



**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND
LITERATURE**

**THE PREDICAMENT OF THE DIASPORA AS REFLECTED
IN *THE TEXTURE OF DREAMS* AND *THE BEAUTIFUL
THINGS THAT HEAVEN BEARS***

**BY
ENDALKACHEW HAILU**

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APPROVED BY: BOARD OF EXAMINERS

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Abstract

*The research study has four major chapters. The first chapter shows that the research sets out to fill the gap in the critical literatures of the country regarding Diaspora or migrant literature through a thematic analysis of Fasil's **The Texture of Dreams** (2005) and Dinaw's **The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears** (2007). The meaning and thematic preoccupations of migrant /Diaspora literature are also described in the background to the study section of this chapter. Chapter two reviews studies on Ethiopian English novels and relevant theoretical issues relating to the Diaspora and its predicament. The third chapter presents a thorough thematic analysis of the major themes in the two novels under the sections woes of the homeland, woes in the host land, sub-themes and divergent themes. These include economic and political woes of the homeland, disillusionment, frustration, emptiness, homesickness, racism and discrimination, nostalgia, loss, acculturation and lust for love. The findings of the study are the similarity, despite differences of approach, of the two novels in revealing the overarching themes of displacement and emptiness in the lives of the Ethiopian/African Diaspora sharing same concerns of racism and discrimination with other black Diaspora writers.*

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Following the Second World War and colonization, millions of people migrated to the Western countries like the USA legally or illegally in search of a better future. These often included third world migrants running away from the tyranny of dictatorial governments in their motherland.

Ethiopian immigrants started migrating to the West following the 1974 coup. Prior to the coup, there were very small numbers of Ethiopians living in the West. According to Hodes (1997) “immigration to the West began in 1980, with the greatest number of Ethiopians coming to the US from 1983-1993”. In addition, operation Moses (1985) and operation Solomon (1991) took more than 55,000 Ethiopian Jews (Falashas) to Israel (Charles Kemp, FNP, FAAN. www3.baylor.edu/charles_kemp/Ethiopian_Refugees.htm). Most Ethiopians in the US are from urban backgrounds and inhabit the “large urban areas on the east and west coasts as well as in Houston and Dallas”(Ibid)

These Ethiopians, like many other immigrant communities, “are victims of circumstances and events quite beyond their control that have in many instances caused untold and unimaginable misery pain and trauma” (Lohrentz 2004:3). Examples of these are the red/white terror of the 1970’s, the accompanying famine and draught, war and forced military service and risky and dangerous migrations to the neighboring countries. Such traumatic experiences are recorded by the likes of Nega Mezlekia who in his autobiography *Notes from the Hyena’s Belly* (2001) depicts the tyranny of the Derg, famine and drought, the Ethio-Somali war and their effect on the youth. A similar work is *Of Beetles and Angels: A True Story of the American Dream* (2001) by Maui Asgedom. It tells the story of “an Ethiopian/Eritrean youth, Maui Asgedom, who left his country at the young age of three to escape civil war, emigrated to U.S....” and later graduated from Harvard university with an honorable degree (Ibid:6). Others include: the series *In their Own Voices* (1997) which has a chapter entitled “Teenage

Refugees from Ethiopia Speak Out” containing the stories of young Ethiopian immigrants; the children’s book ***Far-away Home*** (2000) by Kurtz and Lewis which narrates the story of an Ethiopian émigré family living in US (Ibid:6-7) and the novels ***The Texture of Dreams*** (2005) by Fasil Yitbarek about an Ethiopian immigrants life in New York, ***The God Who Begot a Jackal*** by Nega Mezlekia(2002) about feudalism in Ethiopia,and ***The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*** (2007) by Dinaw Mengistu about the sufferings of a ed terror victim in the USA.

Eventhough Ethiopians in the Diaspora have produced literary works like those mentioned above, their works have been marginalized and denied the critical attention they deserve from literary critics in Ethiopia. The unavailability of most of the works in Ethiopia may have something to do with this, but in this age of globalization it won’t be a satisfying excuse.

At the turn of the century, novels in English which seemed to have stopped coming from Ethiopian authors since Sahle-Sellassie Berhane-Mariam, Dagnachew Worku, and Abe Gubegna (1960’s and 70’s) have re-emerged on the other side of the globe. The prominent ones included Nega Mezlekia’s ***The God Who Begot a Jackal*** (2002), Fasil Yitbarek’s ***The Texture of Dreams*** (2005) and Dinaw Mengistu’s ***The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*** (2007). These novels seem to have passed the test in their host country as they have won literary awards in the USA and Canada and become subjects of many literary articles and book reviews in those countries.

The famous magazine, **Guardian**, for examples has awarded Dinaw Mengistu *The Guardian First Book Award* with £10,000 for “[h]is clean, sparse sentences and ability to deal with tragedy in a controlled and meticulous way” in his novel ***The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*** (2007) (www.guardian.Co.uk, Wednesday, December 5, 2007). ***The Texture of Dreams*** (2005) received praise from critics and literary editors in the US. The online magazines of Ethiopian Americans like tadias.com and Elelta.com also appeared with critical reviews and blogs about the novel. Though it is not a novel Nega Mezlekia’s ***Notes from the Hyenas Belly*** (2001) won the Canadian

Governor General's Award as A *Library Journal* Best Book of 2001, despite the disputes of authorship with his editor (www.amazone.com).

As these works were ignored in the past, the researcher has selected ***The Texture of Dreams*** (2005) and ***The Beautiful things that Heaven Bears*** (2007), to find out through a thematic analysis how successfully they have represented the predicament of the Diaspora. These two novels are selected because they are novels unlike Nega Mezlekia's biography (***Notes from the Hyna's Belly***) and they deal with the Diaspora unlike Nega's novel that is set in 18th century Ethiopia (***The God Who Begot a Jackal***).

1.2. Background to the Study

A cursory review of the two novels mentioned above reveals the fact that those Ethiopian immigrants who grew up in Ethiopia feel to a certain extent detached from the host nation and tend to be haunted by their experiences in their motherland. This is a characteristic feature of what came to be known as migrant literature.

Migrant literature is the name given to writings by and to some extent reflecting the effects and experiences of migration (www.wikipedia.com). According to Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, most of the research works on migrant literature have focused mainly on:

the principal channels of mass-migration in the twentieth century. These include: European migration to North America or Australia; migration from former colonies to Europe (Black-British literature, British-Asian literature, French Beur-literature); literature in the context of guest-worker programs (Turks, Italians or Greeks in Germany and Holland); exile literature such as that of exiled German dissidents during the Nazi period ([www. wikepeida.com/ migrant/literature/encyclopedia.. htm](http://www.wikepeida.com/migrant/literature/encyclopedia..htm)).

This delimitation of the studies is due to a logo-centric thinking and fails to encompass the literatures of third world migrants to America, Oceania or other Asian, African or Latin American countries by focusing on the logos - Europe. So long as the essence of migrant literature is the experience of

migrancy, the literatures of African and other third world migrant communities should be studied as part of migrant literature.

Migrant literatures may be about life in the host country, life in the motherland or life during the exodus but written by an immigrant. The essential element of migrant literature is the immigrant perspective (Ibid). The thematic concerns of migrant literature are often...

on the social contexts in the migrant's country of origin which prompt them to leave, on the experience of migration itself, on the mixed reception which they may receive in the country of arrival, on experiences of racism and hostility, and on the sense of rootlessness and the search for identity which can result from displacement and cultural diversity (Ibid).

These thematic concerns of migrant literature more or less overlap with those of post-colonial literatures. This is especially true of migrant literature produced by immigrants of formerly colonized and/or presently neocolonized third world nations. The only difference in those cases is that the migrant writer is in the metropolis instead of home and is writing from there about the life, experiences and memories of the Diaspora. Displacement, for example, was there during colonization resulting from cultural imposition and still exists due to neocolonization and globalization (Europeanization). Max Dorsinville (1997; 1983), for example has proposed the relationship between the dominated and the dominating as the underlying comparative approach to all literature. His approach was used for post-colonial literature because of the colonizer (dominating) and colonized (dominated) relation in it (Ashcroft et al 1989:32). It can also be adopted for majority and minority relations between the indigenous and the immigrant. Therefore, migrant literature shares this basic issue of dominance with post-colonial literature. And this has led to the adoption of some standard categories of post-colonial theory for describing migrant literature (Ibid). Among these categories are displacement, disillusionment, location between cultures (DissemiNation) and hybridity.

Other categorizations used in the study of migrant literature are guest and host communities or **Gastarbeiter** first used by Rafik Schami (1978);

emigrant versus immigrant perspective relating to levels of acculturation; primary and secondary migration; and first and second generation migrants (based on birth in the country of origin or host country). These are all attempts to compare between different groups of immigrants and between immigrants and the indigenous people (Ibid).

They are all not far away from the post-modern situation. Imperialist power and the neocolonized during post-independence period, and cultural imposition through control of international institutions like NGO's, sources of funds/money like IMF, centers of educational excellence, international electronic media etc., at present in developing countries are all similar to the majority whites v/s the minority immigrants/Diaspora situation in the West. In addition, cultural conflicts, discrimination, alienation, identity crisis, generation gap etc., which characterize migrant/diasporic literature, all fit well to the concepts used to describe post-modern literature. The themes of the migrant literature of Africa, by extension – Ethiopia, can therefore be successfully studied with the concepts of migrancy, diaspora, displacement and related concepts adopted from post-modernism.

However, it must be understood that some concepts of post colonialism are adopted officially in the fields of Diaspora studies or migrant literature does not mean the fields are not mutually exclusive. It is based on this understanding that the studied novels' themes will be analyzed from the point of view of the concepts of the Diaspora and related post-modern/post-colonial concepts such as migrancy displacement, hybridity, desimination, exile and the critical model of thematic parallels.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

As mentioned in the above sections there is a gap in the research on Ethiopian literature. This is the gap opened by the total absence of works on Ethiopian migrant/Diaspora literature. The researcher thus attempts to fill

this gap partially by carrying out an analysis of the major themes of the two diasporic novels focusing on the predicament of the Diaspora.

And in order to analyze this predicament, the researcher tries to answer the following questions in the review of literature section: What is the predicament that an immigrant faces in a foreign country? What do theories of Diaspora, race and ethnic relations and related concepts of post-modernisms say about the situation of the Diaspora and migrant literature in general? And how do the relevant theories of psychology (e.g. psychopathology, stress, anxiety etc), anthropology (racism, acculturation, prejudice, discrimination etc), and post-modernisms describe the situation of the immigrant?

After answering these theoretical questions and establishing parameters and categories of analysis, the following research questions will be answered in the analysis section.

1. What are the major themes of the two diasporic novels?
2. What are the thematic parallels and divergences between the two diasporic novels?
3. Are the common predicaments of the Diaspora identified in the review of literature section faced by the characters in the novels, especially Ethiopian characters?
4. Do the major themes of the novels successfully depict the predicaments of the Diaspora? If so to what extent?
5. How do the subject characters react to the predicaments (e.g. to discrimination or alienation)? Is this theme of reaction foregrounded in the works?
6. Do the two works have thematic priorities that make them distinctively Ethiopian?

In short, the study tries to identify the major predicaments of the African and Ethiopian immigrant characters in the novels. It also tries to find out if the

works show a cultural distinctiveness through pre-occupation with certain themes which are peculiarly African or Ethiopian.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The research study has the following general and specific objectives.

General Objectives

1. To identify, describe and analyze the psychological, economic and socio-cultural predicaments of the Diaspora in the themes of the two novels.
2. To analyze the effects of the predicaments on the subject characters in the novels.
3. To find out whether there are themes which are distinctively African or Ethiopian.

Specific Objectives

1. Identifying the major themes of the two novels and describing themes of migrants' predicaments.
2. Finding out whether the common predicaments of the Diaspora are equally applicable to the Ethiopian Diaspora.
3. Describing and analyzing the various predicaments in which the subject characters find themselves, with extracts from the two novels.
4. Showing the various ways through which the predicaments and their effects are revealed in the texts.

1.5. Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this research textual analysis will be used together with relevant conceptual tools from Diaspora studies, post-colonialism and post structuralism (postmodernism). In the textual analysis, linguistic evidences from the text will inform all the judgments and conclusions arrived at. Thematic parallels between the two novels will be

identified and compared. The selection of extracts from each novel will be made representative of the whole novel as much as possible.

1.6. Significance of the Study

The research study will give a critical understanding of the thematic preoccupations of Ethiopian diasporic literature. It also introduces this hitherto ignored branch of Ethiopian literature to Ethiopian literary scholars and by so doing provides an opportunity to conduct further research in the area. The research gives teachers the chance to teach English literature by using the two novels whose contents are nearer to Ethiopian students and are thus motivating.

The results of this research could also serve as informative to historians and literary critics interested in the Ethiopian Diaspora. In addition, anthropologists and social psychologists may find it relevant. It can also serve to prove or disprove the myth that Ethiopians are immune to the black experience and the myth that USA is a heaven on earth.

Lastly, future researchers working on related topics may find it useful as a springboard.

CHAPTER TWO -LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Review of Related Works

Ethiopian literature in English suffers from scarcity. And this becomes even more apparent when it comes to Ethiopian novels in English. This may be because the novel is not a popular genre in Ethiopia even in Amharic. And as no foreign language ever became an official language in Ethiopia, unlike other African nations, English is totally alien to Ethiopian writers except the well – educated few. It is due to these two factors that English novels by Ethiopian authors are scarce.

Debebe Seifu (1980) addressing this same issue gave two reasons, i.e. that “Ethiopian writers have a strong literary background in Amharic that disallows them to resort to or, at least, give an undivided attention to writing in English” and that “English has not been given much emphasis in Ethiopian schools” resulting in the absence of a good command of English which disabled writers who might have otherwise written in English (Debebe, 1980:3). Another researcher Mesfin Adinew (2000) agreeing with Debebe’s reasons says that the few successful writers who published their works in the 1960’s and 70’s are those who got educated abroad or at home beyond the tertiary level (Mesfin, 2000:10). Dagniachew Worku, Sahle – Sellaise, Ashenafi Kebede, Abbie Gubegna - all fall under Mesfins category of ‘the new elite’ i.e. the educated who came after the massacre of the pre-war elite by the Italian fascists (Ibid).

The momentary upsurge in the production of Ethiopian English novels which started in the 1960’s and ended at the end of the 70’s included among others Sahle Sellassie Berhane Mariam’s *The Afersata*, *Warrior King*, *Firebrands* and *Shinega’s Village*. The themes of *Shinega’s Village* and *The Afersata* are the culture and life of the Gurage people. Debebe (1980) criticizes *The Afersata* of poorly built plot structure and the absence of a focalizing central theme. But Debebe appreciates its “simple and clear English” (Ibid: 17-21).

Warrior King (1974) is a historical novel about king Tewodros II and how he came to power. And its major themes, according to Debebe (1980), are the personality of Kassa (Tewodros) and the rebuilding of the Ethiopian empire (Ibid: 25). Debebe criticizes Sahle Sellassie of providing a one-sided portrayal of Kassa (Tewodros) emphasizing his good/positive qualities over the negative ones (Ibid). Unlike Debebe, Taye Assefa (1980) finds the image of Kassa in the **Warrior King** (1974) realistic as it shows Kassa's claims of commitment to Ethiopia's unity through his enthusiastic speeches and his lust for power through his unceremonious deeds (33-35). Judging the portrayal of Kassa as realistic or not could depend on one's parameters of realism but Taye is more convincing with the arguments and supportive extracts he provides to readers (Ibid: 33-35). According to Taye (1980) the purpose of the novel, i.e. refuting the "popular myth" that there are some families blessed to rule and many others cursed to be ruled, is successfully achieved. And it is this myth and its undoing that is the theme of the novel (Ibid: 35).

Firebrands (1979), another novel by Sahle Sellassie, has for its thematic focus corruption and disillusionment. But, according to Debebe (1980), even though the theme of corruption is well brought out, the themes of change and disillusionment are not successfully portrayed (38). Mesfin (2000) identifies this novel as marking the end of the promising trend of Ethiopian English novels of the 60's and 70's (14).

Dagnachew Worku came up with **The Thirteenth Sun** (1973) which became quite a surprise excelling both in form and content. Its major themes, according to Debebe, are "corruption, exploitation, degradation, despair and remorse" in the feudo – bourgeoisie Ethiopia (1980:42). And according to Teklu Minas (1983) thematically the novel tries to show the Ethiopian society on the eve of the February 1974 revolution as "a society in which traditional forces are in conflict both with each other and with modern influences" (24). Teklu sees the whole novel as symbolic of Ethiopia and its title as ironic. Thirteen months of darkness in feudalism is what the title satirically suggests according to him and the characters are all symbolic. Fitawrary Woldu symbolizes emperor Hail Selassie I or the "change resistant and tradition

bound old social system”; while the clergy of Zekwala represent the Orthodox Church. The conjure woman symbolizes superstition or traditional beliefs and Goytom represents the conscious young Ethiopians who are progressive and radicals. The peasant characters with their ignorance and worshipful tendencies towards authority represent the illiterate Ethiopian broad mass. Finally, Woynitu is a representation of the slightly educated Ethiopian girls who end up being co-wives of the haves. And it is the conflict between these symbolic constituents of Ethiopia at the coming of modernization that is the overarching theme of the novel. To sum up, the disintegration of “the old social system” is its major theme (Teklu 1983: 24-36).

Another novelist Abbie Gubegna published ***Defiance*** (1975) which dealt with the theme of Ethiopia’s resistance to Italian occupation. Themes of defiance, disunity and unified resistance are the major themes of the novel, according to Debebe (1980: 63-69). Debebe criticizes the novel for its language which “lacks refinement and maturity” (Ibid: 73) Abbie Gubegna has also published ***The Savage Girl*** which is a translation of his earlier Amharic fiction ***‘Keltamawa Ehite’***.

Defend the Name (1969) by Wolde Haile focuses on the theme of colonialism, but seems to lack good organization as a work of art (Debebe 1980:80).

Ashenafi Kebede’s ***Confession*** (1965), often claimed to be the first Ethiopian English novel, deals with the themes of “racial prejudices and conflicts” (Ibid: 74). The novel shows how an Ethiopian who is not aware of the socio – historical constructs ,black and white, falls in love with a white girl in the color conscious America and how their love life ends miserably due to discrimination and prejudice (Ibid:74). This novel, which is very similar to diasporic novels, shows how the indifferent air an Ethiopian shows towards racism and discrimination gets slowly undone. The protagonist Ethiopian character faces the fact that he is considered inferior by the parents and tribes of his fiancé and suffers from ‘humility, despair and identity crisis’ (Ibid: 75-76). Themes of homesickness and loneliness are also depicted in the novel (Ibid: 76-77).

