the entire city. Fear accompanied me to school, where a classmate mourned the death of his father, the last imperial prime minister, whom Mengistu killed one night along with sixty other prominent officials. Loss pulled up a chair at my grand mother's table, where family gatherings were now marked by absences For eight long months, I watched these events unfold and I held my breath, though I could not have said for whom or for what I was waiting. In England, my parents spent their days in physical therapy and their nights in worry and prayer. My father regained only partial control of his legs and has had to use wheelchairs ever since his injury...It is still difficult for me to realize that he was only forty-two when he was paralyzed, just a bit older than I am now and so young to give up the joy and freedom of physical movement..... Once safely in the United States, my parents immediately began trying to get us out of Ethiopia. Butit took a great deal of negotiation and outright pleading with both the *Derg* and the American Embassy before my sisters and I were finally allowed to leave for the United States (10-11).

As mentioned in Ch. 2, Sec. 1.2, the 1974 Ethiopian revolution was a turning point in the lives of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Ethiopians whose impact still seems to reverberate and occupy the hearts and minds of Ethiopians both at home and in the diaspora. Due to this, Rebecca's narrative devotes a significant



portion to this historic moment and reflects on its social, political, as well as psychological ramifications often by comparing it with the current situation in the country. In some passages the author depicts of the chaotic moments of the revolution in relation to (and as being the cause for) the current presence of a large (and continuously growing) number of Ethiopian diasporas in the West, their new role, as well as the question of identity. The following extract, which describes some of these aspects and the painful and still hurting experience of Rebecca and her family, throws some light on the issue at hand and winds up this sub-section:

The immediate consequence of the revolution, the *Derg*'s rise to power, turned thousands of Ethiopians into political, social and economic refugees and created, for the first time in Ethiopian history, a huge diaspora population that has continued to grow under the TPLF. Now, many of these immigrants have established themselves in their new countries and are beginning to reestablish ties with Ethiopia. In the process, they – or rather, we – have become the impetus for the changes I witnessed. Far from being the lone and lonely outsider I had feared I would be, I am in fact just one of many line-straddlers to press family, friends, strangers and the state to rethink the content of the word “ Ethiopian” (184-185).

4.2.2.1.3 Domestic Racism

The colour-based discrimination that prevails within Ethiopia and among Ethiopians themselves is another important topic that is treated in *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*. As it happens, racial discrimination is not a phenomenon manifested among whites towards blacks and non-white people at

large, but also affecting non-whites themselves, including the Ethiopian/African population. In her stark account of the racial snubs and scorns she –both as an Ethiopian and as a diaspora–witnesses in a supposedly Black African country, what Rebecca depicts in the following passage is a good case in point and thus worth quoting as much as possible in its entirety:

So many Ethiopians believe themselves superior to the darker-skinned peoples of sub-Saharan Africa – in fact, many don't even consider themselves black and anti-African racism is both deeply ingrained and ubiquitous. Just a day or two earlier I had watched another relative think nothing of casually shouting a terrible epithet at a charcoal-skinned farmer whose flock of sheep blocked her car, and even among immigrants living in the U.S. the sentiment is common. I find this racism painful to witness and hard to confront– I'd cringed but said nothing in the car that afternoon.... Beyond the realm of familial and social accommodation, state actors and other institutions are also debating the question of how to categorize and treat immigrants. Are we Ethiopian, *ferenji*, or something else altogether? (Or, to repeat the social studies question, "Class, what is Haile?")... I found myself scrutinized under several different frameworks.... to determine whether [as] a visitor [I was] entitled to the lower rates generally available to Ethiopians. That definition works well for purposes of differentiating between Ethiopians living in Ethiopia and say, German or Spanish tourists, but it totally excludes the thousands of first generation immigrants who have changed their citizenship for reasons that often have little to do with their identification with Ethiopia (180-1).

In describing the feeling of alienation she felt in North Ethiopia during her visit, Rebecca laments: "During that walk, and in later encounters in town, I suddenly found myself an outsider in a way I had not expected. I was in Ethiopia, but I didn't

understand a word as people around me chatted and called to one another, and I felt as foreign as my Greek- Armenian husband” (86).

4.2.2.1.4 Concern about Homeland State of Affairs

As mentioned in the background section (Ch.1, Sec.1.3.2.2), the diaspora is playing an increasingly important role in their home countries’ economic and political domains. So much so that they have even been dubbed “the fourth development actors” (ADPC 2008b) worldwide. Accordingly, their involvement in the political affairs of their home countries and their fierce protests against the injustice, undemocratic rules and corrupt practices they observe in their countries have found voice in their literary writings, too. Accordingly, although it is found mentioned routinely (or in relation with past experiences) in the other texts too, the issue is treated more prominently and in an in-depth manner in Rebecca’s, *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*.

The discouraging state of current political climate and affairs she observes is raised in many occasions and is reflected in her angry, remorseful remarks. The following excerpt, one of the many, suffices to epitomize her observation and impressions of Ethiopia, Ethiopian politics and its impact vis-à-vis the current government or ruling party:

The new regime, which was born as the Tigre People’s Liberation Front (the TPLEF), and once in power was renamed the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front, was initially an improvement over Mengistu’s *Derg*. But it too has stifled dissent, murdered citizens and done just as much as the *Derg* to accumulate and retain power for itself. Today,

more than fifteen years later, the TPLF remains firmly in control...Ethiopia's road over the last three decades has been extremely difficult. In addition to political repression and violence, its seventy-five million inhabitants have suffered from crippling economic mismanagement, rampant government corruption, and the enormous economic drain and social disruption of the war with Somalia and military campaigns in connection with civil wars. Nature, for its part, has been nearly as cruel as human actors, unleashing long, recurrent droughts over the Horn of Africa that, together with poor agricultural practices, have caused widespread famine, most notably in 1984. More recently, the TPLF has taken the country down a dangerous new road by pushing ethnic-based politics and preferences that emphasize the differences among Ethiopia's tens of linguistic and ethnic groups rather than a national identity. In response to this endless run of misfortune, many Ethiopians, especially the educated elite of Addis Ababa, have simply left (13-17).

The author's grave concern about her country and its future, and her critical attitude of the current government that she perceives as following a misguided political system, and being corrupt, partial and undemocratic, can be easily inferred from the excerpt cited above. Further to this, Rebecca also remorsefully reflects on the 'wasted' sacrifice of her generation's youth to avail democracy and political freedom, in conjunction with the rampant nepotism, the actual and potential impact of ethnic-based politics, and the despair and dejected attitude that apparently many Ethiopians (like her uncle) have today. The following passage captures her impressions and concerns in this regard:

Tadesse [her uncle] would welcome a representative government, but he thinks that regimes are nearly impossible to change and, once in place,

inherently disposed to self-preservation. ... Could he really afford to be agnostic about politics when, as I saw it, his private companies and business decisions were so clearly affected by the political climate? ... The monarchy, the *Derg*, and now the TPLF, all favored businesses connected to people in power, so that the most successful companies in Ethiopia are rarely the best-run The problems that concern Tadesse remain entrenched precisely because Ethiopia's governments have not yet addressed them. Finally, even questions of national identity and culture can have an impact on business. For example, the current government's emphasis on regional and ethnic identity over national unity has created an environment where a contractor from Addis Ababa is not welcome in Axum or Mekele, no matter what his qualifications..(54-56; 64).

Remarking yet again on the plight of the Ethiopian farmers in the north and their seemingly hopeless living situation, the author says: "Regional farmers can barely support themselves- the area is plagued by drought and famine and is a primary source of the heart- wrenching images that the West identifies with Ethiopia" (131).

