

**VIOLENCE AND MEMORY IN THE ETHIOPIAN NOVEL: MAAZA
MENGISTE'S *BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE* AND DINAW
MENGESTU'S *CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION***

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DECLARATION

This project is my original work and has not been presented for the award of any degree in any other university

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This project has been submitted for examination with our permission as University Supervisors

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Dr. Alina Rinkanya

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to

Mami

Guka

and Cucu

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the themes of memory and violence in Maaza Mengiste's Beneath the Lion's Gaze and Dinaw Mengestu's Children of the Revolution. The theme of violence is discussed in the first chapter while memory is discussed in the subsequent chapter. The study also adopts a gender perspective to violence and memory, which constitutes my third chapter.

Therefore, the study employs theories of violence, memory and gender. Under the theme of violence, the study is guided by the ideas of Lawrence, B. and Karim, Aisha (*On Violence*), Wole Soyinka (*Climate of Fear: The Quest for Dignity in a Dehumanized World*), Achille Mbembe (*On the Postcolony*), Antonio Gramsci (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks*), and Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*). On the other hand, my analysis of the theme of memory is majorly guided by the ideas of Felman (1992, 206), Susan Gubar (2003), Godwin Siundu (2009) and Terrence Lyons (2006). Lastly, my third chapter is guided by the ideas of Sara Suleri, with regard to African feminism.

The study discusses violence as multi-directional. In as much as the military regimes mete violence against the people, the latter responds through the use of available forms of violence. The study therefore explores three different forms of violence including physical, psychological and symbolic. Physical violence entails observable harm to internal or external organs of the characters' bodies while psychological violence refers to mental harm. As such violence leads various characters to mental or psychological break down. Whereas both men and women are affected by the various forms of violence, women seem to suffer most from these acts of violence aimed at

total destruction of revolting individuals or groups. However, women emerge victorious (they acquire positions of leadership both at the family, community and national levels) at the end of the two novels, as the men are sent to prisons, incapacitated or even killed. The men on the other hand are emasculated as they seek to affirm their identities as men.

Faced with these difficult experiences characters employ memory to enhance or blur their vision and mission in the two novels. On one hand, some characters are made better by what they remember, while on the other some are destroyed by what they remember. In addition, the two authors recall their past differently based on their genders. Therefore, this research is yielding with regard to the study of the themes of violence, memory and gender in the Ethiopian literature.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, in *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, write that “[l]iterature begins with war, with the rage of war” (303). This statement is in connection to the works of Homer (Book 1, Lines 1-8), who wrote in 700 BC, and whose major theme was war. Bennet and Royle, therefore, suggest that the “western tradition, in other words, starts up in rage and blood, the rage for rage – godlike, swift-footed, murderous Achilles’ rage...” (303). Bennett and Royle, however, note that change has occurred in the recent past: “[t]he public, nationalistic celebration of military heroism of the nineteenth century has given way to a more contemporary appreciation of the significance of private sorrow and a resistance to futility of war, any war, all war” (303-4). This is majorly a replica of post colonial Africa, whose novels illuminate various forms of violence by different players, meted against different individuals. This argument by Bennett and Royle introduces this study to analysing how the writers deal with the concept of violence, which is characterised by wars. The study interrogates how the two authors deal with violence from personal, communal and national levels.

Maaza Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* is set in Ethiopia under the monarch and later the rule of the Derg (a military dictatorial regime). Dinaw Mengestu’s *Children of the Revolution*, on the other hand, is set in America but connected to the African countries where the main characters hail from – through their memory.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Ethiopian literature has not so far fallen into the focus of literary critics and reading public in Kenya. This study interrogates various forms of violence manifest in the two Ethiopian novels by Maaza Mengiste and Dinaw Mengestu. It also maps out memory as a marker of identity of the various characters in these novels. Lastly, this study employs a gender perspective to violence and memory.