The works reviewed above together with some works of translation in the contemporary era and the works of the Ethiopian Diaspora constitute the very few Ethiopian English novels. Most of these are written by Western educated Ethiopians. And the Ethiopian Diaspora novelists are similar to them in this respect. But the Ethiopian diasporic novels did not become subjects of literary research in Ethiopia and this research tries to initiate such research by analyzing two diasporic novels.

But, before that, some book reviews and feature articles which appeared on the literary columns of some Western electronic magazines such as The Washington Post, Entertainment Weekly, and The New York Times regarding Dinaw's novel under study here deserve to be reviewed.

In The Washington Post, Bob Thompson wrote the article "Indelible Images of a Place Unseen" which dealt with ***The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*** (2007)(www.washingtonpost.com. Thursday, March 1, 2007:col). According to Thompson, there are biographic parallels between the writer, Mengistu, and the protagonist Stephanos of the novel because both migrated to the US running away from the horrors of the Dergue. But there are significant differences too. Mengistu was two when he came to USA and it is his uncle who was killed by PMAC (Provisional Military Administrative Council), while Stephanos was seventeen and it is his father who got killed in his presence. These parallels show, according to Thomson, that the haunting horrible experiences of the home that press immigrants for outlets often come out as fiction as is the case with Mengistu. Thomposn also finds themes of identity seeking, longing for home, loneliness or emotional exile and dislocation in the novel (Ibid: 1-3).

Jenifer Reese on a book review of the novel on the Entertainment Weekly considers the novel a melancholic review of "America's cherished immigrant narrative – that triumphant tale of striving and assimilation, of quaint old world traditions giving way to the enticements of the new..." (www.entertainmentweekly.com, February 23, 2007). Reese also comments on

the author's style of communicating through what is left unsaid and the emotional uninvolvedness of the protagonist emphasizing silence as a shelter most immigrants take from their unpleasurable 'pasts' and 'presents' (Ibid: 1-3).

Another book review by Rob Nixion who is a professor of English at the University of Wisconsin appeared on the The New York Times on March 25, 2007. In this review Nixion considers 'departure' and 'arrival' and the space in between them as a condition describing the protagonist of the novel (www.thenewyorktimes.com, March 25, 2007:2-4). It is this tragedy of hanging between nations and how immigrants live with it that is the novel's theme according to Nixion (Ibid: 4) Nixion also identifies the solace of friendship between "men and women suspended between continents; suspended, too, between memory and forgetting" and its soothing effect as a major theme in the novel (Ibid). The novel in general is about "the architecture of hope and memory" as experienced by three African immigrants: Stephanos (Ethiopia) Joe (Congo) and Ken (Kenya) (Ibid).

In conclusion, 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.

2.2.The Theory of Diaspora

2.2.1. Introduction

Diaspora studies is a field struggling with the following issues, according to Susan S. Friedman's proposal "Migration and Diaspora: Cultural Theory of Representation" (2008:2),

"The multiple meanings and models of diaspora and migration; the relation of migration and diaspora to conquest, colonialism, post-colonialism, refugeesism, political exile, etc; the heterogeneity of diasporic groups, especially by gender, class, sexuality, caste, religion (etc); the problematic and potentials of assimilation, acculturation, and transculturation, nativism and the hostility of host lands, generational conflicts and continuities in the (re)

production of culture; the role of language and other cultural practices in migratory experiences; the significance of memory for the production of what Salman Rushdi calls “imaginary homelands”; the phenomenological dimensions of migration and diaspora (loss, between worlds, nostalgia) depression, exhilaration etc); etc. ”

And a field like this hardly fits itself to the limiting and centering powers of definitions and theories. That is why there are a lot of arguments between scholars as to what ‘Diaspora’ and ‘Diaspora studies’ mean: Diaspora as located between cultures and between majority and minority, nation and non-nation, citizen and foreigner, original and hybrid often goes beyond the centering theories of humanities. Before discussing the various arguments about Diaspora, different definitions of the term must be considered.

2.2.2. Defining Diaspora

The 1989 Oxford English Dictionary “traces the etymology of the word ‘Diaspora’ back to its Greek root and to its appearance in the Old Testament (Deut. 28:25).” And it considers the word as a reference to “God’s intentions for the people of Israel to be ‘dispersed’ across the world” (Leong Yew. <http://www.usp.nus.edu.sg/post/diaspora/theory.html>). In the 1993 edition, “Diaspora” is defined as referring to “any body of people living outside their traditional homeland” revising the former definition of the term as exclusively applicable to Israelis or Jews (Ibid). And the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (1995) defines Diaspora as “the process by which people of a particular nation become scattered and settle in other countries, especially (the Diaspora) the Jews who left ancient Palestine in this way” (320). The obsession with the classical case of the Israeli Diaspora and the identification of the word as representative of an immigrant community and its process of formation which the above definitions show point to the need of distinguishing between these meanings for a fruitful discussion. For the purpose of this research the capitalized “Diaspora” will be used to refer to the people and the lower case “diaspora” to refer to the process and other theoretical aspects of the term except in quoted literature.

Ashcroft et al. in their ***Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies*** (1998) define diaspora as “the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions ...” (68). And they use the term in the context of Western or European colonization. Their definition seems to be especially remodeled for colonial and post – colonial contexts.

A historian by the name Sathis Georgouris (www.eh.net/XIII/Congress/cd/papers/10_Gourgouris_390.pdf,2008) showed a similar emphasis to the constant ,mobility, in his research article “The Concept of Diaspora in the Contemporary World”. He argues that historically Diasporas are the results of migration, whatever the case. And because they don’t have to be bounded by the economic, political, historical etc., limits of any state, they are always on the move seeking better gains as entrepreneurs. And it is this historical mobility and the ability to surpass the institutional operatives of capitalism that made them economically successful “diasporic entrepreneurial networks”. And this made them to stick together and form “the articulate image of social – ethnic cohesion” (Ibid:8).

Georgouris concludes asserting that diasporic communities should not be viewed as traces of a national community but rather as results of their own dispersal /mobility under specific historical conditions (political, economic, sociological, psychological, cultural). Accordingly not every immigrant community is truly Diaspora except those who share a strong ancestral center and linkage with each other in their movements in the hostlands (Ibid: 3). Georgouris gives as examples Jews, Greeks, and Armenian failing to extend his analysis outside Europe.

Another European scholar, Dr. Myria Georgiou, defines diaspora as “an intermediate concept between the local and the global that nevertheless transcends the national perspectives” quoting Gillespe (1965: 6) (Georgiou 2001: 1). And it implies ...

“a decentralized relation to ethnicity, real or imagined relations between scattered people who sustain a sense of community through various forms of communication and contact and who do not necessarily depend on returning to a distant Homeland (Peters 1999 quoted in ibid)”.

Beyond dualisms and socio-historical constructs- outside the nation - ethnicity becomes too frail to hold on to. And the nation is no longer limited in its geographical boundaries. Its dispersed people interact whether in reality or in imagination and sustain a diasporic community. This is fitting to the Ethiopian Diaspora in the USA except for the issue of ethnicity which is debatable.

An article entitled “Diasporas: Some Conceptual Considerations” by Fred W. Riggs (www2.Hawaii.edu/~fredr/diacon.htm, 23 December 2000) defines Diaspora as “communities whose members live informally outside a homeland while maintaining active contacts with it” (Ibid). The word ‘informally’ excludes people having a formal status such as “soldiers, diplomats, missionaries, businessmen, journalists, spies etc” who are agents of the state or non-state entities in the homeland. The other criterion ‘active’ refers to the maintenance of interactive relationship (Ibid). But maintenance of contact in the homeland may exclude latent diasporans with the potential to be active (Ibid).

Conceptually “diaspora highlights the existence of transnational networks of people and their sense of belonging in communities beyond spatial boundaries” (Georgiou 2001:1). It also implies that this sense of belonging is not only connected with experiencing migration but “might have an on-going importance for younger generations who have not experienced migration processes” (Ibid). In addition diaspora implies that certain cultures continue to “survive, transform and remain relevant” even after the owners of the culture get physically dislocated from their homeland. In general diaspora specific to minorities who sometime in history migrated and have a deep connection with a distant homeland are different from indigenous minorities

due to “the direct or the symbolic and historical experience of migration and or deterritorialisation” (Ibid).

Safran (1991) proposes that “... the concept of diaspora be applied to expatriate minority community whose members share several of the following characteristics” (Safran quoted in Riggs 2000: 11). Safran’s characteristics are summarized as follows.

1. *Dispersal from an original center to peripheral regions, [dispersal]*
2. *perpetuated myth of the homeland [myth]*
3. *sense of alienation in their hostlands, [alienation]*
4. *idealization of their homeland as a place to which they will return, [idealization]*
5. *commitment to maintain or restore their homeland [commitment]*
6. *relationships with the homeland whose existence supports their own ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity [interaction with homeland]*
(Ibid:11-12)

In general, the theories and concepts of Diaspora define the Diaspora as a community dispersed from an original homeland residing in a hostland and maintaining a real or imaginary connection with the homeland. As a concept, it is the condition of existing dislocated from the socio-historical constructs like nation, race, ethnicity, culture etc., which define oneself in a different location having its own constructs and the resultant effects and features on the subject individual or community

2.2.3. Diaspora and Cultural Hybridity

Diaspora is a post – modern concept that fills the weaknesses of concepts like “ethnicity, nationality and nationhood, boundaries and identity” in describing the complex contemporary world (Georgiou 2001: 1). It helps in the “understanding of migration, post – migration and reterritorialization, peoples multiple sense of belonging and loyalties beyond national boundaries” (Ibid).

Dr. Myria Geogiou (2001) in the article “Thinking Diaspora: Why Diaspora is a Key Concept for Understanding Multicultural Europe” describes becoming

'diasporized' as central to the understanding of the contemporary Western world.

Diaspora, as it applies to late modernity conditions, illustrates the hybrid and ever – changing nature of identities that are not inescapably dependent on homogeneity, purity and stable localization. Cultures' viability does not depend on purity, rather they survive through mixing (Boyarin and Boyarin: 1993). Identities in the diaspora become 'diasporized' ... (Georgiou 2001: 1).

So, according to Georgiou, identities in the Diaspora go beyond dualisms or common socio-cultural constructs. There is a diversity of cultures in the Diaspora which through hybridity “co-exist, compete, merge and emerge” (Ibid). And the cultures of the Diaspora can also be the results of “cultural meetings or of suppression, exclusion and domination” (Ibid). Yet the cultures of Diaspora do not fall either under an original pure one or a new impure one (e.g. The migrant, the foreign, indigeneous). Instead, Georgiou argues...

... diasporas' hybridity implies multiple points of departure and multiple destinations, it implies instabilities and inequalities, not only – in the meeting of two different cultures or populations (e.g. 'the Turkish and 'the German') but within any of those cultures, group communities, as much as in – between (Ibid: 1-2)".

In short, what Georgiou means is that what really exists is a hybridized identity and culture and the weaknesses of socio historical constructs (race, ethnicity etc.) and dualisms (foreign, indigenous etc) to describe the post – modern western world. And the concept of diasproa became the best way for understanding some conditions of minorities living in the West formerly undermined by the concepts of ethnicity and migration (ibid: 2).

Georgiou (2001) argues that diaspora “is not a panacea” or should not be seen as the only useful concept for understanding the cultural hybridity of certain minorities. Its value does not render concepts like migration and ethnicity unimportant but rather adds to them. It highlights, according to Georgiou (2001) that:

“ethnic communities can be an integrated part of Europe even if its members have attachments to other places; it shows that ethnicity can insist as a reference for generations; and it emphasizes that communities can extend beyond national boundaries. These are key characteristics of a multicultural Europe that have to be acknowledged and understood (3).”

2.3. Post- modernity and the Diaspora

According to Homi K. Bhabha’s ***The Location of Culture*** (1994), ...

Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the ‘present’, for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix ‘post’ post modernism, post colonialism, post-feminism..... (Bhabha1994:1-2 quoted in www.prelctur.stanford.edu/lectures/bhabha/exerpts.htm).

Bhabha focuses on the instability of the concepts of binary oppositions such as tradition or culture and modernity, black /white, self/other, majority/minority, present/past/future etc. He argues that what is actually there in the post-modern era is what he calls ‘the beyond.’ This he argues is the reality of the multicultural post-modern society whose identity, culture and history are mixed up. He explains this with an example from the artwork of an African – American artist who uses a stairwell between symbolic representations of white and black; Bhabha appreciates the work as representing the fluidity of primordial constructions (Ibid:1-18). This he seems to suggest, is what the post-modern artists should do, i.e., showing the displaced unstable existence of our times beyond the temporal limits of past, present and future and polarities like black /white, self /other ,majority /minority etc.

If the jargon of our times – post modernity, post-coloniality, post-feminism – has any meaning at all, it does not lie in the popular use of the ‘post’ to indicate sequentially – after - feminism; or polarity – anti – modernism. These terms that insistently gesture to the beyond, only embody its restless and revisionary energy if they transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment (Ibid).

Here what Bhabha suggests is that post-modernisms are attempts to go beyond the limiting impositions of modernity and colonial and neocolonial impositions: beyond time, beyond polarities (binary oppositions) and beyond the categorizations of the modern and colonialin between. This displaced in-betweenness is essential, because it's like getting outside a car to see it well and find its fault. He argues this "beyond' or in-between location is where the true narrative of the oppressed would start asserting itself free of the structuring powers of the majority discourse (Ibid).

The wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the epistemological limits of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices-women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities. For the demography of the new internationalism is the history of post-colonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees (Ibid).

And it is in this sense that Bhabha argues in "Border Lives: The Art of the Present" in ***The Location of Culture*** (1994) that "the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presenting" just like 'the beyond' (Ibid) Bhabha argues that there is no homogenous nation or 'organic' ethnic community for there are always minorities ignored. And he argues giving numerous examples that all imagined communities are hybridized and multicultural and that this is the post-modern reality (Ibid). He elaborates this well through concepts like mimicry, civility, dissemiNation , migrancy etc(Ibid).

The Diaspora, as an individual or community living under the dwarfing influence of Western culture in Western cities, is a good example for this theory and can be better understood through the concepts of Bhabha (1994). Because Diaspora/indigenous in multicultural West is only a parallel of colonizer/colonized or neocolonizer/neocolonized suffering a similar though a different type of oppression, some concepts and categories in post-colonial

and post-modern theory used in Diaspora studies will be discussed in the following sections.

2.3.1. Dissemination

The deviation is used by Bhabha (1994) to point to the existence of the émigré between nations. And the 'N' is capitalized to emphasize that it is not just the individual immigrant that gets dispersed or dislocated but the socio-historical construct 'Nation' too. Homi K. Bhabha introduced this term in *The Location of Culture* in the chapter "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation"(1994:139-170). Here Bhabha describes location as a concept of identity unlimited by geographical area and concerned with "the social, cultural, religious and linguistic processes which constitute a cultural identity regardless of the specific location in which these occur" (Bhabha 1994:139-40). This concept helps take into account the Diaspora communities, their interaction with other immigrants and the indigenous people and its effect on their cultural identity.

Bhabha puts the idea of nationalism and nation under question exposing its instability. He argues that the 'nation' is only a historical construction and what existed and still exists is the 'nationless' (Ibid). And for him, the immigrants, the minorities and the diasporic gather in the cities to change the history of the nation. He refers to this gathering as "the return of the diasporic; the post colonial" (Ibid). The postmodern city provides a space in between, free of the limiting historicity of the nation, where "the perplexity of the living is most acutely experienced" (Ibid).

Bhabha describes the situation of the Diaspora as a time of gathering:

Gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gathering in the ghettos and cafes of city centers; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degree, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of the worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual revival; gathering the present (Ibid).

These acts of gathering are the effects of dissemination that took the migrants on the border or in-between. Located in-between one lacks something stable to hold on to and thus engages into gathering from both sides of the border (i.e. home country/host country, mother tongue /foreign language, past, present etc) something to hold on to. The immigrant in this process of gathering suffers from the displacing effects of the foreign tongue, acculturation and gaining or losing the acceptance of the host community, and the relegation into the past of the experiences of the home country and its recurrent memories (Ibid).

The conception of the nation as a cultural identity which historicism advocates is refuted by the situation of the migrant. The immigrant often easily falls into hybridity and becomes “a stranger to ones’ own country language, sex and identity ...” in Kristeva’s terms (Kristeva quoted in Bhabha 1994). Bhabha thus introduces the nationless, debunking the historicist conception of the nation and focusing on the temporality of the location of culture. The concepts of the nation are for him narrations created by centuries of discourses attempting to use social reference to the people as rhetorical strategy to be representatives of the whole. And it is the challenges of immigration and hybridity on this narration of the ‘nation’ that leads the immigrant to acculturation, identity crisis or as Bhabha would have preferred – the discovery of the instability of the ‘nation’ and the concurrent discovery of ‘nationlessness’ (Ibid).

Bhabha described what he called ‘people of the pagus’ i.e. colonials, post colonials, migrants, minorities as people who will not be contained within the national narration which pedagogically appeals to similar origins, patriotism or which performatively appeals to making the present history of self. These displaced people or migrants:-

are Marx’s reserve army of migrant labour who by speaking the foreignness of language split the patriotic voice of unisonance and become Neitzche’s mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphosis. They articulate the death –in-life of the idea of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation: the worn-out metaphors of the resplendent national life now circulate in another narrative of

entry permits and passports and work-permits that at once preserve and proliferate, bind and breach the human rights of the nation (Bhabha 1994:139-70 quoted in Ibid).

Bhabha shows that experiences of immigration expose the emptiness of the narrations or imaginations of the 'nation' of both the immigrant and host people. In addition Bhabha further discusses that experiencing migration especially to a country whose language is totally foreign often robs the immigrant of language which bridges the gap between knowledge and act. This often is the reason why immigrants, especially refugees, lose a sense of being in control of their life and fall into the oblivion of not knowing why everything happened and is happening (Ibid).. And the immigrants' narratives, stories, writings etc., reveal this void via silences and the object of loss.

In conclusion desimiNation, as a concept emphasizing the temporality of culture as opposed to its historical originality and 'primordality', describes the condition of the immigrant: ripped off from its motherland and not fitting in the 'foreign' structures of the host land, the immigrant experiences the full power of the 'nationless' which was formerly shielded by the socio-historical construct-nation.

2.3.2. Displacement

Displacement is a concept that refers to the crisis of identity which Ashcroft et. al. (1989:8) describe as "concern with the development or recovery of an affective identifying relationship between self and place". This crisis of identity can result from migration, enslavement, transpiration, voluntary immigration for better life ...