Overall, it can be said that, through her scathing remarks, the author declares her serious concern over and her interest to bridge the gap between her two worlds in terms of civil and human rights and the rule of law—the infringement of which had caused her own flight from her homeland and to seek a new life in America.

To conclude, as seen in the foregoing discussion, Rebecca's memoir-travelogue touched many issues based on the author's observation on her visit to Ethiopia many years later. But more specifically, she brought up the issue of what it means to re-discover one's stolen home or identity, and made a revisit of her and her

family's traumatic experiences during and after the revolution. This focused particularly on the social, political and economic upheaval the Ethiopian revolution had caused and the infamous 'Red Terror' in which an estimated hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians were massacred by the military junta at the time. As well, she frankly and bitterly brought out to light the age-old yet little-talked-about issue of skin-colour prejudice that prevails in Ethiopia, and expressed her concern on what she sees as dangerous and destructive politics of Ethiopian governments past and present.

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

4.2.2.2.0 Introduction

Ethiopian political system has passed through a number of changes in the long history of the country. But – fortunately or unfortunately – most of these changes have been violent, and the revolution in 1974 was the bloodiest one causing the displacement, migration and death of countless Ethiopians. Therefore, as mentioned repeatedly in the foregoing discussions, one of the most dominant topics that consistently features in nearly all (including many other writings not included herein) literatures of the Ethiopian diaspora is the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution and its multifarious long-lasting impacts. Many historians cite several issues as the driving factors for the Ethiopian revolution in 1974. These include, among other things, the geo-politics of the time at the international level, growing discontent among the population, disillusionment with the existing regime, its governance system and institutions, its failure to pull the country out of the

gripping poverty, growing class difference, subjugation and exploitation of the lower class and particularly the peasant population, lack of political freedom and democracy, as well as rampant corruption and nepotism. All of these were felt deeply particularly by the intelligentsia, leading them to fierce protests and strikes that eventually spread to the whole country and were replicated by the population at large. As pointed out in Ch.1, Sec. 1.2, this period was not unique to Ethiopia. The revolution was rather part of the turbulent political upheaval that swept across post-colonial Africa in the late-1960s and the 70s. Thus, in keeping with this fact, Maaza's narrative successfully captures this tumultuous time-period by retracing the beginning, development and aftermath of this revolution. Given this fact, then, the following thematic analysis of this narrative will essentially be a re-examination of this time period, i.e. the 1974 Ethiopian revolution and its ramifications in social, political, and psychological aspects as depicted in the book in question.

4.2.2.2.1 Revisiting the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution

- *The Impetus for the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution*

Major push factors represented in the narrative include: abject poverty and the backwardness of the country, the growing class difference and subjugation of the lower class people by the upper, the disillusionment with both previous and the succeeding military regime, mass discontent, and the violent struggle for political freedom with the ensuing chaos. Along with this is depicted also African dictators' unrelenting grip (monopoly) of power, their use of brute force to crush any dissent,

as well as their inconsiderateness toward their people (e.g. the Wollo famine in Ethiopia); and the rampant corruption and economic decline at the time. Numerous passages vividly portray the socio-political context, particularly the extent of poverty and misery millions of Ethiopian peasants were wallowing in and the disillusionment with the existing regime at the time, which led to the mass-uprising and the fierce struggle for change in the country.

The following extract is from a lengthy and equally moving and graphic letter written during the height of the revolution. It is written by Micky, one of the active anti-government youth and who is also the son of Dr Hailu, to his friend Dawit. Since it depicts in detail the country's outdated farming practice and the farmers' miserable life—which was the main catalyst for the 1974 revolution— it serves as a good instance in the depiction of the driving force of the revolution (the present researcher has tried to paraphrase or shorten it as much as possible but found that any more trimming than the present would weaken the essence and significantly reduce the vehemence and resolve conveyed by the letter):

Back in his tent that cold night, shivering under the pale yellow glow of a weak kerosene lamp, Mickey wrote with urgency and anger, scribbling his words onto the blank paper.

“This is how a man tills his land: behind cattle that are tied to one end of a plow that he uses to dig and lift and turn the ground. He holds a stick in one hand and the end of the plow in the other. At the end of that stick is a rope that he uses to whip the animals when they tire from the hot sun and the lack of water and simple hunger. A man works like this every day,

every month, year after year, behind his cattle, his hand attached to a plow that has dug its own imprints into his calloused palms. He speaks to no one but himself, he hears nothing but his own slavish grunts as he pushes his plow into dirt, willing a crop to grow from unforgiving ground, praying daily for more rain. But it didn't rain in 1972 in the north, my friend, and the farmer had no crops. The rains did not come as they should, and when the rains failed, the crops failed, and when the crops failed, the farmer grew hungry and when he grew hungry his cattle also grew hungry, because a farmer will feed his cattle before himself. When the cattle began to die, the farmer gathered his family and tried to walk to the nearest village, the nearest aid shelter, the nearest anywhere where he could hold out his proud hand and beg for food, But everywhere he went was the same as what he had left. They are starving here in Wello, Dawit. They are starving in Tigre and Shoa. We have lived in the city and we have forgotten about these people. And imagine, now, a farmer far from Wello, in the south, where the rains are more forgiving and the land has not been cursed by famine. This farmer plows land that isn't his, that was never his father's, which was never his grandfather's, and will never be his son's. He works as hard as his animals day after day to pay a landowner's taxes and to glean enough crops so his family has enough grains for food after they've given the landowner his share. The landowner's share is always large. It is always more than the landowner needs. It is a selfish share created by a selfish system that preys on the weak and makes them servants to the rich. Dawit, we live in a feudal system....Our emperor has built the myth of this land on the blood of those who have been too tired to voice their own truths... Is this my country? We have grown up together, Dawit, but I was someone else before you knew me. My father was this farmer from the south, he died on a rich man's plot of land tied to the wrong end of his plow because he'd been forced to sell his cattle to feed his family that harvest. My father died like an animal, still tied to those

ropes when I found him, swallowing with his last breaths the dust of another man's land, broken by the burden of his labor. The rich think this land is theirs though they have never earned the right to call it theirs. Not like these farmers. Not like my father. Most of those who are here, on the ground dying, are the ones who were strong enough to walk out of their villages and get here. The roads are littered with our people who died on the way, their bodies rotting in the sun if the vultures haven't gotten to them first. We dishonor our dead and our workers, Dawit. The rich have kept this secret, the emperor has stolen this truth from us and we have to fight to get our country back and save these people: A man told me today as many as two hundred thousand will die. They will die. It is too late for them. Do we even have as many alive in Addis Ababa? "" (28-9).

The following excerpt also, which particularly focuses on and describes the devastating effect of the drought and the infamous Ethiopian famine of the 1970s (and the government's only concern to hide it from the outside world) in a heartrending tone is worth citing here. The author brings this out again later by contrasting it with the lavish life style of the royalty and in conjunction with the highly moving documentary of the BBC that was broadcast throughout the world:

...Patches of brown cracked earth had been dug out of the flat dryness of the landscape. They dotted the dead land like pockmarks, craters dug by desperate hands in search of shrivelled roots and insects or any stone that could sit in their mouths and remind their tongues of the weight of bread. Mickey's boots felt tight around his sweaty socks and swollen feet. His rounded belly suddenly an obscenity in this land of rotten animal carcasses and inhuman hunger. The smell of dead cattle forced him to put a handkerchief over his nose and mouth.