1.2 Justification

Ethiopian writers, especially Maaza Mengiste in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Dinaw Mengestu in *Children of the Revolution*, exhibit a unique mastery in representation of violence and memory. The aforementioned books are “new” thus not much local and international literary criticism has been conducted on them as well as on the writers. To bridge this gap, I have consulted various internet sources with regard to the two authors as well as their works. However, the two novels have enough materials on the themes of violence and memory, which are the core for my research.

The works of Maaza Mengiste and Dinaw Mengestu reveal the high quality of Ethiopian literature. The two writers (although differently) shed light on life in Ethiopia during and after the reign of the Derg, which is arguably one of the most difficult African experiences (Soyinka, *Climate of Fear: The Quest for Dignity in a Dehumanized World* 30). Maaza Mengiste in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* narrates first hand events while Mengestu in *Children of the Revolution* uses the character of Stephanos to narrate events of the past.

Therefore, it is regrettable that Ethiopian literature has not been mainstreamed in the Kenyan literary circle. This study interrogates the various forms of violence manifest in the two Ethiopian novels by Mengiste and Mengestu. It also maps out memory as a marker of identity of the various characters in these novels.

1.3 Objectives of the study

- i. To identify the different forms of violence as recounted in the selected novels
- ii. To identify the memory as a marker of identity
- iii. To identify the impact of violence and memory on men and women

1.4 Hypotheses

- i. Different forms of memory are manifest in the selected novels
- ii. The concern with memory is captured by the use of different markers
- iii. Violence, hence memory, impacts on men and women differently

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This study seeks to fill in the existing gap in knowledge with regard to Ethiopian literature. However, since Ethiopian literature has a very wide spectrum, the study narrows down to the writings of Maaza Mengiste and Dinaw Mengestu with a bias to themes of violence and memory. The study analyses the different forms of violence, which will be perceived as multi-directional. Therefore, the study not only categorizes the victimiser as the only wielder of violence, but goes further to analyse the fluidity of terms “victim” and “victimiser”. Consequently, the desire to be in the position of the other is considered as an act of violence.

Memory has also been understood as a marker of identity, hence as a tool for liberation but also as an agent of suppression. With this regard, the study seeks to identify different instances when the act of remembering liberates various characters from their current difficulties. However, the study also highlights different instances when characters are reprimanded by the events that they remember to the extent that they are unable to fully appreciate the present. All these have been attained through acts of remembering which are interpreted as spiritual journeys which either redeem or alienate the character in question.

Finally, this study is limited but not diluted by the lack of a lot of secondary materials on the two authors and their novels, as well as Ethiopian literature in general. However, to counter this lack, I have consulted various critiques of African writers advancing the themes of memory, violence and gender as well as number of internet sources.

1.6 Literature Review

Ethiopia has a long history of wars dating back to the times of the Shewan king, Menelik 11, who fought and conquered other kingdoms to form the modern day Ethiopia. By the end of the nineteenth century, Menelik had a standing army that was highly trained and organized, unlike other African kingdoms. Ethiopians were therefore employed by Italians to suppress anti-colonial resistance in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, present day Libya, from 1911 all the way to 1930s. These soldiers were preferred by the Italians due to their culture, in which “soldiering was a very prestigious occupation among Ethiopians and of the potential of Ethiopian soldiers” (Getahun, “Sedat, Migration, and Refugeism as Portrayed in Ethiopian Song Lyrics” 344). As a conse-

quence, the Ethiopian soldiers, under the guide of Menelik 11, had defeated the Italians in 1896 during the battle of Adowa.

There after, the Emperor Haile Selassie advanced this culture in which soldiering was held in high regards. The emperor during his more than four decades of emperorship was able to suppress a number of armed conflicts from within and outside Ethiopia, but the Italian invasion that sent him into exile. This study, therefore, explores the events preceding and following the deposition of the emperor in the year 1974, as present by Maaza Mengiste in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Dinaw Mengestu in *Children of the Revolution*.