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 (Ashcroft et. al. 1989:8-9).

Among the effects of displacement are "[t]he alienation of vision and the crisis in self image" on the displaced. In addition it often leads to a stubborn

assertion of “the myths of identity” in the subject’s literature dealing with the experience (Ibid: 9). Displacement can also lead to linguistic alienation resulting from the drowning of one’s culture under the disciplining powers of the dominating culture (Ibid). This has often led in Africa to “the alienation of the state from the actual society” (Finnstrom, 1997: p1of1, [www. Postcolonial web.org/poldiscourse/finnstrom/finnstrom1.htm](http://www.Postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/finnstrom/finnstrom1.htm)). And this is often why immigrants form their own Diaspora communities in the host nation. In addition the geographic and climatic conditions of the host country can create a sense of otherness in the migrant (Op cit: 11).

Exile is “one manifestation of the ubiquitous concern with place and displacement” in societies home and abroad (Ashcroft et al 1989: 29). Exile is a “sense of loss and displacement from a traditional homeland” ([www .postcolonialweb.com](http://www.postcolonialweb.com)). It can occur in the homeland due to modernization which can rip off one’s “traditional language, way of life, religion, tribal practices etc”(Ibid). And it inevitably occurs in a foreign land where everything is at odds with one’s tradition or culture. And in such cases exile brings about homelessness, displacement and nostalgia on its subjects (Ibid).

2.3.3. Hybridity

Models of hybridity and syncreticity are often used by post-modern theories. This is because pure ancestry no longer describes post-modern realities of identity (Ibid: 34-35). Hybridity as a reality and theme in the post-modern literature was viewed as a threat to identity and ancestry. As Harris(quoted in Ibid) describes, hybridity:

is constantly struggling to free itself from a past which stressed ancestry, and which valued the pure over its threatening opposite, the ‘composite’. It replaces a temporal lineality with a special plurality (Ibid: 35-36).

Because in the present post-modern world cultural encounters are happening more on equal terms as a mutual acceptance of differences, “recent approaches have recognized that the strength of ...[literary] theory may well

lie in its inherently compensative methodology and hybridized and syncretic view of the modern world which this implies" (Ibid: 36-37). This view then use the framework of 'difference on equal terms' to explore the hybridity in literatures and multi-cultural theories (Ibid). It can thus be used to analyze the hybridity of some migrants and their literatures.

2.4. The Predicament of the Immigrant

According to Al-Issa (1995), "[t]he concept of ethnicity refers to a social-psychological sense of belongingness in which members of a group share a unique social and cultural heritage"(Al-Issa (1995) quoted in Al-Issa and Tousignant (Eds), 1997: 3). Because "the bond that brings members of an ethnic group together may be defined in terms of either racial or cultural similarities or both" (Ibid), immigrants suffer from various psychological problems in the absence of this bond. The immigrants suffer from stress. And "[t]he greater the difference between the host culture, and the immigrants culture the greater the culture shock and social isolation" (Ibid: 5).

Acculturation, which can be defined as a "cultural change resulting from direct contact between two cultural groups", takes one of four strategies (Berry (1992) quoted in Ibid: 5): The first strategy is assimilation. It is defined as "the relinquishing of one's own ethnic identity and adopting that of the dominant society" (Ibid). According to Al-Issa, the American melting-pot concept refers to assimilation. The second strategy is integration i.e. "the incorporation of part of the other culture but maintaining one's own cultural identity". This results in a multicultural society with distinct ethnic groups. The third one is separation, "when the ethnic group withdraws from the larger society". Segregation is an example of separation. Lastly "marginalization 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" (Ibid). Experiencing acculturation often results in stress, "anxiety, depression, feelings of marginality and alienation" (Berry, 1992: 75-quoted in Ibid).

Immigrants also suffer from discrimination and prejudice under the host society. These are often difficult to avoid because they are manifested daily directly and indirectly. Immigrants are targets of prejudice and discrimination because of various psychological factors affecting them and the host society. These include: group favoritism towards one's group; competition for positive social identity; social influences (mass media, schools, parents, peer groups etc); social structural differences (e.g. class differences); displaced hostility or projection of frustration from a powerful body to the powerless minority (e.g. lower class whites are more biased towards blacks); authoritarian personality; difference in socio-cultural norms; the tendency of people to oversimplify and generalize the characteristics of people outside their groups; perceiver's expectancies and reactions to the distinctiveness of a group (Ibid:19-23). All these factors were found to be causes of the stereotyping and discrimination of minority groups in Europe and North America.

These stereotyping and discrimination no doubt affect the immigrants because as Allport (1954:142 quoted in Ibid:25) puts it "one's reputation, whether false or true cannot be hammered, hammered, hammered into one's head without doing something to one's character". Allport summarizes the psychological effect of discrimination or victimization into two i.e. "blaming oneself (withdrawal, self-hate, aggression against one's own group) or blaming external agents (fighting back, suspicion, increased group pride" (Ibid). A slightly different categorization of response to discrimination is forwarded by Pettigrew (1964) who listed three types:

1. *moving towards the oppressor by seeking acceptance through integration;*
2. *moving against the oppressor by fighting back and*
3. *moving away from the oppressor thorough flight or avoidance (Ibid).*

In all the types of responses the stigmatized cannot refute the fact that he/she is being stigmatized. And the realization of this fact only can lead to expectation of negative treatment and loss of personal deservingness which could affect the chances of getting good jobs and the motivation to strive for

betterment (Ibid: 26). And studies conducted on the relation between stress and discrimination have shown that “[d]iscrimination was associated with feeling more aggression, sadness, anxiety, and increased self-consciousness” (Ibid).

The historical domination of the third world by the Westerners gave the people of the West the belief that their science and Christianity indeed puts them above everyone else, resulting in the stigmatization of the non-Western. Despite developments of recent times, the human rights laws of the Western world failed to eliminate discrimination and prejudice and gave rise to what came to be known as aversive racism (Ibid: 28).

When prejudice “continues to exist in more subtle and indirect forms” instead of being “overtly expressed against minorities” it is referred to as aversive racism (Ibid: 23). Gartner and Dovidio (1986) first used the term aversive racism which, according to them,

represents a particular type of ambivalence in which the conflict is between feelings and beliefs associated with a sincerely egalitarian value system and unacknowledged negative feelings and beliefs (Gartner and Dovidio, 1986:62 quoted in Ibid: 23-24).

Aversive racism is rather far difficult to deal with and combat. According to Al-Issa(1995):

This ‘new racism 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: 28-29).

In conclusion, immigrants seem to be in a helpless situation faced with direct and aversive racism, which are deep-rooted in Western societies. In the USA, for example, immigrants are generally not favored by native African Americans and Whites because their immigration is assumed to have negative effects (Hochschild quoted in Gallagher 1999:545).And this results in discrimination against immigrants. According to Hamilton and Gifford (1976)

the best way to get rid of the undesirable psychological influences and predicament this produces is to harness the media. If there are more genuine media coverage of the distinctive behaviours and characteristic of minority groups (immigrants), their distinctive negative behaviors could decrease and illusory correlations could be reduced (Ibid: 23). One of the media through which this could be done is literature. Novels, poems, dramas, short stories and films by and about the immigrant minority groups can help counteract the perception of all minorities as voiceless subjects (Others) making them to be respected as humans for what they are. It can also help the minorities to gain confidence and gradually shake off the dwarfing psychological pressures of discrimination.

CHAPTER THREE- ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

3.1. Introduction

Theme is the central idea of a literary or artistic production. Theme is not just the subject or subject matter but what is said about the subject. The major parallel themes in the novels are divided into three major parts. The first one is Woes of the Homeland that includes themes of economic woes (impoverishment and deprivation) and political woes (war, human rights violations and corruption) in the motherland. The second part is the Woes in the Host land. It encompasses most of the major themes of the novels namely, disillusionment, racism and discrimination, frustration, emptiness and homesickness. The third part under the heading sub-themes includes acculturation and lust for love. The major themes not shared by the two novels are included under the section divergent themes and contain nostalgia and loss.

3.2. Synopsis of the Plots of the Two Novels

3.2.1. The Texture of Dreams

A young Ethiopian, Yosef, with a B.A. degree in English migrates to the USA in order to escape the economic and political problems in Ethiopia just after the fall of the Dergue regime. After stress filled months of joblessness and despair in the new land Yosef luckily gets a job to teach English to Russian refugees. He then upgrades himself by getting an MA in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) and falls in love with Helen who was his classmate in his TESL class. Despite the fact that she has a boyfriend and doesn't want to be in a relationship based on love except sexual partnership, Yosef couldn't stop loving her. Loneliness, boredom, emptiness and memories of his motherland and the loved ones become his constant companions. Yosef spends hours thinking about his predicament. Nostalgic memories of his childhood in Dessie, his boyhood adventures, his love for music, his

miserable campus life haunt his days and nights in New York. His landlady becomes a good listener of his woes and comforts him. But the sudden death of this landlady with whom he developed an intimate mother-son relationship coupled with his ever-growing homesickness and emptiness become too heavy a burden to live with. He decides to go back to Ethiopia for a two-month vacation. And just as he is a few days away from his flight to Addis, Helen calls him out of the blue. She tells him she is ready for true love. Yosef hopes the new romance will pull him out of the tragedy of his predicament.

3.2.2. The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears

Stephanos, an Ethiopian immigrant who lost his father in a horrific manner in the hands of the Dergue militia, migrates to the USA running away from the red and white terror of the late 1970's. Haunted by the traumatic memories of home Stephanos secludes himself in the guise of a storekeeper in a ramshackle black-American neighborhood and in the comfort of two African immigrant friends i.e. Joseph (Congo) and Kenneth (Kenya). The three try to forget the woes of their lives drinking together, chatting about Africa and playing games of memorizing African coups and dictators. Poverty, disappointment with America and the loss of home and all that's dear to it are their constant woes. Then Judith, a white woman, and her daughter slip into Stephanos's life. Stephanos sees the chance of deliverance from his hollow sallow life in their friendship. But his ambitions of love and family fail due to the socio-economic status differences between him and Judith. Stephanos's long on hold emotional instability breaks loose as bankruptcy is added to this. He then walks to his uncle's house symbolically re-waking and re-narrating his life in the process and coming to terms with his father's death and his half – hearted presence in the USA and resolving to pluck himself out of his in – between existence.

3.3. Analysis of the Major Themes

3.3.1. Parallel Themes

3.3.1.1. Woes of the Homeland

The 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.

3.3.1.1.1. Economic Woes

In *The Texture of Dreams* (2005) the immigrant Yosef recalls his and his family's poverty in Dessie during the Dergue regime.

Born of and raised by parents of humble means, my early years in the old, impoverished town of Dessie were frugal. We, like most folks in town, subsisted on bare necessities (Fasil, 2005:5).

Living on simple, poor or scarce means meant that children hardly get anything beyond little food to survive on and some cheap clothes to cover their body. The children thus grow deprived of things beyond basic needs. And this results in deprivation, which often results in extravagance and childhood behavior in adulthood as an unconscious act of compensation. A good example is Yosef's TV mania and his playing with toys as a grownup in the USA (Ibid: 110).

Yosef's impoverishment and deprivation continued in his college years too as "the fangs of malnutrition and the abuse of callous professors... during the four brutal years at Addis Ababa University" are a little better than hell to him (Ibid: 5-6). Hope of a better future was the only reason for his survival in those four years.

Without visions of greener pastures ahead, I wouldn't have had the strength to compete against hundreds of provincial book worms my fellow students to whom, just like me college was the only way out of poverty (Ibid: 5).

But the hope is deferred as the impoverishment and deprivation with in the home country situation continued in Yosef's life even after graduating and getting a job and triggered ideas of migrating. In his own words:

As I was to find out, however, my sudden ascent to the rank of the Ethiopian middle class right after graduation would not usher in a life of prosperity. My cushy Government Issue job in the capital paid enough to keep body and soul together, but not enough to indulge my long-in-hold yearning for the finer amenities of life although that did not stop me from squandering my pay by living beyond my means. It didn't take me long to sink deeply into debt. It was then, hopelessly broke and sorely disenchanted with charmless humdrum of life after college, that I began thinking of leaving it all behind and setting off for the true Mecca of opulence: America! (6).

As the above extract shows, lack of enough income to fulfill his long on hold needs for the finer things in life made Yosef to long for America. Impoverishment and deprivation are, therefore, the major causes for Yosef's migration to America (Ibid: 6). And in a way they are also the major reasons for his success in America as their fear made him work hard even when there isn't any real purpose and meaning in his life there.

Economic woes are not dealt with as widely in ***The Texture of Dreams*** as in ***The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears***. This may be because the protagonist Stephanos was born of a well-to-do family and his migration was triggered mainly by politics. However, the other main characters in the novel Joseph and Kenneth had poverty and unemployment that drove them out of their homelands.

Joseph, the Congolese immigrant suffered from poverty and joblessness in the former Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo).

He [Joseph] had stories of all night chess tournaments held in dingy cafés and bars, games that erupted into beatings, stabbings, and on occasion, shootings. "We had no jobs; we were done with school, no family, no money, so we played chess all day. It was what we did." Clusters, and in some cases, surrogate families of young men formed around the game. Some were illiterate and had spent years fighting from the bush; others, like Joseph, were born

into affluent families who had paid for French and English tutors before losing everything to Mobutu and his corrupt, bloated government (Dinaw 2007:62-63).

The town folks of Kinshasa, with little of their money left from the greedy government's enormous appetite, hardly had enough money to survive. Their children's education had cost them a lot of money and gave them no return. Joseph and his friends were not given any jobs. So to forget their impoverishment they overindulge in the game of chess. Such woes of poverty and hopelessness made Joseph to migrate and end up in the US.

Kenneth's Kenya gave him a horrible poverty and the chance of becoming nothing but a beggar of tourists (186). The poverty Kenneth passed through was so horrible that he devotes all his life to nothing but making money when he goes to the USA. He works ten, often twelve hours a day (184-85). The impoverishment and deprivation he went through in his homeland coupled with its political woes make him hate Kenya. At one point as Joseph, Kenneth, and Stephanos are chatting over a drink and playing their usual game of memorizing African coups, Kenneth suddenly stands up from his seat and the following conversation takes place...

"Where are you going?" I asked him. "You just got here."

"Sorry, Stephanos. I'm tired of these conversations. I'm going to go home and sleep. I have to be back at work tomorrow."

"Let him go, Stephanos," Joseph said. "The big Man is tired of our African talk. He wants to go home and dream of his new suit."

"What was your father, Stephanos?" Kenneth asked me.

"A lawyer"

"That's right. A lawyer. And You, Joseph?"

"You know what he was."

"A businessman."

"Yes. A businessman."

"And what was mine?"

Kenneth looked over at Joseph and then me, knowing that neither one of us knew how to answer his question.

"Come, Joseph. I've told you this before."

"He was illiterate," Joseph responded.

"What else?"

"That's it."

"Exactly. That's it. That's all he ever was. A poor illiterate man who lived in a slum. And you know what that makes him in Africa?"

Nothing. That is what Africa is right now. A continent full of poor illiterates dying in slums. What am I supposed to miss? Being sent into the street to beg white tourists for money? If I die today, my sister in Nairobi will get one hundred thousand dollars. Someone would have to come and move the furniture out of my apartment. My suits will be shipped back to Kenya for my cousins. You, Joseph, would get my car. The only thing my father owned when he died was a picture of Jomo Kenyatta. His great leader. From the day I was born, there have been only two leaders of Kenya. The first was terrible, and now the second is even worse. That's why I'm here in this country. No revolution. No coup."(185-86)

The impoverishment in Kenya, which he and his father suffered from, makes Kenneth hate his homeland. He wants to forget Africa, their games of Africa's coup's and revolutions, and focuses on what according to him really matters—money. His belief and devotion to money in the host land no doubt emanated from the economic woes his homeland gave him.

3.3.1.1.2. Political Woes

In *The Texture of Dreams* Ethiopia gave Yosef "other woes too", he explains: "There were other woes too that had steeled my resolve to flee, such as my distress over the ever-deepening gloom that was descending on my country" (6). The "ever - deepening gloom" is a reference to the war in Ethiopia and the disagreements and clashes between rebel groups or opposition parties just after the fall of the Dergue. This made Yosef fear that there is going to be "total anarchy" in the country, as he later explains to Mark (143).

In the seventeen years of war in Ethiopia, Yosef has witnessed the horrors of war, public gunfights and killings by the Dergue. He himself has escaped from getting shot, imprisoned or recruited for the civil war with luck. Once he and his friends got back late and drunk to the campus on the eve of their voyage to the jungle to clear lands and erect houses for settlers from the drought stricken north. The campus guard wouldn't let them in and to escape imprisonment they go for the fence. But while Yosef and his friend are waiting for their turn to climb the fence, a pick up truck loaded with armed militia comes out of nowhere and stops in their vicinity. Then, Yosef narrates, ...

... we take off at top speed and run zigzagging to dodge bullets that might be fired at us. With the maniacally yelling patrolmen close behind us, we cut across the narrow asphalt road and plunge into a dark cluster of shabby homes ... The thought of bullets arresting our flight crosses our minds as we sprint before our pursuers and the receding tramp of their heavy boots (233).

They escaped in the end, but their experience is horrific: chased by militiamen who won't hesitate to shoot a person for the mere violation of curfew. Such experience of horrors of war and military dictatorships affect Yosef's life even in the land of freedom. When he is confronted with the choice to strike or not with his co-workers for better payment and benefits in New York, he surprisingly chooses not to strike. Consider his own explanation:

Seeing my colleagues confronting the bosses has filled me with unease because it brings back memories of a great insurrection in my country. Insubordinate teachers inciting their colleagues to defy authority somehow reminds me of the misguided Ethiopian revolution and the years of terror that followed it. 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).

His colleagues succeed in their strike and the resulting shame and stigma double his burdens in the host land. The horrors of war and injustice he experienced in his homeland not only drove him away from the homeland but also remained with Yosef in the host land affecting his behaviours and decisions.

Misuse of power, another political woe, was prevalent in Ethiopia during the Dergue regime. The corrupt officials controlled market under the guise of socialism. Yosef recalls one aspect of this corruption:

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. As often as not the shop attendant would emerge to announce that the

store has run out of supplies, unleashing fury that would mutely sweep through the weary throng. We knew our rations had been smuggled out through the back door, but we would rather go home empty - handed than get into serous trouble by blurting that out (24).