"You'll get used to the smell," the clerk from the local administrator's office said to him, pointing him in the direction of a small tent. "It's the carcasses". He stopped and pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket and handed it to Mickey. "These are some basic facts about the village," he said, his eyes earnest. "They don't want to know anything about what's happening here, those officials. I've tried to tell them, but they're afraid of bad publicity if the news spreads." He grunted and shook his head. "I've been forbidden to tell you the truth, but you can read it." He pointed to the paper and shoved his hands in the pocket of his white overcoat. "I was told to dress like a doctor in case any reporters come here".....(27).

The class difference or the subjugation of the lower class in the country, which is another factor behind the uprising, is also another a subject covered in Maaza's book. On one occasion Dawit (one of Doctor Hailu's sons, and both of whom are among the major characters in the story) returns home shocked after having witnessed his brother raping the housemaid. Here the way his mother responds to his bewilderment and feeling of shame, as quoted below, suffices to show depiction of the extent of cruelty the lower class people were subjected to:

When he got home, his father opened the door, saw the blood on his clothes, and immediately started shouting, asking loud accusatory questions Dawit refused to answer, shaken still by what he'd seen and done. When he tried to explain to his mother later, leaving out the part about Mulu's nakedness, she'd hugged him, sad. "This is how many boys learn how to become men," she said. "House girls are sometimes expected to do more than cook and clean. You could have cost Mulu her job" (23).

- *Consequences of the Revolution*

As it happens, it is what followed in the wake of the revolution, after the deposition of the emperor by the military junta, that marked the beginning of the dark period in Ethiopian 20th century history. The military elite which ousted the king and seized power went back on its promises and began consolidating its power by ruthlessly stifling any dissent, throwing to jails hundreds of thousands of students and shooting to death thousands. It caused the dislocation, flight and migration of people *en masse* to other countries, created suspicion and distrust between previously close people, a rift and antagonism between families and the society at large, and disintegration of the social fabric that hitherto held families, kin and neighbourhoods alike together. In short, it was a time that ushered in yet an unparalleled reign of terror, chaos, social instability, and economic decline that lasted for decades. All these facets are found adequately portrayed in Maaza's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*.

However, of all the ramifications of the revolution represented in the book, the new 'culture' of fear, dislocation/migration, and the government-sponsored 'Red Terror' and its long-lasting impacts are given a prominent place in this book. This is mainly due to the fact that the tension, palpable fear and trepidation, as well as the uncertainty that gripped the whole country in the days immediately preceding the deposition of the emperor and the reign of terror that followed are events still remembered by many Ethiopians today.

The following passage is believed to adequately represent this reign of terror and the eerily chilling atmosphere of the time as depicted in the narrative in question:

Addis Ababa was buried in dark clouds of gun smoke. Waves of arrests swept swiftly through the city. Bullets fell like rain. Blood flowed in currents. Winds blew the rotten stench of the dead through deserted streets. Dotting the surrounding highlands and marching steadily into frightened neighbourhoods, the *Derg's* urban militia gathered more members, hefted Soviet rifles on their shoulders, and swarmed the city....Snipers and firing squads worked relentlessly. A pulsing, steady rhythm bore down on the stunned city while on a narrow patch of barren land, moonlight closed around a pregnant woman pleading at the foot of a man with stones for eyes and a plunging bayoneted rifle in his hand....They learned that bodies left alone for one day raised less suspicion than those they picked up immediately. And as family after family from neighbourhoods beyond theirs began to gather.... desperate for news of their missing, they realized that they were not enough and would never be enough to rid the roads of this latest blasphemy.

Dawit and Sara stopped at a barefoot boy lying face up on the road, no 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. Dawit got out of the car and ...lifted the boy into the back of the Volkswagen and gently laid him on an old, frayed blanket, careful not to smudge the car seat with blood. He forced himself to keep his gaze away from the body, away from more tangible evidence that there was no God, that all his life he and this boy had prayed to nothing.... (226).

Several similar passages abound that portray the gruesome, shocking scenes of murder and rampage in an uncanny details. Here it can only be said that Maaza has

succeeded in her depiction as well as documentation of the ghastly realities of the time without reservation.

Another interrelated issue represented in this narrative is the psycho-social impact of the revolution. This is depicted in the pervasive feelings of hopelessness, despair, self-doubt, grief and mental traumas affecting the population. Concomitant with this is also the growing suspicion and distrust among family members, disintegration of long-held assets and values that led to the creation of rift and antagonism among family members and friends, and the once-close community at large (e.g. pages: 130,149, 163, 193, etc.) both during and after the revolt.

The following two passages which highlight the impact of the revolution which turned families and individuals, the young and the old, as well as the rich and the poor alike into confused, helpless, fretful, and hopeless beings, serve as cases in point:

He [Dr. Hailu] stared at his hand lying palm open in his lap and felt the solitude and panic that had been eating into the edges of his days since his wife Selam had gone into the hospital. Seven days of confusion. And he'd just operated on a boy for a gunshot wound to the back. After years as a doctor, he knew the rotations and shifts of his staff...but he couldn't account for his wife's deteriorating condition and this relentless drive of students who demanded action to address the country's poverty and lack of progress. He had no answers, could do nothing but sit and gaze in helplessness at an empty hand that looked pale and thin in the afternoon sun (6).

And the second extract reads:

Yonas was a thirty-two-year-old man now, with a daughter and a wife, he knelt in the prayer room every day, held his naked wrists to the sun, and wondered again about his worthiness. His mother had been in the hospital for a week... He alone witnessed the countless afternoons she came into the prayer room to weep by herself, unaware that her eldest son was pressed against the thick wooden door, listening. He was also the only one who knew that she'd stopped taking the medicine his father prescribed for her heart. He'd caught her throwing her daily dose down the sink one day, and been so shocked and confused he'd merely stood there and stared. She'd looked up to find him, and given him a slow smile of resignation. "My son," she'd said, her hand gently twisting the pill cap on. "*You understand, don't you? I'm tired of fighting what God wants.*" (18, emphasis added).

What is depicted in the above passage is an instance of the pervasive feeling of doom and gloom, and the state of hopelessness and self-defeating attitude that has become the norm of the day in most families during those trying periods.

As well, rift, distrust, growing antagonism, and revengeful feelings among people were common during those days, impacting not only on families or siblings but the communities at large. The author depicts this scenario in a number of occasions. The following two extracts that touch on the issues of discord, intolerance and resentment affecting family members are chosen among the many similar others as representatives in this regard:

In the living room, Yonas and Dawit were glaring at each other. Sunlight spilled and widened in the gap between them. Sara approached with square

slices of *dabo*, hoping she could defuse what seemed like an escalating argument.

“What do you know about peasant rights?” she heard Yonas ask Dawit. He had both hands shoved into his pockets. Yonas's temper was as volatile as Dawit's, but his control over his emotions was far better than his brother's, though today he seemed close to an outburst.

“Here.” Sara said, handing him a plate.

Yonas pushed it away. “Have you ever been outside the city? Have you ever tried to learn about the people you say you're speaking for? All your demonstrations are about higher pay and lower petrol, middle-class elitist concerns, how does that help the poor in the countryside?”

Sara shoved the plate towards Dawit. “Take it,” she said. “And remember we have guests.”

Dawit lowered his voice. “Who's going to speak up for them?” he asked. “People like you, who just want to hide until things get better?” He tore the square chunk of bread angrily and shoved a piece in his mouth. “At least we're trying to get things changed”(47).