Maaza Mengiste and Dinaw Mengestu are victims of the wars that were experienced in Ethiopia especially during the rule of the Derg, from 1974 all the way to 1991. Maaza Mengiste's family, for example, left Ethiopia when she was four years old, and a time they had lost three of her uncles to the revolution. The situation was most tragic and many people fled Ethiopia. Back home "those who stayed were hobbled by censorship and legions of informants", while "those who left, by the exigencies of exile and fear for those left behind" (Eldemariam, *The Guardian* 24th April, 2010). Therefore, the revolution affects the family as a social institution by "turning children against parents, and against each other" (Eldemariam, *The Guardian* 24th April, 2010), and also through geographical dislocation.

A number of African countries including Kenya and Ethiopia have gone through difficult experiences that have forced many to seek refuge outside their country. Sanchez Arce in "Changing States: Exile and Syncretism in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde*" ar-

gues that this exodus is also guided by “the illusion of a promised land after the desert” (78). A good number of exiles become alienated and disillusioned. Consequently, these exiles (re)connect with their motherland through writing. Maaza Mengiste in *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* and Dinaw Mengestu in *Children of the Revolution* exhibit the paradoxical experience of living within or leaving the confines of a home during or as a result of war. Thus, the two novels are a good representation of exiles writing about their homes. The two novels are arguably new novels, since the former was published in 2010 while the latter was published in 2007. The two novels majorly capture the plight of Ethiopians both in Ethiopia and the United States of America (US).

Jonathan Cape in his review of *Children of the Revolution* (*The Guardian*: 2nd June, 2007) argues that the narrator (Stephanos) is “caught in the no-man’s land between the two worlds”. These two worlds that imprison him are presumably Ethiopia and the US, and echo the themes of violence and memory that are at the core of this study. Although the narrator has lived in Washington DC for the past seventeen years, “[a]ll it takes is a trick of architecture or light for Washington DC to dissolve into Addis Ababa” (Cape, 2007). It is through memory that the narrator travels, spiritually, to Ethiopia. Washington DC is a place of absence, a place that reminds the narrator the kind of life he is missing back in Ethiopia. The character of Stephanos is representative of the author (Mengestu) who is also a victim of these historical occurrences. Cape therefore argues that as an Ethiopian émigré, Mengestu, “is preoccupied with the fragility of homes” (Cape, 2007).

Khaled Hosseini, on the other hand, argues that *Children of the Revolution* narrates a “rich and lyrical story of displacement and loneliness”. This kind of loneliness is only known by those that are in exile. Stephanos misses his best moments with his father who is now dead. Hosseini, therefore, concludes that these Ethiopian immigrants are in “search for acceptance, peace and identity”.

Consequently, Jonathan Cape argues that Mengestu is concerned with “the space that stretches out between integration into a new culture and disintegration into memories of old” (*The Guardian*: 2nd June, 2007). These memories disengage exiles with their new places, but fail to offer them a better option. Exiles are therefore forced to live in the margin; between home and exile.

However, according to Cape, Mengestu checks on the amount of sorrow experienced by the reader, and in so doing “lifts *Children of the Revolution* beyond the bounds of an immigrant’s misery memoir” by the power of his “captivating acuity”. He further argues that Mengestu “bestows an immense dignity” without sentimentalizing the plight of these ‘children of the revolution’. Although these “children” are disadvantaged, they also have their faults (*The Guardian*: 2nd June, 2007).

Aida Edermariam, on the other hand, while speaking about Maaza Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze*, in an article featured in *The Guardian* (24th April, 2010), argues that greatest of all “traumas of 20th-century Ethiopia” is “the disposition of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974, and the replacement of hundreds of years of imperial rule with a totalitarian Marxist state”. This is with reference to *Beneath the Lion’s*

Gaze, which narrates the difficult experiences following the deposition of Haile Selassie.