Yosef recalls this while admiring the abundance of products and the freedom of buyers in a New York super market. The corrupt officials of the Dergue did not only deny the people the right to buy as much as they want but they smuggled their rations and sold it to corrupt traders who probably bribed them.

The misuse of power in Ethiopia, which together with other problems drove immigrants like Yosef out, is not just limited to smuggling rations. But, as Yosef recalls, the poor Ethiopians were often forced to buy things they don't need unjustly for the benefit of corrupt officials. Look at the following passage:

"You have to buy two television antennas in order to get one mattress," the store manager told me. Mattresses were needed rather badly, and people were compelled to buy things they didn't need if they wanted to get a mattress. "But ... but I don't even have a single TV set, sir. What would I do with two antennas?" I said, smiling sweetly, hoping to soften him up.

"That is none of my concern," he shot back. "I am talking about antennas. Two of them. No antennas, no mattress. That is that," he said with certain finality in his voice that left no room for further argument.

That was the time when greedy government officials had plugged their tentacles into all manner of money - making schemes, amassing fortunes in the process ... (24-25).

Living for seventeen years under such a dictatorial government, Yosef even doubts whether a poor person who can't bribe officials has a right when he thinks of asking for a passport from the immigration office a month or so before the fall of the Dergue. Consider the following:

... the military regime of Ethiopia had stripped citizens of the right to travel abroad. Passports were issued to high-ranking government officials and their relatives, or to those who had

lavishly greased the right palms. A nobody like myself would gain nothing in the attempt except to be barked at and then rudely turned away by a terrifyingly foul-tempered security guard (7).

This can be a mock/satiric description of the reality of the time. But it could also mean that, Yosef, disciplined by the repeated violation of human rights, corruption, and inequality in the country, is no more sure whether he really has a right. So, with no confidence, he goes to the office of the Immigration Official holding on to sheer luck. Though the guard lets him in to his astonishment, his fears materialize when he meets the man in charge.

"I..I..was told to come some other time, but...uh...you see,sir,with things being what they are, I thought,...uh...I might trouble you. I have all the required documents ready for a passport."

.....
"Get out!" he snarled at me between clenched teeth. The words, wrenched out of his despairing soul, cut through my chummy masquerade like an arctic draft and made me realize the callousness of my request. How could I, a non entity dare to demand my citizen's right at a time when the enemy was at the outskirts of the town and could storm the capital at any moment?...I closed the door and walked away. Crestfallen (9).

This experience of Yosef at the Immigration office shows the extreme misuse of power in the country that resulted in moral decadence and animistic behavior on the part of the officials. The official in the immigration office is referred to by Yosef as a 'jailed jailer' because he couldn't get himself out of the country and is awaiting his downfall with despair. Corruption almost always ends up imprisoning the corrupt. The expression 'non entity' in the above extract is a satiric attack on the Ethiopian folk's lack of a sense of deservingness for their rights and fear of and submission to authority. A society, which lived under undemocratic corrupt rulers for centuries, could end up considering being a non-entity as its true label.

The central theme of ***The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*** is the long-term effect on the victims of the unjust loss of the loved ones in the hands of a dictatorial government. Stephanos lost his father to the Dergue militiamen during the red and white terror of the late 1970's.

The traumatic loss of his father and the corpses of red and white terror victims on the streets of Addis goblinize Stephanos in the host country. Sleeping in his uncle's house as a fresh émigré to the US, Stephanos narrates his thought:

... I saw the corpses that lay rotting on unpaved dusty roads with the words 'traitor' or 'communist' written in blood on the chest, and the furious mobs that roamed the streets at night. I saw my father's face just before three soldiers in tattered uniforms escorted him out of our house. I never saw what death did to his face, whether or not it aged it, or perhaps even restored it to some long-vanished peaceful state. I did imagine it involuntarily while lying awake and staring across the living room to the glass doors that lead out to the balcony. I sometimes imagined leaping off (my emphasis). In my mind, his face was untouched, free from any bruises or scars the soldiers might have left, his eyes, nose, and mouth impossibly perfect. I gave him a wonderful funeral complete with all the rites the dead deserve: a body, casket and flower along with a priest and a coast of mourners who followed him all the way to his family's burial just outside Addis (119-20).

Stephanos's suffering and humiliation as a result of what the murderous Dergue soldiers did to his father in front of him disturbs him for the rest of his life in the host country as described in the passage below:

They had beaten him nearly unconscious in our living room. Blood from his nose and eyes dotted the yellow walls and streaked the chair he used to sit on when he came home from work. Still, he begged them: "I will walk out on my own two feet. That's it. That is all I want from you."...the flyers they found did not belong to my father; they were mine. They were not found in his office but in his bedroom, where he had taken them the night before, after he had found them in my room. That was partially why the soldiers beat him so thoroughly(125).

The soldiers beat his father in front of his family before taking him to his death (128). Stephanos, who watched this, couldn't get over it. He hates himself for it because he loves his father and because his bringing home the SFD (Students for Democracy) flyers that the soldiers discovered may have worsened the situation.

He had refused to tell them where the flyers had come from. ...When my father said the flyers belonged to him, my mother made a desperate attempt to throw her body over his, but the

soldiers were all practiced in handling situations like this .I remember the studied, almost bored air in which they conducted the whole affair..... One of them simply raised the butt of his gun and leveled it directly against her chest. He didn't even have to turn around to see her coming. When she fell, it was as if someone had lifted her legs from under her.... And me? Where was I during all this? Standing in a corner holding my seven-year-old brother's head against my body.....The lead soldier sneers and spits on my mother's carpet....As soon as he spits, one of the soldiers steps to the front and, with the butt of his rifle, knocks my father across the head. Is it possible that they practiced this routine before coming over? Or is it something that's grown organically out of their previous experiences? Spit and then hit. The two soldiers take turns kicking my father in the head and ribs. When my mother begins to cry out the lead soldier draws his pistol and orders her to stop. She does so immediately....My father's left eye has already swollen shut. He is struggling to keep his head from falling.... He begins to declare over and over that the flyers are his.... He lifts himself off the ground by bracing his back against the wall and climbing up with his entire body, inch by inch. His effort to stand on his own invites the mockery of the two young soldiers. They applaud satirically. They encourage him to go on. I pray to God, with as much conviction and faith that I have, for their deaths. I beg Him silently to kill them right then and there. I implore Him. I demand it of Him. If He cannot give me their deaths alone, though, then I ask Him to take all of us together. I pray for the roof of the house to cave in, for the ground to open up and swallow us whole, anything to end this moment (125-129).

He and his family never saw the corpse of his father neither do they know where he was buried. This horrific experience and devilish injustice in the homeland are unbearable to Stephanos. Haunted by the traumatic memory and the humiliation his family suffered he even thinks of committing suicide ('leaping off the apartment (119)). And in a desperate attempt to set things right he gives his father an honorable burial in his imagination (119-20).

Stephanos's life loses meaning and he spends the rest of his life trying to escape the bitter memory of this traumatic experience of injustice. The theme of the protagonist's trying to escape the traumatic loss is discussed under the section, Loss.

Joseph's Zaire also offered him unrest, injustice and dictatorship. And Joseph explains that the love of chess in Kinshasa came from these political woes.

They had a religious devotion to the game, a respect for its handful of rules and almost infinitive variations born, as Joseph said, out of a shared sense of gratitude for having at least one space where their decisions mattered. "Nobody", he said once, "understands chess like an African" (62-63)

Joseph's homeland denied him democracy and justice and he had already left her for the chess world even before he migrated to USA.

The homelands of the immigrant characters in the novel drove them away with horrors of civil war (red/white terror in Ethiopia, rebellions in Zaire), unrest, injustice, misuse of power, violation of human rights etc. These political woes in the cases of traumatic human rights violations, like the one committed on Stephanos's father, humiliate immigrants and kill their interest to live and enjoy life to its fullest for the rest of their lives.

In conclusion, dictatorship, violation of rights, horrors of war and impoverishment and deprivation made home a sour home to its residents resulting in migration. They also left their mark on the personality and behaviour of those people who experienced them. Most Ethiopians migrated to the West during the Dergue regime, and the woes of the homeland during this period almost inevitably appear as a theme in the writings of the Ethiopian Diaspora as seen in these novels.

3.3.1.2. Woes in the Host land

The host land is not a heaven on earth as fresh immigrants imagine and gives immigrants its share of woes. Among these are disillusionment, frustration, emptiness, homesickness, and racism and discrimination. These, which are among the major themes of the two novels, are discussed in the following sections.

3.3.1.2.1. Disillusionment

Getting a job is quite a big deal to the Ethiopian immigrant in USA, especially one fitting into ones idea of a good job. Fasil's Yosef suffers for months from unemployment and even loses hope at one point hearing native New Yorkers complaining of unemployment:

I brood pondering my predicament: a newly - arrived immigrant without American work experience looking for a job in New York city, competing with a slew of experienced native English speakers (41).

Being unable to compete with the natives is caused among others by the lack of employment experience in the USA, as illustrated below:

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).

Still another cause is the language problem. Yosef remembers: "... several people who have interviewed me for various positions have hinted by words and looks that I spoke a strange brand of English" (31). Not knowing how to prepare a CV and how to act during an interview is also another factor (39 - 44). Yosef and other lucky émigrés get trainings to solve this later problem in charity sponsored agencies (Ibid). Because of these apparently simple weaknesses, engineers and doctors often end up with the lowliest jobs and live in a continuous disillusionment.

Unemployment is a big failure for immigrants like Yosef who must sustain not only their own life but also the lives of family members back home. Disillusioned with the land of opulence they grow desperate as they remain jobless and stress creeps in:

I am broke. The few hundred dollars I had brought with me are almost gone. Now I am depending on my friends for transportation and pocket money. God knows how desperate I am for a job. Any job. One that would pay just enough to see me through the tough days ahead... (31).

As a male Ethiopian who used to have a job back home depending on his three female relatives is unbearable and disappointing to Yosef. And one day returning from a job interview, which he passed but just can't take because it isn't his type of job, his accumulated disillusionment reaches its peak:

I stay at home for the remainder of the day, trying to patch up my tattered hopes. Despite Marta's efforts to cheer me up, and despite my own battle to prop up my crumbling confidence, something leaden is trickling into me, dampening my spirits. 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).

Coming to America from a tattered home thousands of miles away dreaming an opulent succulent Mecca, he wouldn't even get a job to peacefully live an ordinary independent life. And this disappointment with life, which haunted him repeatedly in the homeland, could not leave him alone in the US too. And what could he do.

Despair and hopelessness also haunt Yosef as he remains broke and unemployed for months on end. He starts acting weirdly even when talking to his potential employers except crying as described below:

Despair is making me sloppy, and I am mixing things up: calling the wrong number to ask about the wrong job, or calling again after being turned down on the first attempt. When I get through to the contact person, rarely do I muster the calm, business like phone manner I have been trained to assume (46).

Fear of failing in interviews and fear of getting caught and deported for overstaying a visitor's visa materialize in Yosef's nightmare (49-51). Yosef finds himself mocked at by interviewers and secretaries alike and doing everything wrong on the interview in one of his nightmares (49-50). And, he also gets caught by the immigration officer who interviewed him in the American

Embassy back home while looking for a job (51). These are all the results of extreme tension, stress, and repeated disillusionments.

The joy of getting employed for a refugee immigrant like Yosef who just escaped from the civil war in the homeland is beyond expression (53). This extreme ecstasy is also because Yosef suffered for a long time disillusioned with unemployment and because the job he got is a well paying decent job (53-54). But employment in the USA is not for life like in Ethiopia. And fear of losing one's job always haunts immigrants. On the first day at his first job as an English teacher Yosef's confidence is shaken by a comment on his accent and he loses his hard earned fluency in front of his colleagues. And his fear that this may make him lose his job makes him sleepless the whole night (60). Employed or unemployed America continues to disappoint him.

With no body to turn to if they are broke, this fear of unemployment makes immigrants not to live freely spending money when they feel like doing to (82-83). So unemployment and the fear of unemployment haunt the employed and the unemployed alike, especially when the émigrés are fresh to the USA. And this leads to despair, hopelessness, anxiety and fear of losing the chance of getting American citizenship. Thus, disillusionment is among the greatest woes of immigrants in the host land.

The theme of disillusionment is well developed throughout ***The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears***. The title itself shows the ironic disappointment immigrants face in the United States of America. Taken from Dante's ***Inferno*** where it is uttered as the narrator of the poem goes out from hell for a while and catches a glimpse of Heaven, it shows the immigrants overambitious dreams in America. America's or Heaven's beautiful things are not really beautiful. Look at "the beautiful things that heaven (USA) bears": emptiness, overwork, frustration, homesickness, dissatisfaction, disillusionment, racism and discrimination. They are not at all beautiful. The title can, thus, be understood as an ironic description of the USA by a disillusioned immigrant. This interpretation agrees with the meaning suggested in the novel, as illustrated in the following passage:

*Joseph, who continues even now to reread his class notes and highlight passages from the **Inferno**.*

*Through a round aperture I saw appear,
Some of the beautiful things that Heaven bears,*

Where we came fourth, and once more saw the stars.

When he 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).

The meaning suggested in this extract is that Africans live in Hell and only momentarily see happiness or Heaven. But in the context of African immigrants, they have left the Hell in Africa and are in what they dreamed of as Heaven - America. But America disillusioned them.

Stephanos, for example, faces disillusionment on his first day at work:

"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 (141).

Stephanos is disappointed because as a proud Ethiopian born from a well-to-do family he expects a more respectful treatment. Being measured and checked up like a slave for sale is humiliating. Besides the job he took is indecent - carrying luggage in and out of hotel rooms. Young as he was Stephanos could not take it anymore and quits the job (142).

Berhane, once a rich and respected lawyer in Ethiopia, couldn't get a job better than taxi driving (120). Disillusioned and disappointed with this he settles for a lonely life in an Ethiopian Diaspora apartment on the outskirts of Washington (120-23).

Joseph and Kenneth also face disillusionment. They once had dreams and ambitions as fresh immigrants to the USA as can be seen in the following extract:

Joseph laid out his plan that night for getting his college degree and then his PhD from the University of Michigan.

"It's all very simple," he said. "I have talent, and top universities need talent. When they see what I can do they will beg me to come. I'm certain of it."

"And why Michigan?" Kenneth asked him.

Joseph scratched the bottom of his chin.

"Because it's a top-notch school. I knew a woman who went there once. She was a teacher. Smartest woman I ever met. She told me I was brilliant. 'Joseph,' she said. 'You are one of the smartest men I have ever met.' She told me I should go there someday, and that is what I am going to do."

Kenneth, for his part, was going to get his engineering degree and then a master's.

"Only then," he said, "will I go back to Africa. I will go to Nairobi in the finest suit and everyone will say, 'Look at him. That's someone important. That is someone special.' I'll build them buildings that will blow them away. No one will have seen anything like them" (146).

Of course Kenneth never became the type of engineer he dreamt of. He works twelve hours a day under the imposing influence of his boss with hundreds of little engineers like him. Disappointed with where he ended up Kenneth mimics the actions, words and clothing styles of his successful boss in a desperate attempt to hold on to his early dream (2).

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).

Joseph Khangi's dreams did not live past 'a handful of continuing - education classes' at Georgetown Campus (99):

It's been nineteen years since he [Joseph] came to America, and he has tried to see each and every one of those years in the best possible light. Michigan and the PhD are now the idle dreams of a restless young immigrant.

"You don't need a PhD anymore," he said to me once. "Anything you want to learn in this world, you can learn in this city for free."(169)

With their dreams deferred Joseph and Kenneth live in an interminable disillusionment drinking themselves to sleep every evening (145,185). Stephanos, crippled by the horrors of his father's death and its haunting traumatic memory, didn't have such dreams to start with. All he wanted was to sit behind the counter in his store and silently read (146). But America disappoints him too because it fails to give happiness and meaning to his life. The three, therefore, drink to get over their disillusionment.

One of the bars, to which the three immigrants go to escape the tragedy of their lives through overindulgence, extravagance and alcohol, can be seen as symbolic of America and its unattainable dreams (the beautiful things that heaven bears).

We order three scotches, drink them quickly, and order three more. Women come and go off the stage every three and a half minutes, dancing halfheartedly to the '80s pop songs I used to love listening to in my store. Prince. INXS. The cure. When they finish dancing they saunter over to our table and introduce themselves. They all have names from Greek and Roman mythology: Venus, Apollonia, Aphrodite - names that promise an unattainable bit of love and heaven. Before they can offer us anything, we hand them two singles each, and Kenneth tells them all that they're beautiful.

"Beautiful," he says with his lips pursed, eyes turned to the ceiling in a feigned state of ecstatic reverie.

The drinks are ten dollars, and each one lasts for exactly three songs, which is equal to three dancers, which means we're spending about a dollar a minute, and that in sixty-eight minutes, I will have spent all the money I earned that day (44-45).

The 'bit of love and heaven' remained a myth to the three immigrants. Stephanos lost his store because of bankruptcy, (67) while Joseph and

Kenneth remain jailed in the monotony of their little jobs. So their American dreams which they fervently embraced at the beginning gets differed and they settle down in the end accepting the harsh realities and nursing their disillusionment for the rest of their lives.

This predicament of the three immigrants i.e. desperate dreaming, gradual frustration and disillusionment, seems to be the common cycle for most immigrants. Even those who achieve their goals, displaced and alienated as immigrants, probably won't find the perfect happiness they originally dreamt of. They settle down with their disappointments and thank America for the little it gave them if they are as wise as the failed poet Joseph. Joseph once said in response to Stephanos's disappointment with America,

This country is like a little bastard child. You can't be angry when it doesn't give you what you want ... But you have to praise it when it comes close, otherwise it'll turn around and bite you in the ass (6-7).

3.3.1.2.2. Frustration

Frustration is one of the woes of immigrants in the host land. An immigrant, devoid of the friends, relatives, family and religious and social institutions of the homeland, doesn't have much to resort to after work. Friends in the host land hardly replace those in the homeland and the cost of leisure or entertainment may not be affordable. In addition the 'mechanicality' of the Western type of entertainment like TV, cinema, movies, night clubs, parties etc., may not appeal to a lonely immigrant like Fasil's Yosef. So, Yosef confronts the inevitable frustration and boredom in his free time.

Shopping ... an attempt to live out old fantasies and to escape the dullness of my life in New York City...my days have become unbearably monotonous. Working only twenty - four hours a week, I have plenty of spare time, which I don't know what to do with. 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).

The monotonous nature of his tiresome drilling to teach Russian refugees spoken English through a simple question and answer method which hardly needs further reading or any type of preparation and the free time he has are obviously not the only causes. He is probably searching for something more interesting and meaningful in his life. Cut away from home and all that is dear to him he lacks these things and thus gets frustrated. In addition, the cultural and social value differences between his home nation and his host nation could make the host land totally uninteresting, frustrating and boring.