.....

“I don't need a lecture. You don't know what I know”. Dawit thought back to that early morning when Mickey had come to his door in a blood-splattered uniform, a rifle lost and a gun in his belt, confessing to acts that neither of them spoke of again. It was after that that their friendship had begun to unravel; quiet moments were no longer comfortable, and conversations stumbled into stilted, awkward silences...(130).

Along with this, the narrative also draws many scenarios that vividly describe the psychological impact the revolution or the mental traumas suffered by family members and close relatives. As such, some resort to religion or faith while others lose faith and denounce God, as is the case with Sara who feels rage against God and turns away her face on Him (83-4); others go on spending sleepless nights filled with nightmares; and some get obsessed with the idea of revenge and/or exile. One passage (104-106) which describes the last moments of Selam (one of the main characters in the book) before her death in the presence of her family, suffices to illustrate the traumatic experiences many had to endure and the nature of the psychological bond that existed between family members during and after the revolution.

In summary, to reiterate once again, the 1974 Ethiopian revolution was not an isolated episode unique to Ethiopia. Rather it was part of the political upheaval that swept across postcolonial Africa and many parts of the world under colonial rule. It was a turbulent time-period in which there was disillusionment with the new political successors who came to power on the wake of the end of European colonialism or the departure of colonial powers, rage against the ruling despots—both the new ruling elite and old monarchies (as was the case in Ethiopia)— and wide-spread social unrest and uprising in quest for freedom and democracy prevailed, with the subsequent suppression and termination of opponents, particularly the intelligentsia.

As was mentioned in the preceding chapters and sections, this time period therefore marked the beginning of large-scale exodus of Ethiopians to Europe and North America. As well, it was this generation of Ethiopian migrants and their descendants that gave birth to Ethiopian diasporic literature in the English language. Thus viewed against this backdrop, it may not come as a surprise that the 1974 Ethiopian revolution occupies an important place and is ubiquitous in the literary works of not too few Ethiopian diasporic writers. True to form, five out of the six texts in this study reflect upon this historical period directly or indirectly and in varying degrees of width and breadth. The following sub-chapter provides the comparative analysis of the narratives in the two groups in intra- and inter-group manner.

4.3 A Comparative Analysis

4.3.0 Introduction

Viewed from the perspective of postcolonial theory, the comparative model of analysis characteristically focuses on stylistic and thematic parallels that prevail among literatures of nations and regions; and issues of language and the struggle against oppression and discrimination make among its major concerns. Correspondingly, comparative thematic studies focus on concepts such as exile/dislocation, education, identity, and acculturation, among other things. Similarly, a comparison may be conducted intra-group (on texts contained within the same group) and/or inter-group (on texts across different groups). In connection with this, Ashcroft *et al.* (1989:29), state that the existence of shared themes and

recurrent structural and formal patterns [identified by the comparative approach] speaks for the shared psychic and historical conditions across the differences distinguishing one post-colonial society from another. As a result,

[A]ccounts of comparative features in postcolonial writing need to address the larger issues of how these literatures bear the imprint of the material forces of politics, economics, and culture which act upon them within the imperial framework, and of how this is bound up with the replacing of the imposed language in the new geographical and cultural context.

Thus, in keeping with this notion, the purpose of the comparative assessment here has been to determine existing thematic convergences and divergences in the texts under study. This, needless to say, is regardless of the fact that all of the narratives in question are written by diasporic writers of the same origin. Accordingly, when subjected to comparative examination, the two sets of texts (i.e. Dinaw's and Fasil's novels, and Hama Tuma's anthology in the first group, and Rebecca's and Maaza's narratives in the second), notwithstanding their generic variations, generally exhibit both thematic convergences and divergences. The same holds true also of the narratives contained within each group. Hence, this section compares and contrasts the texts under study, and attempts to explain the possible factors accounting for the observed correspondence and/or variance of thematic preoccupations. The section begins first by conducting intra-group analysis, followed by a similar analysis of texts across the two groups (inter-group).

4.3.1 Intra-Group Analysis

4.3.1.1 *Intra-Group Analysis of Group-A Texts*

In terms of similarities, the first feature that the four texts under Group-A have in common is, obviously, the fact that they depict immigrants' lived experiences and their sentiments in the context of their host countries, in this case the United States of America and Western Europe. In other words, the texts in this group as a whole are set in the Western world where also the authors live.

On the issue of thematic concerns, as discussed in Chapter 4, Sec.4.1.2, each of Dinaw's two novels, *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* and *How to Read the Air*, Fasil's *The Texture of Dreams*, and Hama Tuma's *Give Me a Dog's Life Any Day* generally deal with issues of disillusionment, the plight of immigrants as caused by a nexus of factors, the hypocrisy and double standards of the West, and the dilemma and identity crisis experienced by most immigrants, especially from Africa.

Accordingly, generally speaking, the diaspora's disillusioning experience in their new world in various respects are found succinctly captured in these texts. To elaborate, these experiences include their disappointment/disenchantment with the hopes, dreams (particularly of the 'American Dream'), and worldviews they had been nurturing for long before migrating to Europe and North America, their coming-to-terms with their (and by extension their country's) place or status in the context of the contemporary world order, as well as their shocking awareness of the true Western world with its hypocrisy and double standards. This last aspect is

most prominent and is treated most passionately, particularly in the fourth text, Hama Tuma's collection of satirical essays.

Again, the social and psychological trauma of immigrants is another prominent subject that is equally shared and treated particularly in direct manner by the three novels, and indirectly by the fourth text. The ordeals of the diaspora living in Europe and North America are drawn out in the novels in relation to a range of aspects as shown in Chapter 4 (Sec. 4.1.2.2). These facts are represented as they manifest or are caused by unfulfilled dreams (mainly the dream of pursuing tertiary-level education), the challenges of adaptation and language, boredom emanating from dullness of life, recurring homesickness and thoughts of painful experiences of the past, as well as racial prejudice and alienation and the concomitant feelings of being different and self-isolation. Along with these are issues of the dilemma of belongingness, or what is commonly referred to as identity crisis, that afflict countless diasporas that make up among the core issues raised in the texts under discussion. Similarly, the various mechanisms employed by immigrants as a means of escape from the persistent frustration and feeling of despair are also depicted in the texts. Accordingly, some turn to religions, daydreaming, alienate themselves even from their fellow immigrants or countrymen and in some cases, deny or hide their identities in a futile attempt to blend in with the host society or escape scrutiny.

At the same time, within this general commonality of themes raised in these texts, there are also certain variations, mainly in relation to the degree of coverage or



treatment some of the topics are given in the respective texts. As such, social and psychological trauma of immigrants, disillusionment with past dreams and ambitions as well as with the self (i.e. with one's past and present) are topics that are allocated an extensive and equally intensive exposure. This is mostly in Dinaw's two novels and Fasil's one novel. In Hama Tuma's essays, however, these issues emerge intermittently and in conjunction with other larger topics, and are thus tackled not as much.

Again, the theme of hypocrisy and double standards of the West is given greater coverage, in contrast to the other three novels in which the topic is raised in a roundabout approach. Concurrent with this is the variation in terms of the mode of treatment of this issue observed among the three novels and Hama Tuma's anthology. The current cultural hegemony and political and economic supremacy of the West and its double standards are reflected in the former narratives in a seemingly balanced way, while in the latter's case they seem to be treated with full of bitterness, frustration, and humour all rolled into one. As a matter of fact, all of the essays can be said to be a biting and sarcastic political and social criticisms aimed at a) the West in general and colonial Europe and the USA in particular, and b) African dictatorial regimes and the pathetic state of affairs in the continent.