Adam Lorraine, in an article featured in the *New York Times* (1st March, 2010), therefore says that Maaza Mengiste, “joins a group of other young African writing in English – including the Nigerians Chris Abani, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Helon Habila, Uwem Akpan and Uzodinma Iweala, as well as Aminatta Forna from Sierra Leone – whose subject is continent’s postcolonial civil wars”. Interestingly, the writer goes ahead to compare Mengiste, due to her creativity in depicting Ethiopian experiences, to Dinaw Mengestu who has done the same but differently.

It is evident in the two novels, but most elaborately in Dinaw Mengestu’s *Children of the Revolution* that individuals relocate only to escape the unfavourable conditions enhanced by wars. These individuals are not familiar with the places that they are relocating and only do so for lack of a better option. Terrence Lyons, while discussing the plight of emigrants, depicts the close attachment between the migrating individuals or groups to their original homes. In this regard, Lyons in “Transnational Politics in Ethiopia: Diasporas and the 2005 Elections” further argues that “many migrant groups retain and amplify attachment to their identity’s territorial aspect, even if they are physically distant from or unlikely to visit that territory” (267) This is echoed by Jan Abbink in the essay “Slow Awakening? The Ethiopian Diaspora in the Netherlands, 1977-2007” argues that “there is constant concern about the tensions and tragedies befalling their home country” (372). These spiritual and physical dislocations can be traced back from the process of decolonization in most African countries.

Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* problematizes the process of decolonization, which is marked with the use of excessive violence by both the colonizers and the colonized. Fanon writes that “[d]ecolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature...”(27). These forces are antagonistic and are aimed at destroying the other. The colonized aspire to take the colonizer’s (in particular, the settler’s) position while the colonizer seeks to maintain the status quo. This being the case, as Fanon argues, violence is inevitable.

That affirmed intention to place the last at the head of things, and to make them climb at a pace (too quickly, some say) the well-known steps which characterize an organized society, can only triumph if we use all means to turn the scale, including, of course, that of violence (*The Wretched of the Earth* 28).

The desire to take the position of the other leads to different forms of violence. In such cases, the person who desires to take the position of the other has to overcome resistance from those in privileged positions. Whereas the former wishes to get to this position soonest time possible, the latter wishes to stick to that position for as long as they could.

Fanon argues that the colonizer is aware of the likelihood of use of violence by the colonized to move them from this privileged position. Therefore, being the minority, the colonizer employs the army and the police. Fanon, therefore, argues that the world of the colonizer and the colonized is “cut into two” where the “dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 29).

The historic man would appear to be a product of a choice between abject submission or bondage, on the one hand, for the sake of self-preservation, and, on the other, a quest for dignity, even if this leads to death (Soyinka, *Climate of Fear: The Quest for Dignity in a Dehumanized World* 95).

This observation by Soyinka presents the hard choices that face the ‘historic man’, who has to balance between living in “bondage” and “self-preservation”. On the other hand, he has to balance between “quest for dignity” and “death”. Therefore, violence seems inevitable in the two choices, thus the subject has to contend between “self-preservation” and “quest for dignity” (Soyinka, *Climate of Fear: The Quest for Dignity in a Dehumanized World* 95). Consequently, Achille Mbembe presents the relationship between those in positions of power and the subjects in the postcolonial Africa as mutual.

It is only through such shift in perspective that we can come to understand that the postcolonial relationship is not primarily a relationship of resistance or of collaboration but can best be characterised as illicit cohabitation, a relationship made fraught by the very fact of the commandment and its ‘subjects’ having to share the same living space (Mbembe, “Provisional Notes on the Postcolony” 4).

This sharing of same “living space” demands that the two opposing forces, that is, the government and the subject, look for ways to solve their differences. Stephen Ellis in “Writing Histories of Contemporary Africa” argues that these “bureaucratic corporations disposing of a monopoly of legitimate violence” suppress the interests of the

majority through violence (19). There exists therefore a paradox of state machinery subjecting the public for the interest of the public. Many are put in detention while others are assassinated in the name of maintaining state security. The government therefore exist as an “invisible government which is the true ruling power” engaged in “the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses [that] is an important element in democratic society” (Ellis 19).