What makes this feeling of boredom twice troublesome in the case of Yosef is that he is a teacher who should stand in front of his students for hours. And that he can't nurse it like a clerk who had the privacy of his office. He has to keep a lid on it most of the time. The narrator describes this.

... I can't afford to walk into the classroom with my mind cluttered with the worries of my private life... I must leave the convoluted baggage of my immigrant's life at the door, for nothing short of my complete presence in body and mind can keep my students satisfied and guarantee my continued employment. Nothing less than my best will enable me to cling to the reputation of "good teacher" that I have earned through the single - minded dedication of one who doesn't have the luxury of being mediocre (84).

In an attempt to get rid of his boredom Yosef buys a TV at one time. But as it turns out it is no solution at all. In his words:

...TV has cast its paralyzing spell on me, and I have lost the willpower to stay away for long from the breathless array of trash that it spews into my room. The tube has me captive, and I am wasting hours every day vegetating in my armchair with the remote in my hand... I get bored with most of what the TV has to offer, and yet, I can't bring myself to turn it off. Instead, I surf the channels back and forth, turning in halfway into shows and turning out a few minutes later, in and out again and again until my curiosity is effectively blunted by a parade of rubbish. Then, I turn it off and leave my seat, feeling numb and empty, only to go back to it later. Yes, I have become a TV freak. Like a person in an abusive relationship who is powerless to break free, I am held hostage by the trash box I have bought for six hundred dollars. I have lost those quiet moments of reflection I used to have before I let TV invade my privacy. Even when I know there is nothing I like to watch, it sees the remote control demonically lures my hand to

seek it. Things have come to such a pass that I can't even eat without the TV on (109-110).

The TV only numbs his senses, kills his time and gets him tired. But it fails to save him from facing remorse after watching it. Yosef often criticizes himself for acting like a child, loses interest in the TV and faces the unpleasurable fact of his unhappy boredom-filled life as an immigrant. His obsession with TV is a reliving of his childhood deprivations but his frustrated life's search for an escape hole is also an equally important cause. This is because if he had more interesting occupations (without boredom) in his immigrant life he wouldn't have faced his childhood deprivations. His TV mania is thus mainly an attempt to get rid of frustration.

After six years in the USA Yosef reflects on the failure of his numerous attempts to avoid the results of his monotonous and unhappy life:

I have held out long enough, over six years, against the concerted assault of loneliness and discontent. I have doggedly put on a brave face, despite the barrenness that is invading my days, so as not to anger providence whose favor I had beseeched until my prayers were answered... 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 has 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 posing 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? (215-16)

The above extract is what Yosef thinks lying on his bed after calling in sick as a result of "a spontaneous decision prompted by colossal boredom" (215). It is the drudgery of his daily life and the lack of any interest or purpose in his life that turns Yosef gloomy. Loneliness, the result of displacement and homesickness, also contributes to the 'colossal boredom', which haunts Yosef. The themes of emptiness and homesickness evident in the above extract, which are very much related to boredom, are discussed in the following pages.

In Dinaw Mengistu's novel frustration is overshadowed by themes of emptiness and loss. Frustration is a constant companion of Stephanos. This is because of the traumatic memory of his father's death, the loss of family and loved ones, homesickness and the economic depression that made him bankrupt and poor.

Once when Kenneth calls him in the morning to check whether he is performing his store-keeping business Stephanos responds oddly.

"... Why aren't you at the store yet?" he asks me

.....

"I was on my way there," I tell him.

"It's almost nine," he says. I look at the clock hanging on the wall across from me. I hadn't considered the time yet. There are already too many hours in the day;' to worry about any one in particular is pointless (35).

Stephanos's response to Kenneth indicates extreme frustration and lack of interest in life. This conversation took place after the departure from his life of Judith and Naomi who showed him a glimmer of love and family life. On top of that the economic depression has settled in and he is running bankrupt. And of course a day for him means hours of wakefulness in which the horrible image of his father in his last minutes could come and scare him. Stephanos thus feels bored and uninterested in his store-keeping business. He wishes to go on sleeping.

Often times, Stephanos focuses on the simple objects around him and busies himself in meticulously observing them in order to escape his ever-present frustration. Following is an example:

I left for the store half an hour later, hoping however foolishly, to catch what's left of the morning rush hour crowd. The sidewalks and street are particularly deserted; everyone but me and a few morning joggers has already reached their destination. The emptiness is nice, though. 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. There's an arc of benches on either side of the statue. The benches have new black lacquer paint, and behind the benches

are thick layers of startlingly fresh green sod where only dust and scattered clumps of crabgrass and weeds used to grow (35).

Stephanos's preoccupation with the environment around Logan circle is even more surprising when one considers that it is an early morning working hour in a country where time is money. Instead of rushing to his store and opening it or doing some other money making work, Stephanos indifferently sits cold and bored on the cement benches across Logan circle busying his mind with little things.

Stephanos got frustrated by his first job in the USA and quitted it in less than a year to become a storekeeper and comfortably read:

*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).*

Not just frustration but emptiness or the lack of meaning and purpose in his life too is at work here. Frustrated by the monotony of his menial job and the lack of interest in life engendered by his horrific experiences in the homeland, Stephanos even assumes suicide as an option-‘simply step off the edge’. He was standing on the Memorial Bridge staring at a river when he thought this and could have lost his life if he had jumped off. Stephanos chooses to live in a poor black American neighborhood running a store and taking asylum in the conversations, games and late night drinks which he and his friends Kenneth and Joseph half-heartedly indulge themselves with in order to escape frustration and emptiness.

A good example is when Kenneth and Joseph come to Stephanos's store frustrated and tired from the drudgery of their subaltern jobs. Stephanos whose store keeping business is showing him signs of a total bankruptcy is also frustrated and uninterested in life. Stephanos escapes and in the process helps his friends escape the boring and melancholic reality of their daily life

by resorting to a game of African coup's and revolutions they've adopted over the years (6-8). Here is an example,

Before either of them can tell me something else about America ("This country cares only about one thing..." "There are three things you need to know about Americans..."), I call out, "Bukassa." The name catches them off guard. They both turn and stare at me. They swirl their cups around and around to make sure it looks like they're thinking. Kenneth walks over to the map of Africa I keep taped on the wall right next to the door. It's at least twenty years old, maybe older. The borders and names have changed since it was made, but maps, like pictures and journals, have a built-in nostalgic quality that can never render them completely obsolete. The countries are all color coded, and Africa's hanging dour head looks like a woman's head wrapped in a shawl. Kenneth rubs his hand silently over the continent, working his way west to east and then south until his index finger tickles the tip of South Africa. When he's finished tracing his hand over the map, he turns around and points at me.

"Gabon." He says it as if it were a crime I was guilty of. "What about it?" I tell him, "I hear it's a fine country. Good people. Never been there myself, through." He turns back to the map and whispers, "Fuck you."

"Come on. I thought you were an engineer," Joseph taunts him. "Whatever happened to precision?" He stands up and puts his large fat arm over Kenneth's narrow shoulders. With his other hand he draws a circle around the center of Africa. He finds his spot and taps it twice.

"Central African Republic," he says. "When was it?"

He scratches his chin thoughtfully, like the intellectual he always thought he was going to become, and has never stopped wanting to be.

*"Nineteen sixty-four? No. Nineteen sixty-five."
"Nineteen sixty-six," I tell him.
"Close."
"But not close enough."*

This game, in addition to taking their minds off the tragedy of their frustrating life momentarily, helps them maintain contact with Africa and ease the inevitable identity crises and homesickness displacement would bring upon them. Perpetual boredom and frustration thus accompany the

immigrant characters in Dinaw's novel in their daily lives as a result of disillusionment, emptiness, homesickness and loss.

3.3.1.2.3. Emptiness

Similar to frustration the theme of emptiness is also revealed at various places in Fasil's novel. Yosef comparing himself, and by extension the Ethiopian Diaspora, with the biblical Joseph reflects:

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).

At one time in his life in the USA Yosef seeks relief through his childhood infatuation, music, buying a stereo and listening to music. He reflects:

... I have gotten a stereo and I am back with the true love of my life...I leave my soul at its mercy to be trampled underfoot or to soar with it to the summit of rapture.

Am I being sentimental, like a mawkish old man who spurns the here and now by exalting the there and then through the distorting lenses of nostalgia? Is my discontent a thinly disguised apology for my inability to make the most of what I have got? Is it all just an ingrate's neurotic angst, or is it the cold, hard fact that my life is becoming - what is the word- hollow? (149).

Just like his TV mania the meaninglessness and purposelessness of his life is what pushes him to get lost in the fantasy world of music. This only relieves him temporarily.

In an attempt to pluck himself out of the engulfing emptiness of his life in America, Yosef seeks the intervention of God. This is reflected in his apocalyptic dream (chapter 26, p. 219-22). In the dream an Ethiopian hermit tells him that he should wait for the message sent to him and read it. And finding a love letter written by a Georgian lover to his girl friend in Georgian

script on the roadside, Yosef considers it 'the message' sent to him from above to deliver him from emptiness.

Yes, this could be an answer to my prayers, for my convictions, my judgments, my actions and decisions have, after all, been rather precarious lately, and I have indeed been praying fervently for divine intervention ... could this be a truly propitious moment, an instant in my life that will put an end to my purposeless drifting? Could it really be that once I learn the meaning of this divine revelation, things will change for the better? Could this message indeed hold the answer to the riddle that my life has become of late? (239-40).

This longing for divine intervention and looking for a solution in dreams and a sheet of paper with an alien script shows the extent of the emptiness that is devouring Yosef's life day and night. It also implies that he has suffered a lot from emptiness. Furthermore, it indicates how much he is desperate to be relieved of it to the extent of foolishly putting faith in a mere paper found on the roadside.

Sometimes Yosef even doubts whether life in the Diaspora is really better than life at home:

.... Am I really better off here? Have I achieved all that I had set out to do? And if so, has that made me any happier? I count the gains I have made in the past six years in an attempt to stop that persistent voice of doubt from poisoning my fragile peace (148).

This is because of the lack of happiness and the introduction of emptiness into his life paradoxically in the land supposed to be the peak of satisfaction. All these show the helplessly hollow life immigrants like Yosef face in the host land and its effect.

The three main characters in Dinaw's novel Kenneth, Joseph and Stephanos face emptiness in all its power and often hide in the delirium of alcohol and overwork to forget it.

Kenneth, the Kenyan immigrant who seems to have no hope of returning home, tries to find order and meaning in his life in the USA. For example:

... He's come to believe that American men are so successful because they say the same thing over and over again... "So, I say, 'You close the store early today?' And you say, 'Fuck you.' "

"Fuck you, Ken," I say as the door closes behind him. He smiles gratefully at me whenever I say that. As much as Kenneth have ever needed anything in his life, he has needed order and predictability, small daily reassurances that the world is what it is, regardless of how flawed that may be (2)."

Kenneth's search for 'order and predictability' is a search for meaning. He wants to assure himself that his life is not an empty, unstable dream vulnerable to change. He used to be a Kenyan living in the homeland enjoying the love of his father and family, but government change and poverty drove him out. He didn't even see his father's face before his death. That life was unstable, volatile and unpredictable. Its compulsive recurrence makes his life in the host land empty and meaningless. And in an attempt to deny the acceptance of this unpleasurable fact and ease the pressure on his psyche he holds on to 'small daily reassurances' like repetition of similar conversations with his friends.

Stephanos's uncle Berhane who used to be a government official with a chauffeur to drive his car for him couldn't help feeling empty at becoming just another cab driver in the streets of D.C. Berhane tries to find meaning in his old furniture, as the narrator describes in the following passage:

My uncle's apartment hasn't changed in the slightest detail since I moved out. I'm grateful to him for this small measure of consistency. He's kept all of the furniture exactly the same, even though he's been talking of buying a new couch or dining-room table for years. He's attached to the old ones.

He can't help but be. I'm not sure what else in the world he has to believe in if not the couch and table that have stayed with him for the past nineteen years (119).

The emptiness or the lack of meaning in his life is the result of the changes that occurred in his life (118-121). Berhane had lived in Ethiopia as a rich and important man (115). He used to own an elegant home and ranch outside

of Addis (96-97). He migrated to Sudan and suffered there as a refugee (121). And lastly he came to America and found out that he could be nothing more than a taxi-driver getting money just enough for survival. Such a life in the host land with no hope of returning home (because of his connection with the Emperor's government) is meaningless for the emigrant Berhane. And emptiness haunts him day and night. He, therefore, seeks comfort by keeping old furniture that makes him feel at home and give him at least something he calls 'mine'. In addition, it reminds him of his past and helps him not to lose track of his volatile immigrant life in a foreign land by pointing to his life's beginning. A good demonstration of this is how Stephanos re-lives his past in Berhane's house and therapeutically re-narrates and reorders it (118-30).

The protagonist Stephanos suffers from emptiness the day he sets his foot on the American soil. He could not find any purpose or meaning in his life in America and shuts himself out in his uncle's house for the first few weeks (140). As a nineteen-year-old Ethiopian whose life shaped him to identify himself with and find meaning in Ethiopia and all that is Ethiopian, the alien host country could not appeal to him. He equates embracing America and what it offers with losing his dear Ethiopia. And in a desperate attempt to insulate himself from the emptiness that comes with that, he shuts himself out in his uncle's house (140-41).

Stephanos's life in the host land loses meaning mainly because of the memory of his father's brutal beating by the Dergue soldiers and his death with no burial ceremony. This cold fact of witnessing his father's beatings, not knowing where he was killed, not seeing his corpse and not knowing where he was buried makes Stephanos to lose interest in life. Furthermore, homesickness and disconnection with family and the loved ones makes his life even emptier. Emptiness thus becomes a problem he has to fight in the host land.

A good example of his attempt to escape emptiness is his tendency to be an uninvolved watcher of life revealed in the following extracts.

I want to take the couple [tourists he's following] gently by the hand and lead them down the street to Samuel's café, where we could sit under the green [l]awning on a busy corner and watch the crowd. This, I would tell them, is all I want out of life, to sit here on this plastic lawn chairs and watch the parade of skinny and muscular men, old and young, as they flirt and fight with each other (77).

Judith poured tea for the two of us, and a cup of hot chocolate for Naomi...The three of us sipped our tea and hot chocolate just as the sun was setting for the day. The first of the evening commuters were beginning to rush past the store on their way home, traffic was building up along the circle and on Massachusetts avenue, and the temperature was a moderate 36 degree, just cold enough to lend a certain urgency to returning home at the end of the day. We had managed to avoid all of that, like three prisoners locked in a comfortable cell that afforded them a view of a world they no longer cared to join. I remember looking out the window of the store and watching men and women walk briskly with their coats and scarves wrapped around their necks and feeling a certain pity for them (111).

Both the extracts show Stephanos's obsession with watching. Being an uninvolved watcher is one way of escaping the harsh reality of his life for him. A watcher is not expected to worry about his life or anything else except silently and peacefully performing his duty of watching. His attention is focused on the other- the watched. And there is no room for facing his life's hopeless emptiness. Silently watching is his best shield against the meaninglessness and purposelessness of his life in the host land.

Stephanos's emptiness also makes him live a lonely life except for occasional evening chats over alcohol with his two friends. He does not contact his uncle and family at home for a long time. Nor has he any girlfriend or wife. And one day after Judith's arrival in the neighborhood, the following happens:

... 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).

Stephanos's emptiness made him live a solitary life in the eerie and cold silence of the old and ruining neighborhood of Logan circle. And his lonely life there for more than a decade and a half disciplines his mind to consider a secluded life normal and the opposite extraordinary. He had "forgotten what [his] doorbell sounded like", "couldn't even remember the last time it had been pressed" and "[w]hen it rang [his] heart pressed against [his] chest and stayed there" (82). All these indicate the extreme loneliness and emptiness in his life before Judith came into it. And the expression "such things as guests and doorbells" showing how receiving guests and answering doorbells are foreign to his life point to the extreme emptiness of his life.

The three of them resort to drinking to escape from the emptiness of their lives (9). And the narrator Stephanos describes Kenneth's emptiness and his struggle to escape it through alcohol and overwork as follows.

I spent two months living in his oversize, barely furnished apartment when the heat[er] in mine broke during the middle of a winter storm three years ago. I tried not to be around when he came home from work.

I couldn't bear the sight of him sitting frozen and lifeless in a plastic lawn chair by the patio windows drinking beer after beer, wiggling his toes in his expensive wool socks. I came home one night and found him hysterically laughing to himself. The only light in the apartment came from the street lamp that hung just a few feet away from the porch windows. It wasn't enough light to see him by, which was fine because I could hear him laughing and arguing with himself and I wouldn't have wanted to know what his face looked like while he was doing that (145-46).

The behavior of Kenneth in the above extract shows the lack of meaning and satisfaction in his life. The loss of his father to death before he could support him, separation from the homeland and all that is dear to him and his monotonous daily work without a family to provide for make him feel hollow.

In addition, the condition in the homeland makes his return an impossible thing (186). After working for twelve hours, the stark reality of the emptiness of his life hits him in the face and he indulges in drinking alcohol to escape it and fall asleep.

In conclusion, emptiness in Dinaw's novel, which the immigrant characters struggle to wriggle themselves out of, is shown as haunting the lives of immigrants in the host land.

3.3.1.2.4. Homesickness

In *The Texture of Dreams* Yosef once dreams that his mother is dead and screams while sleeping. His kind - hearted landlady Mrs. Hanson comes to his room, wakes him and nurses him like a baby boy telling him it is just a dream (105-106):

My mother ... I am told that ... she is dead." Tears are seeping into my pillow ...

"There, there it's all a bad dream. That happens when you miss your loved ones she's perfectly okay..." (106).

They then both cry together as Mrs. Hanson too, as a lonely poor and old widow, has a lot to cry about. Her crying with him soothes him(106).

Such emotional breakdowns are the results of stifled desire to be re-united with the loved ones i.e. homesickness. The loved ones are far away and it demands a lot of money to visit them. In addition, the host land with its strange culture and people who have very little emotional, spiritual or psychological bond with the immigrant could hardly replace the homeland. This makes immigrants like Yosef sad from homesickness. And this sadness is like an open barrel full of water that needs a little pushing to be spilled. Once reading the sad story of Dostoevsky, Yosef faces emotional disturbance and escapes it by resorting to cooking (156-57).