Having seen the similarities and differences shared between the narratives in Group-A, we now move on to and examine the two texts in Group-B in a similar way.

4.3.1.2 Intra-Group Analysis of Group-B Texts

Taken as a whole, the salient features the two narratives in this group (i.e. *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*, and *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*) share are: a) the setting (the authors' homeland, Ethiopia), b) their generic category, and c) their heavy reliance on Ethiopian history or blending of history with their respective narratives. Thematically speaking, however, as discussed in Chapter 4, Sec. 4.2.2, the outstanding subject the two works have in common is the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution and its consequences, with similarities outweighing differences in this regard.

So the differences exhibited with regard to their respective treatment of the said topic, the 1974 revolution, as already mentioned, have to do mainly with three aspects: i) the specific time-period and location the stories are set in (*Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia* is set in Addis Ababa and north Ethiopia and covers the period from the eve of the revolution up to 2010 or up until the time the book was written), while *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* is set only in Addis Ababa and is limited to the 1970s); ii) the particular focus/emphasis (the former exploring Ethiopian socio-political and historical circumstances by and large, including the 1974 Ethiopian revolution, in relation to the present, and the latter concentrating exclusively on the revolution and the following tumultuous moments mainly the period of the Red Terror, 1976-1978), and iii) extent of treatment. Here *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia* retrospectively questions the worthwhileness of the event given the enthusiasm that was there for the revolution and the sheer

optimism regarding its outcome, the huge sacrifices paid, including its debilitating impact on land owners and mid- and upper class people, and the onslaught on activists that sparked off the flight of Ethiopians in an unparalleled number. Most importantly, this narrative critically assesses this historical event by comparing and contrasting it with the present socio-political reality in the country, and touches upon the theme of isolation and adaptation problems the writer faced as an immigrant in the USA, both of which are key issues that are lacking in its counterpart. Maaza's narrative, on the other hand, brings to the fore the social, economic and political factors instrumental in the outbreak of the revolution, assesses its consequences on the long-standing traditions, societal beliefs, assumptions and relationships at length, and depicts the fear reigning at the time in most graphic details. In addition, the fact that Rebecca's narrative weaves in Ethiopian history of resisting colonization while embracing its own, distinct, Christian traditions as well as its culture and landscape, sets it apart from the other works in either group. These differences could be attributed to the writers' apparent differences in terms of experiences or personal background respectively. Again, apart from these distinctions, another important variation is the inclusion of two other themes in Rebecca's travelogue/memoir, *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia* that are not found in Maaza's historical narrative, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. These are, as discussed in 4.2.2.1, the re-discovery of one's identity and origin and the rare subject of domestic racism –again attributable mainly to a differing background. To sum up, *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia* deals largely with issues of self-discovery or the rediscovery of one's true identity

and homeland (which makes it again distinctive in this respect), compares the past with the present, and offers some critical reflections on the current state of socio-political affairs in Ethiopia. On the other hand, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* is wholly set in the past, and can be said to be basically of a revisit of horrors and social chaos during the Ethiopian revolution in the 1970s. As such, its exclusive emphasis on this topic makes it unique among all the texts under study.

4.3.2 Inter-Group Analysis

4.3.2.0 Introduction

The purpose of engaging in group-wise comparative assessment, as briefly mentioned at the opening of this chapter, is primarily to determine any existing convergences and/or divergences in terms of thematic preoccupations in the texts under study, and to come up with possible explanations for emerging similarities and dissimilarities. Thus, the discussion in this section focuses on identifying the major convergent and divergent themes existing between the two groups of narratives under study.

To begin with and generally speaking, it can be said that the two groups (i.e. the texts classified in the two groups) are not thematically mutually exclusive *per se*, but bear both convergence and divergence of themes in one form or another. In other words, thematic differences existing between the groups are not the primary nor sole *raison d'être* for the classification of the six texts into two groups. For instance, as shown in Chapter 4, Section 4.1.2, the topics of disillusionment, social and psychological traumas of immigrants, isolation and racial discrimination,

dilemma and identity crisis, and coping mechanisms of immigrants make among the most dominant themes in Group-A. However, a number of these subjects, albeit to varying degrees of focus and magnitude, and in one form or another, are also raised in Group-B texts too as is shown below.

4.3.2.1 Disillusionment

Disillusionment in various forms and aspects is one of the primary topics shared by majority (5 out of 6) of the narratives in both groups. As discussed in the foregoing sections, these disillusioning experiences have to do with past dreams and ambition; with long-held beliefs, ideals and worldviews, as well as with one's (and one's country's) place/status in a wider context, and the hypocrisy and double standards of the West. The differences prevailing between the two categories on this theme is manifested in two forms. These are, as already pointed out, the particular perspective or dimension the narratives in the respective group employ and the manner (depth) of treatment. For Dinaw and Fasil, for instance, the disillusioning experiences relate mainly with the 'American Dream', the long-nurtured false notions of and hopes of the Ethiopian (as well as many other African) diaspora before coming to America. While in the case of Rebecca the disillusionment is with the myths and truths of one's own country and identity (see Section 4.2.2.1.1). In fact, in this regard, the only exception in which no mention of disillusioning experience in whatever form was represented is *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*.

4.3.2.2 *A Visit to the Past*

A trip to the past, or more precisely reliving past traumas, is another common theme shared by the two groups of texts. More specific in this respect is the 1974 Ethiopian revolution and the resultant 'Red Terror' in which hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians were jailed, maimed for life, or killed and/or banished. As was discussed before (see Ch.1, Sec.1.2 and Ch. 4, Sec. 4.2.2.2.1), the revolution was a historic moment that also resulted in a large-scale exodus of Ethiopians to Europe and North America. Due to this it continues to haunt countless Ethiopian diasporas and also occupies an important place in the literary works of most Ethiopian diasporic writers. In keeping with this notion, five out of the six texts in the two groups touch upon this historical period in relative depths and breadths.

The first possible reason for the predominance or omnipresence of this subject matter is the burden of mixed feelings of horror, shame, guilt, and regret many Ethiopians (especially of that generation) still seem to carry. The second possible reason for the writers' constant visit to this time-period could be for cathartic purposes, i.e. using it as a means of getting rid of or purging painful emotional experiences and achieving reconciliation with the past. Concurrent with these is the possible aim or interest of the authors to leaving a written testimony or record by chronicling the event so that it remains as one component of Ethiopian history.

Indeed, it can be said that the issue of social and psychological trauma suffered under the dictatorial *Derg* regime is raised in all of the books cutting across the two groups. Nevertheless, the subject is not treated as extensively and critically in

Dinaw's, Fasil's, and Hama's books as it is in Rebecca's and Maaza's memoirs. From start to finish, the hardship the characters (i.e. the author herself and/or her family members) endure keeps surfacing in *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*, while in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* the issue is consistent throughout the story. So much so that, as pointed out earlier, the latter narrative occupies the first place in its exclusive and singular devotion to this topic, while the other narratives deal with the topic with a relatively lesser degree of emphasis and frequency.