Nadine Gordimer in *Living in Hope and History*, therefore, argues that it is upon literary writers to illuminate on these ills in the society even at a time the subjects are not ready to point them out for their own security and the government doing all it can to conceal these ills. Gordimer further argues that literary writers have the right to be and the right to write about their being: this is an existential position which occupies them as they look for a way to justify their being. Although writers are subjected to inhumane conditions for their writing they should never cease doing it rather they should do it better for that is the reason for their being: “The best way a writer can serve a revolution is to write as well as he can” (Gordimer, *Living in Hope and History* 202).

In addition, Gordimer argues that fiction is closest to truth than other ‘life opinions’, therefore, “... nothing factual that [she] write[s] or say will be as truthful as [her] fiction” (*Living in Hope and History* 199). Through fiction a writer is able to distant themselves from the work, they are therefore in a better position to comment on or critique that society. Wole Soyinka in *Climate of Fear: The Quest for Dignity in a Dehumanized World* writes that “history concedes to exceptional figures, past and present”, hence the need for works of fiction (44). Although fiction may seem to

measure up to truth, it is sometimes racially, ethnically or economically charged; hence falling short of this noble act.

Sylvan Barnet and William E. Cain in the book, *A Short Guide to Writing about Literature*, argue that through literature an author is able to express feelings and experiences which are too pressing to hold on to without sharing with another person(s). They use the words of Lady Murasaki who argues that these experiences are “so important that he cannot bear to let it pass in oblivion”(6) and “there must never come a time when people do not know about this” (7). Writing is therefore a noble act that seeks to record important details of the past.

These experiences, how and what happens as well as how it is recorded, are determined by the gender of the people in question. Genevieve Brassard, while discussing Irene Rathbone’s works, argues that women in the battle field are expected to assume that they are not going through what everyone is experiencing. On the contrary, they are supposed to create a homely environment. In so doing, women become comfort givers who, in a number of cases, forget or ignore their problems so that others may feel that there is nothing to worry about. After the war, women take care of those hurt in the battle field (the case of home-based care) and also offer moral and spiritual support to their children. According to Higonnet and Patrice Higonnet in "The Double Helix", “women experience war over a different period from that which traditional history usually recognizes, a period which precedes and long outlasts formal hostilities” (46). Men of the other hand are at the fore front during wars. Most of them get hurt or even killed. Consequently, the war alters power relations between men and women.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

According to J. Culler (*Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* 145-9), literary theories are used to enrich and deepen the understanding of the research work as well as to assist in demonstrating the new approach to literary analysis. This study employs theories of memory, gender and violence. In addition, the study also uses a historical approach to memory, gender and violence.

Shoshana Felman in “In an Era of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah”, while discussing the complex nature of memory, argues that witnessing is a “historical crises”, thus has a lasting effect on the subject (206). Susan Gubar in *Poetry After Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew*, on the other hand, points out that even those that fail to witness an occurrence are affected by it. Therefore, the act of witnessing or failing to witness a major event influences a person’s present and future, hence their identities. Although such persons do not have to testify before a panel their experiences affect the way they relate with other persons as well as how they carry on their day to day existence. Memory, therefore, encompasses the ability or inability to witness an event. These events are traumatic and are hard to wipe out of the minds of the first generation as well as the following generations since they are kept alive through what Terrence Lyons, in the essay “Transnational Politics in Ethiopia: Diasporas and the 2005 Elections”, refers to as, “commemorations and symbols” (268).