The story is sad and beautifully told, one that fills my heart with yearning. My eyes had burned with unshed tears a few times as I was reading it. Yet even after I have put down the book, the temptation to weep is still with me I think cooking will keep my mind of it ... at least for an hour or two (156-57).

Yosef avoids the urge to cry due to homesickness by avoiding such contexts that could make him cry. Once while comforting his sick landlady, Mrs. Hanson, she comes to the verge of crying whining about her poverty and loneliness (161,) Yosef responds...

"Come on Mrs. Hanson Things are not as bad as they seem.... If you knew what real poverty was like, you would be grateful for what you have. Take it from me," I say ... The last thing I need is for Mrs. Hanson to breakdown and start crying. As it is, it has been difficult for me to keep the lid on my own emotions lately (162).

Crying is not the only way in which homesickness reveals itself. Sometimes laughter too can serve as an outlet. After narrating the story of a poor old woman in Ethiopia who thanked God for the little she had while living below the poverty line to Mrs. Hanson to stop her from crying they both sit silent. And then ...

Then, there is an uneasy silence. While Mrs. Hanson lies quietly, for a moment my mind is blissfully blank. And soon, an intense desire to laugh at myself for being such a sentimental fool gets a hold of me despite my attempts to suppress it. Laughter mounts inside me; it keeps swelling, gurgling in my chest. First it is a smirk, then a snicker, and in a few seconds, waves of irrepressible mirth. Mrs. Hanson must be thinking that I am splitting apart at the seams. I can see she is positively frightened, and I try to reassure her, sputtering words between my laughter. But I can't stop laughing. I continue to laugh until I am drained of the bizarre emotions and finally find my balance (163).

It's the stifled emotional disturbances caused by the long on hold sadness due to homesickness and longing for the loved ones that are purged through this sudden laughter. Homesickness sometimes expresses itself through nostalgic narration and memories of folks at home too (162). Homesickness, thus, is a constant companion of immigrants. Immigrants try to stifle it to be

stable, but it keeps pressurizing them seeking gratification through contact with home - imagined or actual.

Homesickness though not widely brought out as in ***The Texture of Dreams*** is among the main themes of Dinaw's novel. The immigrants in the novel all have deep attachments with their homeland and miss it.

Berhane Sellassie, despite living in US for two decades, always longs for the homeland: "Berhane is not, in fact a citizen - only a permanent resident, which he will remain until he dies, because in his heart, he will always be in Ethiopia" (122). It is the extreme love for and longing to be in Ethiopia that makes Berhane to remain in Ethiopia. He is always only half-heartedly in America and considers himself a temporary Ethiopian refugee there. He just couldn't like America or adopt its culture because he is homesick and thus numb to the USA living, in his mind's image of Ethiopia (118-22).

The same is true with Stepahnos who saw images of home and loved ones everywhere in his walks on the streets of Washington. He narrates:

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 searched for familiarity wherever I went. I found it in the buildings and in the layout of the streets. 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 found a small measure of it in the circles and in the beggars who slept under the office towers at night. 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 ... (175-76).

The homesickness of Stephanos in this extract triggers a nostalgic and imaginative re-visiting of home. Searching for the slightest resemblances he constructs the image of the home he dearly misses.

Immigrants like Joseph, Kenneth, Berhane and Stephanos find it difficult to get back home due to economic and political reasons. In addition the fear of not finding the homeland as they left it makes 'home' an unattainable signified. Stephanos describes:

There is a simple and startling power to that phrase: going back home. There is an implied contradiction, a sense of moving forward and backward at the same time, but there's no tension in the phrase. Instead, the contradiction gives in to something else: an understanding, perhaps, that what you're returning to can never be the same as what you left. I understand now that distant, faraway look I've seen in other immigrants when they talk about returning to wherever it was they first came from (174).

The home changes due to various social, economic and political developments in the long run. Kids grow up; relatives or friends grow old or pass away; and environments change. And the dearest images in the mind may no more be there when the immigrant returns. Immigrants like Stephanos choose to comfortably be homesick of the image of home in their mind rather than return home and face disappointment and loss. In his own words:

*It would be so much easier never to return, wouldn't it? ... 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... I never understood... until right now: that everything went with you [his father] (175-77).*

As the extract shows Stephanos's interest to return home died because he found out that a home without his father will be no home to him. Stephanos's homesickness is thus tragic, and closely knit with loss. He dangles between Ethiopia and USA suffering from the bitter fact that he can't comfortably be in both places. So he suffers from a never-ending homesickness.

Homesickness in Dinaw's novel is thus overshadowed by loss. And it is shown as a continuous predicament in an immigrants life which won't be satisfied

even at the return to homeland because home changes with time and the loss of a dearly loved relative (like Stephanos's father) makes it empty.

3.3.1.2.5. Racism and Discrimination

The themes of racism and discrimination are not widely dealt with in ***The Texture of Dreams***. The protagonist becomes a close friend of a white landlady and is rarely discriminated against in the story. But there are moments of racial prejudice and discrimination captured by the raring pen of Fasil Yitbarek at a few places in the novel.

One, for example, is Yosef's job interview with Clayton in which Clayton favors Yosef because he is from Africa and ...

"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).

The shadow represents discrimination against the other - the non-Muslim. And the discrimination here is the favor and employment opportunity given based on belonging to Africa and Islam.

At another place, Yosef cannot withhold the joy of landing his first job in New York and glides in the train with joy. Then ...

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).

This is pure prejudice. Identifying a black man as a potential drug abuser and interpreting his happiness or ecstasy as a sign of danger is a prejudice developed through experience.

When he first meets his landlady Yosef experiences prejudice as his landlady finds it difficult to believe that he doesn't eat pork despite being black (71). Mrs. Hanson, at another time, openly attacks him when Yosef misuses the microwave almost starting a fire and the burst wakes her up from sleep. "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). Translation: you come from the uncivilized primitive dark Africa; you can't handle our civilized life. This is a sublimation of aversive racism triggered by a momentary anger.

Yosef remains unaffected by the social construct 'black' in American society. Once discussing the case of a famous black man who killed his white wife and got a "not guilty" verdict from the jury in the class all blacks except Yosef argue that justice is done (110-112). One black student tries to 'talk sense' into Yosef:

"I don't know where you come from, but I am from the United States of America where some white Christian folk's idea of weakened entertainment used to be taking their kids to a black mans lynching (112)."

Throughout the novel the protagonist narrator, Yosef, fails to identify himself as 'black' taking the little prejudice and discrimination meted out to him as a normal problem of the host society.

Immigrant characters in Dinaw's novel are often discriminated by the natives. Their poverty and failure to blend into the native American style of life is often the cause. Once Kenneth decides to buy a used car and goes, with Stephanos, driving a rented car to a used car dealership:

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 neighborhood 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."

He resumed the pose he had taken in front of my house, except now, with the sun a little higher, he put on a pair of sunglasses to complete the portrait. As we stood outside and waited against the hood of the car, middle aged American men in white short-sleeve shirts came in and out of the main office, walked leisurely through the aisles of cars, dabbed their brows with handkerchiefs that they then refolded back into their pockets, 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).

After many years of living as a discriminated low class immigrant and day and night toiling Kenneth gets into the American middle class. All he wants is to prove those who undervalued him wrong and revive his wounded self-esteem. And what he needs above everything now is respect- 'wait, let them come to us'. But the respect Kenneth expected to get after becoming an employed engineer did not come from the natives. Despite the Sedan car he rented and the suit he wore, he is just another African immigrant for the natives. He worked hard and taught himself devotedly to become an engineer, but for the natives, he is an African and he is not wealthy and so they deny him respect and attention. The humiliation is difficult for Kenneth to take in- 'let's go, they don't have what I want'.

This tendency of the natives to discriminate against African immigrants seems so common that Joseph and Kenneth find it difficult to believe that a white woman could rent a house next door to Stephanos as the following passage shows:

*"Guess what?" I asked them.
"What?"
"Some white people just moved in."
"Where?"
"Next door."*

"Next door to who?"
 "Me"
 "He's lying."
 "I'm serious"
 "Next door to **you**."
 "Yes."
 "In that house."
 "I think they're going to fix it up."
 "Why would white people want to live next to you?"
 "I don't think they know I live here."
 "How do you know?"
 "I saw them."
 "And what did they look like?"
 "Tall. White."
 "I only saw one."
 "Well then, that proves nothing."
 "She was searching in her purse for keys." (14-15).

'Why would white people want to live next to' Stephanos? He is black. He is an African immigrant. And the neighborhood is full of black-Americans. Something must be wrong with them – 'what did they look like?' Stephanos is saying 'tall' and 'white'. Well, that's normal. How could this be? He only saw one. That's it. She must be an investigator or officer working for the city administration just checking things. Otherwise, how could whites possibly live next-door to blacks? This is what Kenneth and Joseph, disciplined by the racism and discrimination in USA, think.

It is difficult to accuse Kenneth and Joseph of pessimism because as Stephanos says....

Before Judith, these were the only reasons white people had ever come into the neighborhood to deliver official notices, investigate crimes, and check up on the children of negligent parents (18).

At another time, his long time black-American neighbor Mrs. Davis attacks Stephanos:

"Why do you think a woman like that would wanna live here? Doesn't seem right, does it?"

"It's a free country, Mrs. Davis. People can live where they like."

“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).

Mrs. Davis's prejudice about Africa and African immigrants comes out when Stephanos fails to tell her the secrets of the white woman he has become friends with. Angry at his cold response against her lust for rumor she almost insults him. She tells him that he didn't know what freedom is till he came to USA. And he came to US only 'last week'. The 'last week' figuratively points to his comparatively recent arrival to USA. And the 'living in a hut' part in her speech is just another way of telling him that he is uncivilized and doesn't understand American life.

The extent of race based prejudice and discrimination between whites and the blacks living in Logan Circle neighborhood is revealed in their reaction to the arrival of white settlers in the following extract:

They [white people] unloaded two gilded mirrors and an antique desk, along with a pair of sofas with a pillow so large and comfortable that I imagined myself asking if I could sit, for just a few minutes. A handful of other people were watching with me from the other side of the street. The entire time we stood out there I heard only one person saying anything at all, nothing more than a simple phrase, "White people" (24).

Stephanos saw the furniture, their quality and their conformability - 'I imagined myself asking if I could sit'. But the black - American on-lookers saw only one thing 'white people'. Blinded by racism they couldn't see anything else except 'white people'. And the utterance of only this single phrase is like looking at UFO's and saying 'UFO's'. As a result of identifying whites and all that belongs to them negatively and avoiding contact for years the black-Americans see whites in their neighborhood as aliens (UFO's).

Stephanos, after living in the black American neighborhood for seventeen years, finds himself falling into the trap of racist divisions. Once, in a meeting of the neighborhood against evictions Judith is the only white person in the

hall. And she sat alone detached from the black - Americans who avoided her. Coming late and noticing this, Stephanos sat in the back row in an attempt to be neutral to the race based seating arrangement (196-98). But Mrs. Davis who is leading the meeting calls him and tells him that she could hardly see him. And then ...

Judith turned around in response to Mrs. Davis's scolding to see me sitting nervously in the back. I stood up. Judith moved her coat off the seat next to her. Mrs. Davis caught the gesture and followed me with her eyes to see where I was going to sit. It had become that type meeting. I saw that now. Poor Judith. She didn't know what she had walked in on. All she had seen was a chance to demonstrate her high-minded concern, her belief in participatory democracy and Emersonian ideals.

I took my time gathering my coat and scarf. There were definite sides, and the people in that room were all waiting to see which one I was going to choose.

I smiled warmly at Judith as I passed her row. She turned her head in the opposite direction and threw her coat back over the empty seat. I walked all the way to the front. I took a seat in the first row, on the opposite side of Mrs. Davis and her committee (197-98).

The decision of Stephanos to sit with the blacks instead of his intimate friend Judith, whom he loves, shows how racism disciplines people. Had he sat with her, he would have lost the favor of the community with whom he lived for years and, who knows, some black activists would have set his store or house on fire.

Racism in the black-American neighborhood where Stephanos lives gradually reaches its peak as house rent increases and evictions continue (199-201). And Judith, the only white and rich resident in the neighborhood, receives all the attacks. First her car's windows were broken, and then her house windows and lastly her house was burned down (209-225).

To sum up, racism and discrimination is well depicted in the novel. The immigrants suffer from discrimination from whites and blacks alike. And

they're often forced to take sides in the racism between blacks and whites in USA. The three immigrant characters Joseph, Kenneth and Stephanos identify themselves as blacks.

3.3.1.3. Sub-themes

3.3.1.3.1. Acculturation

Themes of bewilderment or culture shock and gradual acculturation especially preoccupy the first few chapters of *The Texture of Dreams*. American English, eating and closing habits, the boundless freedom and the free market are all sources of bewilderment to the new Ethiopian immigrant Yosef. But he soon blends in benefiting from his higher education and his desperate effort to get a job. But bewilderment and acculturation are not as simple as getting surprised and getting used to for a desperate immigrant. They are much bigger issues.

The first shock Yosef faces is American English, which he confronts just after he steps out of the plane in the airport. He describes:

I get my first taste of America at JFK Airport on a sweltering summer day in 1991. The huge customs officer, who examines my visa and my luggage, barks a few questions at me, chewing his words together with a big lump of gum bulging in his cheek. 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).

For Yosef, who has a degree in English Literature, not understanding English is a big blow to his confidence.

Taken to a cafeteria by his relatives on his first day in USA, Yosef faces this unpleasurable fact again:

... a young waitress approaches us smiling and says: "party of four?" and something else that sounded to my ears like "smoky or nun?"

What was that about smoky or nun? I wonder, "What did she just say?" I whisper to Yordanos in Amharic.

*"She asked if we wanted a table for smokers or nonsmokers."
 "Is that what she said?"
 "Yeah. She said 'smoking or non' meaning smoking or non smoking."
 "Oh, I see."

 "Would you like soup or salad?"
 "Yes, thank you," I answer.
 "Which one?" She asks me.
 "Super salad."
 She chuckles and turns to my friends for help. They are trying not to laugh.
 "What did she say to me?" I ask them with unconcealed bafflement.
 "She asked you if you wanted soup or salad," Aida tells me.
 "Salad," I snap at the smiling waiters. She goes to get our orders and I am relieved to see the back of her (18-19)."*

Growing up in a country where English is confined to the academic context and is taught through reading and writing, even those Ethiopian immigrants who are well educated like Yosef find it difficult to adapt to the spoken English of the common folk in America. They face humiliation and shame like Yosef in the above extract at the failure to comprehend the language they know. Becoming an object of mockery, humiliation and wounded self-esteem isn't the only result of linguistic incompetence. Yosef's language problems have even denied him the chance of getting a job. One employer explained why he could not hire him in this way:

"O.K. Then I'll be honest with you. Wanna know why I can't hire you? First, you're overqualified for the job. Two you're not strong enough. Last, but not least, 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).

Another culture of Americans, i.e. their clothing tradition, is also shocking to Yosef who comes from the pre 1991 Ethiopia. Standing in the passenger waiting area he observes the people around him:

Most people around me are skimpily dressed, exposing most parts of their bodies. There are even some who have near-private regions of their flesh on display. Women don't flaunt their novels where I come from, nor do they reveal much of what lies above their knees (14).

These are immoral and heathenish or barbarous for most Ethiopians (esp. the Christians and Muslims). Scenes like these shock and haunt the untamed minds of immigrants like Yosef resulting in 'abnormal behaviors' in the eye of the natives: making them objects of laughter and giving them the unappreciated label 'fresh' or 'new'. And being identified as such could mean just harmless jeers if lucky and deportation or unemployment if not. So the immigrant painfully rests his homeland's cultures and social values in order to survive. The food, the physiques and behaviors of the natives, their concept of personal space etc and their effect on Yosef are also described in the novel (20,14,22).

The shocks, which Yosef faces, are not all negative. For example, after seventeen years of deprivation of human rights in Ethiopia, Yosef gets astounded at the extent of freedom he got in USA (22-25). He even developed a habit of walking in the night as an act of compensating for the deprivations at home:

I relish the heady thrill of freedom: Sauntering in to 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).

In general, bewilderment is an inevitable phase in an immigrant's life where the immigrant has to face the culture, language, and lifestyle of the host nation with its fresh vision. And its effects such as humiliation, wounded self-esteem, being mocked at, unemployment and in the worst cases deportation make it a serious matter for the immigrant.

Slowly Yosef starts adapting to the culture and lifestyle of New Yorkers:

I have learned to resist gawking at spectacles that would have provoked outrage back home, such as a young girl walking with most of her belongings on show, and another in a crowded train purring with her lover's tongue in her mouth. Even New Yorkers code of personal space, I am trying my best to live up to-performing circus - worthy contortions in a packed train car to keep my body from touching that of a stranger. I grunt "excuse me!" with a fake grin when contact becomes unavoidable. I no longer quail under the withering glares and obscenities that my clumsy collision with

an irate passenger unleashes. " I am sorry! I am really sorry!" I say and move on (22).

In communal Ethiopia people don't kiss in public and women are supposed to be shy. And accidental pushes, shoves or touches are no problem at all. But in USA modernization has ripped off shame and morality from people. In addition there is no love or trust between people. It's a private and selfish life there. And Yosef blends in for survival.

Yosef adopts American English too, slowly getting rid of his 'thick accent':

... I have worked hard to hone my accent in the last few months, and I have done quite well with thinking it. New Yorkers still frown when they hear me speak and often ask that I repeat myself, but not as frequently as they used to. By means of persistent monologues at home and on the streets - talking in front of the mirror, mimicking sentences and phrases I catch on the radio and on TV, giving my tongue/lips/jaw a regular workout to better articulate the vowels and consonants of American English - I have managed to take a few layers off my thick accent (47 - 48).

And after five years Yosef admits that he has changed (125). Acculturation did not totally tear Yosef from his culture, identity or preferences. An example of this is his short-lived relationship with the Peruvian girl Josephine.(159 - 60).Here is the story:

....we broke up because of Josephine's habit of spouting obscenities in bed. I had tried my best to take a charitable view of things, to try to understand what might have been a harmless quirk brought on by a sensual pleasure, like those who stick their tongues out a yard long when they rub their eyes. But no matter how hard I tried I had been unable to stop myself from wilting under the raunchy monologue and exclamations Josephine's mouth spewed out like corn out of a ripped sack; the more the excitement the more lurid the obscenities. I had tried to discuss the matter with her, to see if I could persuade her to tone it down a bit. She had laughed, feigned embarrassment and shrugged...

"Ha ha ha ha ha! I don't believe this! You are serious aren't you?" she had sneered." What he hell is wrong with you? What's wrong with talking smut when you are doing smut? It's not like I talk like that all the time, you know? 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. I enjoy sex and I show it. If you got a problem with it, you can go hell. But you should know you're a fucking loser! Good luck!" she had ranted and stormed out. The last I saw of Josephine (160).