4.3.2.3 Racial Discrimination and Isolation

By the same token, the subject of racial discrimination and isolation as it manifests in various forms is another subject shared by five of the six texts across the two groups. This is again irrespective of variations in terms of the particular approach used (specific focus, perspectives or dimensions). For instance, in the texts in Group-A the discrimination experienced or depicted is race-based, or the typical Black/White paradigm, with only one deviation in Hama's anthology that includes the topic of discrimination as practiced by blacks against blacks; while in the case of Rebecca's narrative (Group-B) the prejudice portrayed is in an Ethiopian/African context as it manifests in the form of the disdainful attitude of lighter-skinned Ethiopians toward fellow (darker-skinned) Ethiopians. The fact that the latter narrative brings out this issue of skin colour or race-based discrimination that prevails in Ethiopia (and most likely in other African countries too) makes it unique.

As shown in Chapter 4, Sec.4.1.2.3, the race-based discrimination that is commonplace in the West in both overt and covert forms, is one of the common issues treated in post-colonial/diasporic literary works in general. In explaining the rationale behind the ubiquity of this issue in diasporic writings and the purpose served by it from the post-colonial perspective, in relation to diasporic writers in Great Britain, Williams (1999, citing Bhabha 1994: 312) states:

[the writing about race and racial relationships in Britain by black writers] is not an attempt to create a separate-but-equal narrative to run alongside the dominant cultural narrative of the nation, nor is it an attempt to assimilate the story of the 'Other' into the dominant narrative. Rather, it is an attempt to disrupt the narratives forged to define the dominant culture, to hybridize the discourse, to reconfigure the concept of all cultural identities as fluid and heterogeneous....The work of these writers endeavors to reconfigure these relations of dominance and resistance, to reposition both the dominant and the marginalized on the stage of cultural discourse, and to challenge the static borders of national and cultural identity.

Concomitant with this scenario are conflict of identity, self-isolation, and alterity that are often adopted by many immigrants who fail or are reluctant to acculturate or generally in response to racial discrimination and stigmatization. As mentioned before, they resort to seclusion and/or concealing of their true identities in order to protect themselves or find a temporary escape from the often unpleasant consequences of racial discrimination. This fact is found well depicted, albeit with differing magnitude and dimensions, across most of the narratives in the two groups as discussed below.

- *Conflict of Identity*

Conflict of identity, as shown in Ch. 4, Sec. 4.1.2.4, manifests in many aspects of the life of the diaspora and is an issue that finds its way through many diasporic narratives. Accordingly, this issue, as was the case with the three novels of Dinaw and Fasil respectively in Group-A, is also a topic shared by Rebecca's narrative in Group-B. She recounts the crisis of identity she encounters and the subsequent self-imposed isolation period she passes through as an alternative coping mechanism. The experience was severe particularly during her early years as an immigrant in America. The following extract serves as representative to illustrate this point. It depicts the author's inner conflicting thoughts or the dilemma she experiences by maintaining multiple identities in which she presents an American personality to the world while she clings to and cherishes her Ethiopian identity in private. She narrates:

....At the same time, I did not feel entirely American: I never felt at ease with the fundamental light-heartedness of my classmates or shared the sense of self-control and invincibility that seemed to underlie it. I struck a balance in which I displayed an American face to the world while I nurtured a private identification with Ethiopia that I kept mostly to myself. Held at a distance by the intervening years, by language and by culture, I felt farther and farther removed from our life in Ethiopia (16).

Isolation and Alterity

Similarly, isolation of immigrants—be it self-imposed or externally-induced—is another theme that is shared by five of the six novels in the two groups. Like many African diaspora living in a strange land and amid alien customs and traditions, the characters in the five narratives are seen at one time or another in their lives living in isolation. Some even go as far as disassociating themselves from their fellow immigrants too. It can be said that a nexus of both internal and external push factors underlie this action by the diaspora. The first and most obvious one has to do with their inner desire to cut themselves off from their unpleasant, often traumatic, past and its reminders, and so erect a protective shield around them. The second interrelated reason is their embarking on the road to self-discovery, thus needing the solitude for re-examination of their cultural identity/belongingness and sort out their confused feelings and sentiments. The end result of this is usually their trying to reconcile their past with their present, as depicted in majority of the concerned narratives. The present in this case represents their new habitat or host land, along with its new socio-cultural constructs and their present psycho-social state, while the past is what they used to be and dream about. As such, the isolation brought about as a result of both of these factors is a self-induced one. At the same time, there are also external factors which play an equally crucial role in pushing immigrants toward seclusion and/or alterity. These include, among other things, the disparaging and stereotypical feedback and misplaced hostility they often get from

host societies because of their race or origin, and/or their resistance to surrender their cultural identity by assimilating.

Allport (1954: 142, cited in Al-Issa and Tousignant 1997: 25) sums up the effects of racial discrimination by classifying them into two categories, which are: i) blaming the self, and ii) blaming external agents presumed to be responsible. As such the former (blaming oneself) manifests in "withdrawal, self-hate, aggression against one's own group" and the latter is directed against the outside and is characterized by "fighting back, suspicion, and increased group pride".

Expounding on the drive behind many immigrants' desire to keep alive their cultural identities and resisting assimilation in the context of West Europe *vis-a-vis* America, Mongo-Mboussa and Menash (1999:76), citing Moura, a prominent postcolonial French writer, write:

Unlike the French, the Anglo-Saxons do not claim to assimilate most of the immigrant communities' differences. People used to refer at one time to the American melting-pot, but those days are long since gone. There is, therefore, a sort of coexistence between the different cultures in the Anglo-Saxon countries. That has developed in the United States with what is called cultural studies, i.e. each immigrant community identifies with its roots first of all, not so as to deny the national ensemble, but to safeguard its identity, and to consolidate the relations between its identity and the general national culture.

Further, Bhabha (1994, cited in Ashcroft *et al.* 1998:170) also concisely captures this adaptation challenges and reason behind the preoccupation of postcolonial

writers with culture when he says: "culture as a strategy of survival is transnational and that is why contemporary postcolonial discourses and literatures are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement and relocation, whether they are the middle passage of slavery and indenture, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World".

So what has been observed so far is the fact that, in many cases, the isolation-or alterity (that "lack of identification with some part of one's personality or one's community, differentness, otherness") – is not solely driven by external factors alone, but is as much self-imposed. In fact, as Lye (2008) points out, the theory of Postcolonialism itself is built in large part around the concept of otherness. This otherness includes doubleness, both identity and difference, so that "every other, every different than and excluded by is dialectically created and includes the values and meaning of the colonizing culture even as it rejects its power to define".

Interestingly, studies indicate that the interest exhibited by the African diaspora in maintaining and asserting their cultural identity is not exceptional. It is met with equal resistance and counteraction on the *other* side to perpetuate the 'supremacy', 'homogeneity' and 'purity' of the White European culture. The following argument forwarded by Williams (1999) serves to wrap up this issue and close this subsection:

The idea of immigration itself... violates Britain's sense of its secure national borders. This perceived threat to national cohesion, in turn, challenges the cultural identity of the White Englishman as being homogenous and unitary. The response of the dominant culture to post-colonial immigration has been what Stuart Hall calls a "defensive exclusivism....an embattled defensiveness of a narrow, national definition of Englishness, of cultural identity" (177). From the National Front to Norman Tebbit's "cricket test" an enormous amount of ideological energy has gone into defining and safeguarding what the dominant culture sees as the end product of its national narrative: true Englishness—and Englishness, by extension is the default culture of the British state....