Consequently, memory enables individuals to (re)define their identities, upon encounter with new cultures. Memory can therefore be perceived as a spiritual journey, through space and time. Siundu in, *Imagining Home and Community in East African Asian Writings: A Reading of Moyez Vassanji and Yusuf Dawood’s Novels*, a discus-

sion of the spiritual journeys taken by the East African Asians, writes that “such a process of remembering is also crucial to the extent that it gives the characters a chance to reflect on the place they as individuals and members of a wider group occupy within the wider spectrum of regional politics” (144). Such characters narrate their unique experiences resulting from their unique backgrounds, which define their identities.

Although characters use memory to narrate their experiences, in some cases, the authors take us through the minds of different characters that are too traumatized to utter their experiences. These experiences have a direct connection with both spiritual and physical dislocations.

In addition, this study seeks to understand “violence as a structure” (Lawrence, B. and Karim, Aisha. 5). Violence follows a certain process, from the time it erupts to the time it becomes part and parcel of the social and political spheres of a certain community. At this point, violence adopts a particular context that is determined by the culture, gender and social affiliations of those involved. Lawrence, B. and Aisha argue that violence adopts a “local context”:

At first eruption, violence is always experienced as unique. If given time and repetition, however, it becomes routine, part of the air, and one learns how to breathe without being asphyxiated. One no longer seeks to eliminate it, nor even understand it. Episodes of violence may flare up in different places, but each is contained in its local context where it risks becoming normal (*On Violence* 5).

Therefore, this study explores the different ways different characters react to varying forms of violence, or whether, for instance, they get used to it to the extent that they don't seek "to eliminate it". It also explores how characters experience, remember and narrate violence, as well as how these narrations of violence affect them and their stories. This has been achieved through a close scrutiny of the various journeys (physical and spiritual) undertaken by various characters in the two novels.

This study also employs the new historicism approach to understand the past, the present and the future. Firstly, the term "histories" is preferable to history. Secondly, the past is not necessarily consistent with the present. And lastly, the literary works are perceived as re-creations of the past that are determined by individual writers. The study employs the ideas of Stephen Ellis in "Writing Histories of Contemporary Africa" and Mukesh Williams who sums up the tenets of new historicism in "New Historicism and Literary Studies".

New historicists look at history more as "glorious fragments" than "a set of coherent histories". They believe that people move relentlessly and unpredictably to new places and, finding themselves in new situations, create new literary scholarship, literature and histories (Williams 117).

Lastly, I have also adopted a gender perspective to violence, where I have sought to explore the experiences of different characters or groups based on their gender. This has been guided by the writings of Sara Suleri, who introduces us to Post-Colonial feminist literature. Suleri posits that coloured women uphold their cultural heritage with pride and busy themselves in their day to day work. Her approach differs from

that of western radical feminist who advocates for complete disengagement of both men and women. Post-Colonial feminism uses symbolic mode, ironical and witty descriptions of political events.

1.8 Methodology

The study employs a qualitative methodology based on library research. It also adopts a comparative analysis of two novels, Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Dinaw Mengestu's *Children of the Revolution*, with regard to the themes of memory and violence. Therefore, the study relies heavily on the theories of memory, violence and gender.

Violence has been represented as a structure from the time it erupts (not excluding psychological or spiritual violence) up to the time some characters get used to it. In addition the study has gone ahead to analyse how different characters, based on their gender, are affected by violence as well how and what they remember.

Moreover, this study has problematized the act of remembering. The study posits that remembering has a long lasting effect on those that remember. Therefore, witnessing an event as well as not witnessing has been understood as a crisis that most of the characters struggle to overcome.

Consequently, relevant works by various literary critics and other writers on the themes of violence and memory have been consulted. These materials have been secured through library research, as well as internet based research. Therefore, close readings of these two novels as well as relevant literary interventions have been very yielding in the course of this study.

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, I have highly benefited from the guidance of my supervisors. Through their guidance, I have ensured that the study is conducted in adherence to the rules appertaining to this program. In addition, their assistance and guidance have enabled me to access to various secondary materials needed for this study.