The way the narrator and protagonist Yosef describes Josephine's bed manners indicates his attitude about it. He uses expressions like 'spouting', 'raunchy monologue', 'spewed', 'lurid', 'obscenities' etc which all show a depreciation of the act as morally low. The image of the corn sack used as a simile also reduces Josephine to inhumanity. So, Yosef, disciplined by the culture, religion and social value of his motherland, considers the act animistic, heathenish or immoral and couldn't bring himself to accepting it. The same is true with Josephine to whom Yosef's reaction is unbelievable-"I can't believe this!"(160). Thus, acculturation does not mean a total abandonment of one's culture as there could always be some irreconcilable differences.

Acculturation is also connected to becoming Americanized and getting accepted as a citizen of USA, especially for refugee immigrants who are in constant fear of getting deported. An example is the Russian immigrants in New York:

I have come across several ... who have taken offence at being spoken to in their language by a non-Russian. God knows why. My guess is that they take such unsolicited overtures as a comment on their failure to be adequately Americanized in manners and speech (83).

Acculturation in its broadest sense takes away the religious piety of immigrants like Yosef too. He narrates:

I am praying ... I am mumbling the words of my prayer, but a part of me is scoffing at my plea, deriding my crisis induced show of piety as futile waste of time.Like a bird that has flown into a glass house my soul wings about pathetically within the confines of my room, colliding against the cold, hard walls of faithlessness (277).

This lack of faith and piety is the result of the disciplining effect of the American society in which he lived: their ideas, science, culture, their belief in money and their overtly or covertly ant-faith discourses disgorged upon him through their unavoidable media such as TV, films, magazines etc.

Acculturation in general has both a bright and dark side to it for the Ethiopian immigrant. It is a question of survival to the Ethiopian immigrant who has to learn the language, culture and lifestyle of the host land in order to successfully work with and become part of the residents of the host land. The failure to successfully acculturate often means not being able to get a job; or, in the case of illegal immigrants, dangers of deportation. Immigrants, therefore, do their utmost to acculturate. On the other hand acculturation can make the immigrants lose some of their dearest values such as faith and suffer from emptiness.

In Dinaw's novel, acculturation, though not widely revealed, is shown to result in some cases in identity crisis on the Ethiopian Diaspora in D.C. Stephanos witnesses this in an elevator ride in an Ethiopian Diaspora apartment:

Once the elevator begins to move, the gossip begins. It's disguised as innocent conversation between two women. Speaking much louder than necessary, one woman claims to have seen Dr. Negatu's daughter getting out of a cab by herself at sunrise. To make matters worse, she was sitting in the front seat. The news is followed by the customary tsking of sound judgment being passed. It's soon followed up with the other news of the day. Those who don't join in on the conversation simply stand quietly like myself, complicit and greedy. In one protracted elevator ride there are rumors of infidelity, abuse drugs, unemployment. It all amounts to one thing proof of a vanishing culture. Time, distance, and nostalgia have convinced these women that back in Ethiopia, we were all moral and perfect, all of which is easier to believe when you consider the lives that most of us live now (117-118).

The loss of culture, Ethiopian codes of morality and ethics, and other social values of the homeland are the concerns of these Ethiopian women in D.C. As one woman in the same elevator ride said, "with enough time ... there won't

be any Ethiopians. They'll all become American" (118). Similar examples are found on pages 122, and 140-45. The loss thus is also the loss of identity and the loss of all of the distinctive features of nationhood. And this often leads them to the idealization of the motherland as moral and perfect.

The theme of acculturation is overshadowed by the theme of loss and given little attention in Dinaw's novel.

3.3.1.3.2. Lust for Love

Though the loneliness and homesickness in the host land demands the support of a loving soul mate, the differences of culture and values often make immigrants fail in building a lasting relationship with the opposite sex. A good example is Yosef's failed relationship with the Peruvian girl Josephine (160). So falling in love can be painful.

In *The Texture of Dreams* Yosef falls in love with Helen, a woman of mixed race, who possesses him the first day he puts his eyes on her at Hunter College. But their attraction is deeper:

My attraction to Helen is not a case of foolish infatuation. She has qualities that are truly endearing to me, like the way she hears me out when I struggle to lift myself out of a verbal rut. ... I speak with less effort when I am with her, and discover that I can be passionate about things I normally would shrug off. She is not one of those who take the trouble to enquire about my past and then masquerade their fast withering curiosity with that empty refrain: "interesting". Helens interest is as genuine as it is enduring (116).

He likes her because she gives him what he lacks like attention- 'the way she hears me out'; confidence 'I speak with less effort'; and passion or interest in life-'I can be passionate'. In addition, there is the fact that she is genuinely free from the false mask natives wear when socializing. These qualities, which immigrants lack in the host land, are among the causes of emptiness and boredom. And Helen promises the potential to relieve him of these problems. On top of that she is beautiful to all appearance:

Helen is a petite woman with dark hair and brown eyes...she has chocolate skin that seems to glow as if she were perpetually bathed in the light of an autumn sunset...radiant eyes...when Helen begins to speak, a hush descends on the class because her eloquence is captivating. And...she would express a thought which none of us knows how to contest. I for one listen to her riveted, undone by her seamless reasoning, bewitched by the smile that lights up her face. There are times when I get lost in the sweet cadence of her voice and the exquisite elegance of her gestures....(115)

Yosef's love for Helen is so deep that the fact of her living with a boyfriend couldn't stop it. Invited at their house, he becomes jealous of her boyfriend – Mark:

His [Mark's] gray eyes affectionately traverse the length of her small body before they rest on her face. There they become glazed with desire. He quietly smothers her with the lust of a rutting stag, and she yields to the mute cry of his libido. Forgetting my presence, their eyes lick each other's faces and I feel discomfort spiked with a twinge of ... er ... jealousy? Helen and Mark are in the thick of wild infatuation (141).

The expression "rutting stag" referring to Mark as a wild male deer in the height of the mating season reduces him to an animal having no humanly passion. While the words 'lust', 'libido', 'lick' and 'wild infatuation' profane the love between the two as nothing more than sexual. These are all reflective of the narrator – Yosef's stifled desire to be the one and only real lover of Helen. Reducing Mark and his relationship to Helen to nothing gives him the hope of claiming Helen one day.

Yosef, thus, indulges into looking for clues for the future break up of the two and feeds his psycho on them (pp. 179, 180, 181, 183). And when they at last break-up, Yosef immediately tells Helen that he loves her only to find out that she's already got another boyfriend (212-13). She also tells him that she doesn't want to be more than friends with someone who could possibly make her fall in love and that she doesn't want their relationship to be more than platonic (213). This has nothing to do with discrimination or aversive racism but cultural and ideological differences. Helen just happens to view physical

intimacy and love or friendship as two things that don't mix while for Yosef they should.

Yosef, never gives up, and nurses his love for Helen for a long time. His unfulfilled desire to be Helen's lover becomes sublimated in his dream. He sees her playing music (the love of his life) wearing sexually attractive attire:

Helen, the small, delicate, superbly crafted woman with a cello massively wedged between her legs, its glossy chestnut blending with the silky cinnamon of her skin She is wearing something diaphanous, a gossamer dress that clings to her lovingly, accentuating her contours. Her slender arms are bare up to the shoulders. Her neck is slick and flawless like that of a gazelle. Her face is the picture of womanhood in full bloom. Her hazel eyes are brimming with smoldering passion as they dreamily gaze through me ... (283).

Luckily, Yosef's love and longing for Helen did not remain a dream. Out of the blue, Helen gives him a call and tells him that she is tired of wrestling with muscle packed men for the mere satisfaction of her sexual desire and that she is ready for love (294 - 95). He goes to her place and a hint is given at the end of the novel that his dream has come true: "And when that [two months of vacation in Ethiopia] is over, who knows what a budding romance could bring"(307).

In general, love is shown as everlasting, patient, and beyond the limiting powers of the real world circumstances in the novel. It is also revealed that immigrants long for it as the one thing that could pluck them out of their predicament.

The theme of searching for love and family and the ups and downs of a one-sided love affair is one of the major themes of ***The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears***. The protagonist Stephanos falls in love with Judith, a white professor of American political history, as she settles next door to him at her sabbatical. He sees in her deliverance from his empty life filled with perpetual disillusionment.

Stephanos's infatuation with Judith started the first day he saw her reading on the bench in front of Logan Circle.

Judith ... looked as indifferent to her surrounding as General Logan did on his horse, her legs properly crossed, one shoe dangling just slightly from her foot as she turned her head with the flip of each page. I admired her from a distance; the way she sat, confident and oblivious to the world, her hair sometimes caught in a gust of wind to reveal the long, elegant lines of her neck. She would sweep her hair back with one clean gesture that suggested unbroken concentration on whatever was in front of her (21).

Stephanos easily socializes with Judith and develops a good friendship with her sweet daughter Naomi (24-29). And, at one time, when he gets a dinner invitation, he desperately prepares for the dinner in order to impress Judith:

I went home early and changed into a neatly pressed button-down white shirt and a pair of slightly worn gray wool slacks Kenneth had handed down to me. Before leaving the house I stood in front of my bathroom mirror and practiced my introduction. I brushed forward the edges of my thinning hair and patted down the sides of my small Afro. My reflection stared back disapprovingly. I had aged. But there was nothing distinguished about me. The laugh lines around my mouth had burrowed in, and there was more of my forehead than I cared to show. I smiled and tried to find a hint of a younger and better version of myself, but there was no doing. He was gone.

I stepped back from the mirror and practiced my introduction. I want to be ready for the moment Judith opened the door and found me standing on her steps. I wanted to strike the right chord, leave no room for error.

"Hello. Great to see you."

"I'm honored to be here. Thank you for having me."

"It's a pleasure to be here. It was so kind of you to invite me." (50-51).

As can be seen in this extract Stephanos is desperate. He goes 'home early' and changes into the best suit he has. He observes his appearance in the mirror and tries to make himself presentable. He even practices the first sentences he will utter in a desperate effort 'to strike the right chord'. His being desperate seems to be abnormal for a man who's almost forty. But as the above extract and the general context of the novel shows Stephanos sort

of slept through his youth and woke at his adulthood for love. So he could be reliving his youthful desires of romance.

For someone like Stephanos, who shut himself out from the world for seventeen years in order to escape the traumatic memory of his father's death and his separation from his family, winning the love of a woman he loves is a big deal. Consider the following:

"Instead of sitting at the dining - room table, Judith suggested we eat on the couch"

"We can be less formal that way, don't you think?" she said.

I nodded my head in agreement. We ate our dinner off porcelain plates with gold - trimmed edges while sitting on the leather couches. Judith and Naomi were spread out on one while I sat across from them with my food delicately balanced on my lap. I watched every bite as it traveled from the tip of my fork into my mouth. I tried to erase any sound of food being ground into bits by chewing slowly, but it was never quite enough. I was still there, with all of my flaws, in Judith's immaculate living room, which was larger and grander than anything I had ever sat and eaten in since coming to Logan Circle. I kept my legs close together and limited my movements to a few simple nods of the head. My plate teetered on a few occasions and had it fallen on the newly restored hardwood floors, I'm confident I would have shattered with it (55).

The 'porcelain plates' and 'leather couches' refer to Judith's high socio-economic status or class. And this class difference adds a certain tension to the already desperate Stephanos.

Stephanos's extreme efforts and his commitment to impressing Judith on that dinner almost succeed. After Naomi goes to sleep, the two sit chatting and Judith tells him the things she does to make Naomi happy (57-58). Then ...

I couldn't help admire Judith's devotion to her daughter, precisely because of its excesses. Who didn't want to be loved like that? She didn't apologize for anything, and I believed her completely.....

"This must sound ridiculous to you," she said.

"Nope," I said. I popped my "p" just as hard, if not harder than Naomi had done earlier. It was a silly thing to have done, but it made Judith laugh with relief, which was more than I could have hoped for. This time, instead of covering her mouth with her hand, she stretched out her fingers and without thinking took two of mine in hers. She leaned in just far enough for me to meet her face less than halfway. It wasn't a kiss so much as it was a gentle press, or an extended graze of lips, full of a sudden, almost crushing tenderness. We held it for a long as we could, three, may be four seconds at most, and then the moment passed.

Judith took a slight step back and said, "I should go check on Naomi."

"It must be getting late, "I said.

"I'll walk you to the door," she said. She walked me to the door and leaned her head outside so she could see my building.

"Get home safely," she said.

"I'll try." (58-59).

What caused the 'slight step back' or repulsion on Judith? Judith, a white professor separated from her Mauritanian husband, is not described as having any racist attitudes in the novel. But aversive racism may be lurking in her subconscious. Another probable cause is their socio-economic status difference. So, prevented by these barriers Judith is unable to give herself in to physical intimacy with Stephanos.

The attempts of Stephanos to recreate that moment repeatedly fail (80-85). But, Stephanos keeps on hoping and once when she comes to his house he gives it another try:

I set out two glasses and filled them partially with ice. This was a deliberate act of seduction; I had seen it before in television and movies. There was a direct chain of events that has to be followed: the glasses of scotch and ice led to the couch, which in turn led to the first hesitant kiss of the night, followed by the frenzied passion that came with my hand running through her hair. All I had to do was know how to play the role right: to hold the cups properly, speak eloquently, and carry myself with the assurance of a leading sitcom actor.

I handed Judith her glass.

"Cheers," I said.

"To what?" she asked.

"Furniture."

"Perfect," she said.

We raised our glasses to the air, and we toasted to furniture.

I sat down on the couch next to Judith. We both put our feet up on the coffee table, bending our knees so that we resembled a pair of children sitting bored and idle. She leaned over and rested her head on my shoulder. All of her exhaustion came through at that moment. Her head didn't land so much as it seemed to finally relent ... I noticed that she had fallen asleep (86-87).

Stephanos's hope of a romantic night expires as he discovers that Judith is drunk and is only passing time with him. She wakes after a twenty-five minutes nap only to hurry home (87-88). These disappointments did not however give an end to his ambition.

Driven by his lust for love and family Stephanos looks for small clues in his conversations with Judith. One day as he and Judith's daughter Naomi, with whom he had developed father daughter relationship, were reading, Judith comes to take Naomi home...

"One more chapter," Naomi pleaded.

"Tomorrow," Judith said. "Tomorrow you can stay as long as you like."

.... I had called Joseph as soon as I returned home so I could explain everything that had happened to him.

"Tell me again now, what did she say when she left the store?" he asked me.

"She said, 'You can stay as long as you like?'"

There was a long stretch of silence on Joseph's end as he deliberated over the meaning of Judith's words.

"What else did she say?" he asked.

"That was it."

"Was she smiling at you?"

"No, she may have, and I just missed it."

.....

"What do you know about his woman?" he asked me.

"What do you mean?" I said. "I know plenty"

"Don't get mad at me, Stephanos. I'm just asking you simple questions. Relationships with women are tricky. Trust me. I know about these things. You've never dated an American before."

Joseph was kind enough not to remind me that since coming to America I had never had a relationship of any kind beyond brief one-night encounters.

*“American women are different,” he continued.
“Remember that you never know what is in their hearts.” (108-109)*

Stephanos’s hanging on to ‘you can stay as long as you like’ as an acceptance of his romantic endeavors gets shattered by Joseph’s simple questions. But still Stephanos driven by his inherent desire for love and family continues looking for little clues:

She opened the door with a “surprise,” and then quickly went to work setting out the cups and drinks on the counter.

“What’s the occasion?” I asked her.

“No occasion,” she said. “But I figured if we were going to red, there was no reason why we couldn’t do it properly.”

I noted the “we” in her last sentence. I held on to it and told myself that I would use it against Joseph later. “We are going to read,” I would tell he. We (111).

The “we” makes him part of a family: A family that will liberate him from his lonely and empty life; a family that will make him forget the loss of his own family and the haunting presence of past traumatic memories. He, therefore, clings to the ‘we’ with a religious devotion.

Stephanos’s happiness at the chance of playing dad to Naomi also shows his extreme longing for love and family life. He misses Naomi while she is with him:

Here we were, an older man and a girl young enough to be the man’s daughter, sitting in a store on a winter morning reading a novel together. I tried not to notice too much, to simply just live, but that was impossible. Every time I looked at her I became aware of just how seemingly perfect this time was. I thought about how years from now I would remember this with a cursing, heartbreaking nostalgia, because of course I knew even then that I would eventually find myself standing here alone (103).

Stephanos’s meticulous search for clues of green lights from Judith discovers a red light in the following extract.

“Those are all from Naomi’s dad,” Judith said, pointing toward the boxes. “He likes his presents to be ... ostentatious.”

.....
“And what about you?” I asked Judith. “What do you like?”

“I prefer simple and elegant.”

“I like small and cheap.” I said.

“That’s too bad,” Judith said. “It looks like you’ve gone and picked the wrong family.”

She said it without thinking, which I suppose was precisely what made it even worse. As soon as she said it she caught the look on my face and tried to take it back.

“Why did you say that?” I asked her.

“It was a joke,” she said. “You know what I mean.”

And I believed her; it had been a joke, but whether or not she meant it with the slightest intentions didn’t matter. I could see myself trying to measure up at family dinners and cocktail parties, and as a result, always falling short (134-35).

Judith’s ‘you’ve picked the wrong family’ opens Stephanos’s eye to the socio-economic status gap between him and her. It downs on him how impossible his dream of becoming her boy friend or husband is.

However, this awareness of Stephanos couldn’t kill his desire for love. Because,

“... The night after I left, I dreamed of standing side by side with a faceless woman whose name I never knew. We were on top of a hill, and she had her back to me, but we were together, at least that much was clear. There was a moment near the end of the dream when I nervously put my army around her waist, and she leaned back into them. I woke up then with an overwhelming sense of loss ... (149).

The dream, which he dreams after getting back from ‘the wrong family’, shows his desire to become lovers with Judith and his fear of separation or failure. Contemplating on the dream he takes the day off and lies in his bed imagining unification with Judith:

... Any moment now Judith was going to ring the doorbell and I was going to apologize, and she was going to apologize. Soon, we were going to laugh the whole thing off as a terrible minor misunderstanding. Greater and more unlikely things happened very day. People won the lottery. Trains jumped off tracks. Missing children were discovered. Why not this? (150).

The immigrant Stephanos tries to deny the failure of his efforts to get love and family. He hides in fantasy and imagination in order to escape from the cold hard fact of his disappointment. But all of it ended one day. It was a Christmas Eve and he had sent Judith a message telling her that he would be coming with Christmas presents in the evening. He spent the whole afternoon shopping for the best presents to give her and Naomi (150-60). But...