4.3.2.4 Concern about Homeland State of Affairs

As already mentioned (Chapter 4, Sec. 4.2.2.1.4), interest and involvement of the diaspora in socio-political and economic matters of their homelands has been established as one facet of the diasporic phenomena in the 21st century, and forming an integral element of diasporic literatures. Thus in keeping with this notion, this concern about state of affairs in the homeland is one of the major subjects covered in the majority of the texts across the two groups, regardless of variations in terms of scales of depth or width of treatment. In Dinaw's and Fasil's novels the topic is dealt with in a relatively indirect way, while in Hama's anthology and Rebecca's travelogue/memoire it is an issue that seems to stand out among the many others. Just as is the case with her euphoric account of her rediscovery of her identity, Rebecca unleashes without reservation her scathing views on what she calls "ethnic-based" and "misguided" politics of the Ethiopian government; Hama on his part critically assesses the deplorable state of African

countries (Ethiopia included), and ridicules African dictators who cling to power at any cost: "It is a characteristic of even poor and always vulgar African dictators with no material basis to go "IMPERIAL". They think they are always right, the Ayatollahs of Truth" (99). And in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* also, as demonstrated in the analysis section, this interest in socio-political affairs of the homeland is found represented mainly in relation to Ethiopian socio-political climate in the seventies. Apparently, Hama Tuma's preoccupation with state of affairs of Africa and Ethiopia is not a new one. In an article titled, "The Role and Ordeals of the African Writer" (2002, cited in Melakneh 2008:12) in which he underscores the responsibility African writers carry in bringing the grim reality of Africa to light, wrote:

The great expectations of the liberation from colonialism were rendered illusory by the neo-colonial machinations and the fact that the patriots who allegedly led the struggles ended up being pawns of the past colonizers. The hopes and aspirations were short-lived and crushed as the powerful killed the bearers and advocates of good days for Africa. From Lumumba to Cabral, and from Machel to Nkrumah, the fires were extinguished.

4.3.2.5 Social and Psychological Traumas of Immigrants

Last but not least, psycho-social problems faced by immigrants that are caused or exacerbated by various factors, which is one of the major themes of Group-A narratives, is also a topic shared in Rebecca's narrative in the second group. In describing the effect her dislocation has had on her life in the new land and the problems of acculturation and alienation she had to endure, Rebecca says:

My embrace of our new life was also impelled by feeling of being outside the mainstream of Ethiopian society. Once my family settled in the United States permanently, my sense of being distanced from other Ethiopians intensified. Early on in Minnesota, we came in contact with no other minorities of any kind, much less other Ethiopians. Since my parents were worried about our adjustment to our new country and its schools, they never insisted that we speak Amharic at home. 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 spoke Amharic infrequently and adopted a classic assimilationist approach to coping with our dislocation: in a stark irony for my father, who has dedicated his life to the study of Ethiopian language and literature, my two younger siblings speak no Amharic at all (15–16).

In the final analysis, three major points emerge from the comparative analysis so far. These are, in a nutshell, i) there is a remarkable degree of convergence of themes than divergence between the narratives of both groups; ii) three subject matters stand out in terms of the frequency and emphasis they are given; iii) the few differences that exist between the groups have to do primarily with genre setting, and the respective writer's orientation or disposition. These issues will be reviewed in detail and in relation to the study's objectives and theoretical framework in the "Summary of Main Findings" section of the following chapter.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since recent times there has been an increasing interest in diaspora studies world wide and an equally increasing number of literary and critical works dealing with African and Asian literatures in English produced by both African diasporas and non-diasporic scholars. However, of these, only a very few dealt directly with works of the Ethiopian diaspora in particular. In other words, there has been a noticeable gap in terms of critical studies in the area of Ethiopian literature in English both at home and in the diaspora. The end result of which was that literary works of Ethiopians in English have remained hidden and understudied. As such, the study was motivated by the need to address these major concerns in the area of Ethiopian literature in English in general and Ethiopian diasporic literature in particular. Within this general objective, the study set out to achieve the following objectives: i) critically and comparatively analyse selected writings of the Ethiopian diaspora in terms of content and establish any thematic convergences and divergences among them, ii) determine their conformity with or divergence from the general notions and principles of Post-colonial literary theory, with the parallel aim of testing the strict assumption of the Post-colonial approach, and iii) find feasible strategies for bringing to light and using selected works of the Ethiopian diaspora for the teaching/learning of literature courses in higher institutions in Ethiopia. Accordingly, in keeping with these aims, this study has selected and critically analysed six prose literary writings of varying genres written in English by the Ethiopian diaspora. The summary of the main findings of this

study, in correlation with its objectives and along with its recommendations, are presented as follows:

5.1 Summary of Main Findings

On the whole, five subject matters have emerged as the most dominant themes that traverse the Ethiopian diasporic narratives selected in this study. These are: i) disillusionment with various aspects and in various forms, ii) a visit to the past (painful past memories), iii) racial discrimination, along with conflict of identity and isolation, iv) interest or involvement in homeland state of affairs, and v) social and psychological traumas of immigrants. Of these, three stand out in terms of the weight or emphasis they are given. These are: i) racial discrimination, ii) conflict or crisis of identity, and iii) a revisit of the past (past traumas). Likewise, issues of hypocrisy and/or double standards of the West and its unrivalled supremacy, and concern about socio-political state of affairs in the homeland count among the topics that are given a relatively smaller degree of treatment or emphasis. In short, the study reveals that there is a remarkable degree of thematic convergence as well as a few divergences among the narratives analysed in this study.

The differences observed between the narratives (as revealed in the analysis of both in intra- and inter-group) are mainly pertaining to the setting, the degree of emphasis as well as manner of handling (including also of the style of language used) in relation to some of the themes covered in the texts. Accordingly, of the major factors that may be cited as responsible for these discrepancies, the most

important one is the type of specific setting or geographical backdrop the narratives are set in. In other words, the four texts in the first group are generally set in North America and Western Europe and thus naturally focus mainly on their diasporic experiences as they take place in the host lands. So topics that relate with their homeland, Ethiopia, are raised mostly alongside other similar topics and/or in relation to the direction of the plot. The exceptions are the two narratives contained in the second group that are at variance owing to the fact that they are almost exclusively set in Ethiopia and deal primarily with Ethiopia and Ethiopians. The next possible factor is the respective author's own choice or interest in picking a certain theme(s) over others, selecting or deciding on the specific dimension of the topic to be tackled and the perspective to adopt, as well as the degree of emphasis the topic deserves (which, in turn, may also depend on the writer's personal experience or background and theoretical orientation). The third possible factor may have to do with the question of readership or the type of audience the narratives were aimed at.

In terms of reasons underlying the thematic parallelism among the narratives, the most outstanding and obvious factor is the identity of the writers, i.e. their belonging to the general class of diasporic writers. This translates into the fact that, because they are all first and second generation immigrants, as is the case with most diasporic writers originating from other countries, they naturally undergo by and large similar experiences that will ultimately find expressions in their writings.

(This point is discussed more in relation to the Postcolonial literary theory, or the second objective of this study, below).