When I returned home from my Christmas shopping, armed with my bags of presents, I found a note waiting for me on the landing to my apartment.

Dear Sepha,

Thank you for the letter. It was very nice of you to think of us. Unfortunately, Naomi and I are leaving early this evening to spend the holiday with my sister and her family in Connecticut. I'm sure we will see you again shortly after we return. I hope you have a merry Christmas.

I'm sorry.

*Best,
J.M.
(160).*

Naomi never came back from Connecticut while Judith came with her ex-husband. After reading that note that fateful Christmas eve, Stephanos leaves his house and walks for hours on the streets of D.C. He then takes home a prostitute and makes love to her as though he is in love with her (163-64).

I buried my head in her chest and treated her as if she were someone I loved. It was surely the context of the evening that mattered. It gave a certain weight and substance to what we were doing, so that when we were done and lying on my bed with the orange glow of the streetlamp as the only light in the room, neither one of us moved or rushed to get up (163).

Stephanos showered the prostitute with his stifled love and tenderness for Judith. He even made the prostitute take one of the presents (164). His disappointment ruled over him and emptiness or lack of meaning settled in again. His platonic relationship with Judith and his being friends with Naomi are just glimpses of 'the beautiful things that heaven bears' and which he as a poor, displaced and lonely immigrant will never achieve.

3.3.2. Divergent Themes

The themes under this section are the themes that are relatively better brought out in only one of the two novels. These themes may be found in both novels but are well developed in only one of the two novels.

3.3.2.1. Nostalgia

Homesickness is missing home and the loved ones that is often revealed through the emotional and psychological disturbances it causes on the homesick, but nostalgia is a preoccupation with the sweet memories of the past(Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary 1995:789,571). Nostalgia can be caused by homesickness, emptiness, loneliness or frustration with the present In Fasil's novel, many pages are devoted to nostalgic narration of past memories of the homeland. And the theme of nostalgia, with the idealization of home and the pleasurable and sad feelings that follow it, almost becomes over abundant in the novel. And to avoid a similar failure the researcher deals with the most relevant and unique aspects of this theme as precisely as possible.

Nostalgia often has the power of helping to quench the immigrants' lust for home by making them relive life in the homeland through memory. It often defies place and its limiting physical boundaries re-placing the displaced, as the following extract shows.

My eyes gaze out at a neighborhood street in the world's most restless city, but what I see is a bumpy dirt road in a rundown town called Dessie, my hometown far far away from the bustling city of New York. I stand motionlessly by the windows of my room in Mrs.

Hanson's house, but I am half a world away inside the home where I grew up (300).

Yosef gets detached from the place around him through nostalgia initiated by homesickness and the similar act of standing by the window and staring at the road in the homeland and the host land. He then recalls himself looking out of the window in his family house (300) and soon images of Dessie, his neighborhood, school life etc. trickle down slowly (Ibid).

Nostalgia also is revealed as having the tendency of haunting its subjects at the most unexpected times. A person who is in conversation with another may not work other things with his mind at the same time. But, for immigrants like Yosef, drifting into the dream world of nostalgia is inevitable especially when the topic of conversation is in the slightest way related to home. Once, for example, while describing the traditional church education in Ethiopia to Helen, Yosef visits his first day at Abba Tsedalu's place via nostalgia ...

When my mother, cajoling yet firm, held me by the hand and delivered me to the priest from Gondar, I was greeted with a hush as curious eyes stared at me. A bunch of ragged kids sitting on bare earth around the priest, warbling in shrill voices like a flock of sparrows, paused for a moment to watch me while my mother briefly chatted with Abba Tsedalu and left. I followed her receding figure with my eyes until the teacher asked a senior student to be my tutor (118).

At another place, Yosef faces his blank monotonous life as an adult in New York and wonders whether he is on the right track. Is teaching English really what he is cut for? He remembers his love of music and drifts into a nostalgic reliving of his childhood and campus life (128-136). For example:

I regaled my elementary school teachers and classmates with love songs and church hymns, and even those who weren't my teachers "burrowed" me to entertain their classes after bribing my sister, at my request, not to spill the beans to our parents. I trained the neighborhood kids to create our own version of the town's high school brass band that we used to follow around in the streets of Dessie... Once the band was assembled, I became its leader. I wore a plume in my hair and strutted like an unrivalled rooster, leading the band along the winding dirt alleys of my neighborhood.

Pompously, I displayed my skill as a drum major while some folks watched in amusement and grumpy old women stuck their heads out of their windows to hurl abuse at us for disturbing their peace (131).

After recalling his passion for music as a kid, Yosef wonders whether it is what he's cut for, as the following extract shows:

... And now, years later, I can't help wondering if there might have been more than a mere childish infatuation there; a propensity that may have tried hard to persevere but had failed in the face of parental disapproval, the curse of toothless hags and the menace of a pauper's future (131).

The nostalgia thus reveals to him that his life is shaped more by external factors than his own choices. After recalling how he ended up in the English department in AAU, he concludes that he and all human beings never control their destiny even in the USA...

Ironically, even here where folks are said to be masters of their destiny, at least with regards to choosing a carrier, I can't say I have escaped the occult intrigues of my stares. Fate brought me to Mrs. Schnider at a time when I was desperately looking for a job, and she emboldened me to seek a teaching job ... In any case, my professional path, like some other momentous ventures of my life, has been deeply entangled in fate (135-36).

Nostalgia thus, helps one to make sense of ones life and discover the reasons for unhappiness in such cases. Nostalgia can also offer a therapeutic relief from the loneliness and emptiness of life in the Diaspora with pleasurable memories of the loved ones and childhood. While talking with his mother on the phone Yosef pictures her in his mind and memories of the past punctuate his conversation with her (185-187).Following is an example:

*"What time is it now in New York?"
"One O'clock in the morning"
"So is it completely dark now? People are in bed and sleeping?"
"Yes. One hour after midnight."
"Guuuud!" she wonders. "It is eight o'clock her; the sun is bright and warm."*

*When I was a kid, I used to tell my mother fantastic things that I had learned in my science class, and one of the claims she had difficulty accepting was the fact that the earth is round. "I swear, Emmaye! It is round as a ball and it spins around the sun. That is why we have day and night. Round as an egg. The earth is round!" I would pester her, trying to convince her to abandon her belief that we lived on a flat earth....
Once again, Mom asks me how I am doing and she says she misses me, her voice quivering ... (185-87).*

Talking to his dad about Yimer's accident he remembers Yimer, their village shoemaker, and how Yimer loved him when he was a kid and the gifts and advises he used to give him(187). And in the same phone conversation with his dad nostalgia takes him to one of his sweet childhood adventures with his father. On his first ever bus trip to Addis Ababa his father gets into an argument with the bus driver because Yosef needs to get off the bus and ease the surge of diarrhea induced by eating bananas. Then,...

"I apologize for troubling you sir. But my son is sick. He needs to get off the bus for a moment," he said.

"Why didn't he do his business earlier when the bus was stopped? I can't stop now!"

"He is really sick. He can't wait. I assure you it won't be long" he pleaded.

"What do you want me to do? Keep a bus full of people waiting while your son defecates? Why is it that you people have no ..."

My dad didn't let the driver finish. Grabbing the unopened bottle of soda on the dashboard, he threatened to break it on the man's skull unless he stopped the bus right away ...

.... I was allowed to get off just in time ... I was embarrassed when I got back on the bus, but I was mighty proud of my dad (191-192)).

Nostalgic reliving of the past like the one in the above extract and others like-his and his friends attempt to ride the mules and donkeys of country folks; high school love affairs; women fighting on their queue at the water pump; old man Ababa Mulat with his fly whisk; the coffee ceremony in his mother's house; his childhood infatuation with the neighboring girl Mimi; and his Grandmother with her folktales (193-204), rescue Yosef momentarily from the

boredom and emptiness of his solitary life and quench his unending thirst of home.

Triggered by inquiries of friends in the host land, conversations with the loved ones on the phone, and anything having the slightest connection with his past in the homeland, Nostalgia haunts Yosef everyday. Mrs. Hanson's question, "What are colleges like in Ethiopia?" (227), makes Yosef to sit bolted for hours on the hospital chair while his mind and soul take a flight home to campus days on the magic carpet of nostalgia (227-235). At another time, on mothers' day, Yosef remembers the sufferings of one mother, Ayalnesh, who loved and sacrificed her whole life for her mentally retarded son-Makasha (264-65). And his fruitless attempt to pray with fervent devotion reminds him of the faith he used to have back home. And he takes asylum from the cold hard fact of his faithlessness in soulless America through a nostalgic memory of an Easter 'Mahlet' ceremony in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church:

Watch them swimming in the thick smoke of myrrh and frankincense that is swirling out of the censers and sluggishly floating up to the ceiling. Look how they bob and glide surrounded by ancient icons and colorful frescoes depicting legends of miracles in the battle of good and evil ... Listen to the enchanting paeon they sing to a God their ancestors had embraced seventeen centuries ago. Behold the waves of devotional ecstasy that sweep through them. Hearken to the mellow strains of late night hymns pouring through their parched lips and seeping into me, murmuring in my veins as I pummel the kebero with consuming rapture. There surely is something present, something more than the wild passions induced by a moonlit night or the delirium of brutal fasting (280).

The expressions 'watch them', 'look now' 'listen', 'behold' etc give immediacy to the images and show that nostalgia is not just remembered but felt too. It is an emotionally involving memory which makes the subject feel like he is there.

Yosef visits his homeland through nostalgia and partially satisfies his homesickness. Nostalgia often helps him to escape from the saddening realities of his life in the host land. It also sometimes helps him evaluate his

life and discover facts of his life he never paid attention to. Above all, nostalgia is revealed in this novel as a way of re-living the sweet experiences of the past in the motherland.

3.2.3.2. Loss

Loss is “the state of no longer having or keeping or having something or somebody” (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary 1995:698). Loss is one of the major themes in ***The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears***. The loss of home, identity, culture, the loved ones etc. is the main reason for the emptiness and lack of interest in life which the protagonist Stephanos experiences. Kenneth and Joseph also suffer from a similar feeling of loss in the following extract.

“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.”

“Why do you always talk like that?” Kenneth demands.

“Because it is true. And that is the only way to describe it. If you have something different to say, then say it.”

Kenneth leans his chair back against the wall. He’s drunk and on the verge of falling.

“I’ll say it,” he says.

He pours the last few drops of scotch into his cup and sticks his tongue out to catch them.

“I can’t remember where the scar on my father’s face is. Sometimes I think it is here, on the left side of his face, just underneath his eye. But then I say to myself, that’s only because you are facing him, and so really, it was on the right side. But then I say no, that can’t be. Because when I was a boy I sat on his shoulders and he would let me rub my hand over it. And so I sit on top of a table and place my legs around a chair and lean over and I try to find where it would have been. Here. Or there. Here. Or there.”

As he speaks his hand skips from one side of his face to the other.....

“Your father is already dead,” I tell him.

“Ana so is yours, Stephanos. Don’t you worry you’ll forget him someday?”

*“No I don’t. I still see him everywhere I go.”
“All of our fathers are dead,” Joseph adds.
“Exactly,” Kenneth says (9-10).*

The loss of the loved ones and their memories weigh heavily on these immigrants. Restless laboring in the host land for over a decade and half without retuning home makes them face the slipping away of the sweet memories of the past. Drinking as Joseph explains is an unconscious attempt to re-fill their drying memories and also an escape from the loss. Kenneth holds on to his bad teeth to remember home (2-3) while Stephanos saves his dads cuff links (50).

Loss makes Stephanos, Joseph and Kenneth to look for something to identify themselves with. Africa, their common continent, gives them coup’s, rebellions, revolutions and dictators. They take it and turn it into a game to stay in touch with their distant home and forget the tragedy of their loss. They are Africans: they should remember Africa whatever way (6-9).

Stephanos remembers his father daily and even imaginatively talks with him:

It was so easy to slip him into my day. All it took was a passing thought of him in his impeccable white shirt and pinstriped suit, and there he was. Does any of this make sense to you, abaye? I know you wouldn’t have had much patience for these conversations with the dead. That would have never been your style. You would have simply asked that I remember you fondly. But it’s nice having you here with me for just a little while as we near 13th street. You used to stretch open your hands and crane your neck back so you could feel the wind wrapping around you, a gesture that I can’t help but mime every time a warm breeze blows by. Perhaps you would have thought, as I always do, that the portrait of Fredrick Douglass painted onto the back of that red building on the corner bears, from the right angel, a striking resemblance to one of the pictures of Haile Selassie that used to adorn the walls of the capital. I was saying earlier that I couldn’t remember at which point I understood that I had left home for good. I can’t seem to remember, either, when we stopped having these conversations. The two are connected, aren’t they? I never understood that until right now: that everything went with you (176-77)

The loss of his father meant the loss of everything to Stephanos:—"everything went with you". Stephanos lost enthusiasm, inspiration and motivation in his life following his father's loss. And his life in USA became meaningless. The loss makes Stephanos to stand-alone lost between the borders of the host land and the homeland for seventeen years. But after an awakening emotional disturbance resulting from his failed attempts to get love and family, Stephanos goes to his uncle's house where he recalls all the details of his past and re-narrates, reorders, and reconciles with it (chapters 4,7,9,11,13and16). After this psychiatric reordering of the grand narrative of his life, Stephanos says:

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).

Loss thus results in an in-between existence that leads to loneliness, alienation and unending emptiness in ***The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears***.

CHAPTER FOUR-CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Diaspora or migrant literature is the literature of migrants or the Diaspora. They often reflect the effects and experiences of migration, past homeland experiences and causes of migration, and the mixed reception and displacement in the host land. Ethiopian Diaspora/migrant literature emerged following the migration of Ethiopians to the West at the fall of the Haile Sellassie regime. And Ethiopian Diaspora novels are a twenty-first century phenomenon. These novels did not become subjects of literary research in Ethiopia formerly.

Diaspora refers to dispersed communities who have an original homeland that they are attached to. Dispersal or migration rips members of the Diaspora of the social constructs such as nation, ethnicity, race, culture, language etc resulting in displacement and cultural hybridity. And this could lead to identity crisis, alienation, nostalgia, loss and emptiness. Immigrants/diasporans lose the unique bond that members of the same race, nation or ethnic group share and suffer from stress, culture shock and social isolation. The major themes of the two novels identified in this study more or less agree with these points identified in the review of literature section.

Themes of emptiness, frustration, disillusionment, homesickness, and racism and discrimination are the major parallel themes in both novels. In Fasil's novel disillusionment is closely connected with unemployment and fear of unemployment while reversal of roles in home and abroad and differed dreams are the main causes of disillusionment in Dinaw's novel. Lack of interest, purpose or meaning in the daily occupations in the host land results in frustration and loneliness in Fasil's novel. Frustration as a result of loss engendered disinterest in life and disillusionment is a constant companion of the characters in Dinaw's novel. Emptiness or lack of meaning and purpose in ones life is the central focalizing theme in both novels. Emptiness is found to be the result and at the same time cause of frustration, disillusionment, homesickness, nostalgia and loss in some situations. And the protagonists of

both novels seek deliverance from emptiness through love. The emptiness in Dinaw's novel is connected to a painful loss and is thus deeper isolating the protagonist to seclusion. But in Fasil's novel the protagonist treats his emptiness through maintenance of contact. Homesickness is depicted as the cause of emotional instability in Fasil's novel, while in Dinaw's novel the bitter memories of home make homesickness to be overshadowed by loss leading the immigrants to seek escape through games and alcoholism. In both novels, racism and discrimination is revealed as the common problem of American society. And the immigrant characters face direct and aversive racism both as immigrants and as blacks. In Dinaw's novel this theme is relatively better handled showing the humiliation, wounded self-esteem and alienation immigrants reap from it.

Economic and political woes of the homeland are among the themes shared by the two novels. And poverty, human rights violations, horrors of war, injustice and corruption are revealed in both novels. But ***The Texture of Dreams*** more successfully brought out these themes compared to Dinaw's novel.

Other themes shared by the two novels are lust for love and acculturation. Acculturation is described well in all its stages from initial bewilderment or culture shock to gradual blending-in in Fasil's novel. Dinaw's novel with its extreme precision treats this theme sparingly. Failure to acculturate leads to culture shock, mockery, unemployment and alienation in Fasil's novel. In both novels, immigrants often face the loss of their dear social and cultural values due to acculturation. Identity crisis and loss also result from acculturation in Dinaw's novel. Lust for love as a result of the continuous emptiness in their lives makes the protagonists of both novels fall in love. And race, class and ideological differences make winning a soul mate difficult. Lust for love with the difficulties of winning a soul mate in the host land is successfully revealed in both novels.

Among the themes that are major and distinctive in only one of the two novels are nostalgia and loss. Nostalgia is widely present and its varying aspects in an immigrant's life are well revealed in *The Texture of Dreams*. But it is just a minor theme overshadowed by the theme of loss in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*. Loss, in the later novel, is a central theme with its unshakable effect on the protagonist-Stephanos. Fasil's novel however doesn't reveal this theme preoccupied with nostalgia (sweet memories of home) and the protagonist's extreme luck and optimism. Nostalgia quenches the immigrant's longing for home. Its sweet memories are often soothing to the displaced immigrant in Fasil's novel. It also helps immigrants to read their past lives and make sense of it. To sum up, it is revealed as an emotionally involving memory giving asylum from the saddening realities of life in the host land. Loss, in Dinaw's novel, makes the protagonist to lose interest in life and seclude himself for seventeen years. The other characters in the novel also suffer from a similar predicament. Loss in general results in alienation, emptiness and distress.

The two novels, in addition to the thematic parallels and divergences described above, have some other striking resemblances and differences. They both have Ethiopian male main characters as first person narrators. And their protagonists migrate to America as youngsters and fall in love with native women. In Fasil's novel the protagonist is more successful in his life, has lesser painful memories to chide about, and wins the love of the woman he loved. In Dinaw's novel on the contrary, the protagonist is disinterested in life and unsuccessful, has the traumatic memory of his father's beatings and death to deal with, and fails to win the love of the woman he loved. However, despite the apparent contrast in the relative success of the two protagonists, they suffer from similar woes. In both novels, the theme of the predicament of Diaspora i.e. the lack of meaning and satisfaction in their lives in the host land because of displacement is the umbrella theme. Thus, the Ethiopian Diaspora writers share the maladies or woes like frustration, disillusionment, racism, discrimination, emptiness, and loss with other black Diaspora writers.

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Declaration

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

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

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Date of approval: _____