Viewed from the perspective of the Postcolonial literary theory in general, the prevalence of these subject matters in the selected literary writings of the Ethiopian diaspora makes the Ethiopian diasporic literature eligible to be included in the general realm Postcolonial/Diasporic literature. This is because, as pointed out frequently, the issues raised in the narratives in question are among the subjects typical (but not exclusive) of Postcolonial/Diasporic literatures. Even going further and comparing them with other diasporic works written by diasporas from colonized African and Asian countries confirms this point convincingly. Cases in point are the works of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ngugi Wa Tiongo which also raise many of the issues found in the writings of the Ethiopian diaspora analysed in the present study, including the last point, which is concern over homeland state of affairs. Here it might be important to expound this point a bit further. Contrary to some commonly held, mainly Eurocentric notions, postcolonial writers are not necessarily confined to subjects of the era of colonialism and the struggles made to abolish it. In fact, as argued by Paul Brians (2006), many postcolonial authors do not share the general orientation of postcolonial scholars toward engaging in an ongoing critique of colonialism. The best examples are Nigerian writers Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka who, for instance, "after writing powerful indictments of the British in their country, turned to exposing the deeds of native-born dictators and corrupt officials within their independent

homeland". In other words, most African as well as Indian diasporic writers in English no longer see the point of reusing the past to explain today's problems. As Brians (*Ibid.*) observes, the fact that modern fiction from formerly colonized nations is hardly preoccupied with the colonial past is quite plain to see.

This reality is unmistakably substantiated by the thematic preoccupations and significant parallelism found in the writings selected in this study. As revealed in the analysis chapter, "exposing the deeds of native-born dictators and corrupt officials within their independent homeland" is also one of the engagements of most of these Ethiopian diasporic writers. Again, some themes (e.g. conflict of identity, self-isolation, and alterity) that are considered common in diasporic writings in general, are also the concerns of most of the texts under study. For instance in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* it is depicted in the thoughts and actions as well as mindset of the three major characters, two from a formerly colonized countries and one from a non-colonized country; in *How to Read the Air*, through the American-born Jonas whose life is dominated by the search for the illusive self and retracing of his roots (or the identity of his parents who were first-generation immigrants); and in *The Texture of Dreams* and *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*, through the protagonists Yosef and Rebecca, respectively, as well as other minor characters representing both colonised and non-colonised countries undergo similar experiences of culture shock, alienation/racial discrimination, as well as crisis of identity and the constant yearning for one's true home. This is irrespective of the hybridity observed in some

of the narratives (particularly in *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*, *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, and *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*), which is a mixing together of indigenous and Western mode of writing that is also typical of most postcolonial/diasporic literatures. This is evinced in the three narratives by the use of non-English (local) terms and expressions (e.g. *Emama* (a title used before the name of elderly women), *Tukul* (small thatch-roofed huts), *dabo* (loaf of bread), *Igziabher yawkal* (God willing), *Tadias* (Hello), *wot* (kind of stew), etc.) mixed with English language. In fact these writers are not the first Ethiopians to make use of this technique, as it has been used before by a famous Ethiopian writer, Dagnachew Worku, decades earlier. As Melakneh (2008:41) puts forth, "Dagnachew fits well into the post-colonial paradigm due to his textual strategy such as introducing editorial intrusions in which case translated and untranslated vernacular diction is incorporated into his novel with a glossary of terms". This also fits well with the postcolonial theory, particularly with one of the strategies of appropriation of colonial languages. It ascribes the employment of indigenous dictions by the subaltern (postcolonial writer) as "an agent of resistance against, rather than compliance with the very discourse that has created its subordinate identity" (Abrams 1999:237). So, on the whole, the findings in this study refute the narrow paradigmatic interpretation of postcolonialism as applicable only to diasporas from formerly colonised nations. One simple and obvious case in point in this regard is that, how, in the present scheme of things, literal colonization (however brief, lengthy, or still existing) or non-colonization of a country has hardly any bearing on literatures produced today by people from the so-called

"Third World" countries. To reiterate once again, and wrap up this issue, the findings here confirm that, regardless of their original location or socio-historical (including literal colonisation or not) or geographical peculiarities, diasporas in the Western world go through, by and large, similar experiences of disillusionment, problems of adaptation, isolation and racial discrimination or segregation, and dilemma and identity crisis. And these, often traumatic, experiences predictably manifest in their writings. In fact, it is said that Homi Bhabha (1984) developed the term "hybridity" so as to capture the sense that many diasporic writers from the developing world have of belonging to both cultures. The end result then is that literary works produced by writers of the Black or Asian diaspora generally exhibit thematic (and stylistic) parallelism. As well, as Melakneh (2008:73) points out, "...Afrocentric critics and writers like Moore (1969), Ngugi (1972) and Griffiths (1978) capitalize on similarities between writings within the Black Diaspora. Such an approach [comparative approach] reveals thematic parallels across Diasporic literatures in English...all of which could be attributed to the shared psychic and historical conditions".

Finally, there are indications in the writings to suggest the writers having mixed feelings that combine both affection and distaste pertaining to their life as a diaspora in host countries. In other words, the fact that they cherish and relish the privileges of the countries they live in while at the same time resist surrendering (total assimilation) is reflected in their works. In this sense, it may be said that their literature by and large is a literature of ambivalence rather than of certainty, a voice

of privilege *vis-à-vis* denial, and of a journey to rediscovery of the self. But since it may be difficult to be conclusive at this stage, the point might serve as an important springboard for future researchers to investigate deeper and reach conclusions. Similarly, the gap the present study tried to address could also benefit a lot if future studies in the area focused on assessment of Ethiopian diasporic works by comparing them with those of diasporas from other non-colonised nations, and with writings produced locally in similar language(s) by non-diasporic (native) Ethiopian as well as other African writers.

5.2 Recommendations

One of the strategies that the study recommends for bringing to light literary works of the Ethiopian diaspora in English language is by incorporating them with the syllabuses of African literature in English language, and using them in the teaching/learning of African literature courses in higher institutions in Ethiopia. This will have an added advantage of motivating students to write in English (as much as in local languages).

The first measure would be working on disseminating or publicising all newly released publications using the print as well as electronic media both locally and internationally. This can be done by the concerned ministry at the local level (e.g. the Ministry of Education) in collaboration with the writers and their agents, and relevant institutions inside the country. These institutions may include, universities

and colleges, cultural centres (both Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian) and event organisers, as well as the Ministry of Information for accessing the media under it. The publicity strategies and forums may target and include literary circles and forums in schools, tertiary-level educational institutions, as well as newspapers and periodicals and radio and TV programmes that have to do with literary and cultural issues.

The Ministry of Education and the Agency for Relevance and Quality of Higher Education need to take steps to make selected works of Ethiopians in English (both at the diaspora and inside) and critical works as well available and easily accessible. This can be done, alongside the dissemination and publicising strategy, by putting them in libraries of universities both private and government-owned. This will help alleviate the current problem of paucity in Ethiopian literary works in English and serve as good resources pertaining to Ethiopian literary works in English language needed by researchers, academicians, students, and institutions both within and outside Ethiopia. In this regard, the Ministry of Education should take the initiative to ensure that relevant departments and instructors at universities and colleges in the country include writings of the Ethiopian diaspora in English language as course materials or requirements in syllabuses of English literature and African literature courses. What is being suggested here is not something unusual or extraordinary. Following the resolution of the Dakar Conference (1963) that agreed upon the immediate incorporation of African literatures into the literature syllabuses of all universities and secondary schools in Africa, many institutions

have taken steps to that end and integrated Africans' literary works (in both African and European languages) with their syllabuses (Moore 1965: 141). In Ethiopia, however, only literatures of Ethiopians written in Amharic or other local languages have so far formed part of the language syllabuses in universities.

Similarly, both students and instructors should be encouraged to read, and to encourage others to read Ethiopian diasporic literary works in English as they are doing with works of other African diasporic writers.

Finally, these actions, in addition to integrating works of the Ethiopian diaspora with mainstream Ethiopian literature, will contribute greatly to the overall development of literature in Ethiopia that is on par with that of other African countries.

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