1.9 Definition of Terms

Violence

This study employs Hussein Bulhan's perspective, in *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*, which defines violence as "any relation, process, or condition" by which an individual or a group "violates the physical, social, and/or psychological integrity of another person or group" which "inhibits human growth, negates inherent potential, limits productive living, and causes death" (135). The study captures both the physical and emotional aspects of violence. In addition, gender appears to be a major determinant of the nature, intensity and frequency of the violence experienced by different characters.

Memory

Memory is the process through which stored information is retrieved. Thus, for a person to remember, they have to experience first. This process allows interaction between the present and the past. The past explains some events or phenomena in the present while at the same time the present also has a bearing to the past. It is also through memory that individuals become conscious of their identity. In addition, this study illustrates how members of different genders remember differently with regard to what and how they remember.

Gender

This study employs Lise Ostergaard's definition, in *Gender and Development: A Practical Guide*, of gender in terms of relations of power.

Gender relations are constructed in terms of the relations of power and dominance that structure the life chances of women and men. In other words, gender divisions are not fixed in biology, but constitute an aspect of the wider social divisions of labour, which in turn are rooted in the conditions of production and reproduction and reinforced by the cultural, religious and ideological systems prevailing in a society (6).

Gender is therefore socially constructed, thus determines the roles given to men and women and also power relations. This study seeks to understand how gender determines the form and amount of violence directed to different characters, how and what they remember based on their gender.

1.10 Chapters Breakdown

Chapter One

Violence in the Ethiopian Novel

This chapter identifies three major forms of violence in Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Dinaw Mengestu's *Children of the Revolution*, which include Physical, Psychological and symbolic violence. Therefore, the chapter has an introduction, analysis of Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Mengestu's *Children of the Revolution* in turns, and a conclusion.

Chapter Two

Memory as a Marker of Identity

This chapter deals with ways in which characters engage with the concept of memory. The chapter concerns with the positive and negative effects of memory, not only on the victims but also those implementing state orders. This chapter also deals with the identity of various characters, including those in exile, which determines what they remember. The home is very crucial for those that are in exile. In addition, the chapter interrogates how various characters tend to justify their stay in exile even after the events that exiled them are no longer in existence as well as how these characters mythologize everything they experienced at home, but dismiss almost everything that they encounter in exile with disregard to reason.

Chapter 3

A Gender Perspective to Violence and Memory

This chapter deals with the effect of gender on the nature and amount of violence that is subjected to different characters, as well as what and how these characters remember these experiences. The chapter posits that characters are subjected to different forms of violence based on their gender.

CHAPTER TWO: VIOLENCE IN THE ETHIOPIAN NOVEL

This chapter identifies different manifestations of violence in Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Dinaw Mengestu's *Children of the Revolution*. The study identifies three forms of violence which includes physical, symbolic and psychological. The study also explores the multi-directional nature of violence, meaning both the perpetrators and their victims are subjected to violence. Lastly, these experiences of violence lead different characters to different levels of self-realization.

2.1 Introduction

Violence can be traced back in pre-colonial Africa but most elaborately during and after colonialism where power stands out as a dividing line. In as much as colonial era stands out as one of the most violent periods in the African history, literary critics have pointed out the violence that accompanied decolonization. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* problematizes the process of decolonization, which is marked with the use of excessive violence by both the colonizers and the colonized.

The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and blood-stained knives which emanate from it. For if the last shall be the first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists. That affirmed intention to place the last at the head of things, and to make them climb at a pace (too quickly, some say) the well-known steps which characterize an organized society, can only triumph if we use all means to turn the scale, including, of course, that of violence (Fanon in *On Violence* Ed. Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim 80).

This change of positions at a very “quick” “pace” is encountered in the two novels of my study, which are set during the postcolonial era. While other African countries went through European colonisation, Ethiopia experienced another kind of colonisation which was not necessarily powered from Europe. However, the deposition of the monarch and eventual take over by the Derg presents some aspects similar to colonization and decolonization. Just like in the colonial states, the major factors of production are owned by a few individuals who benefit from cheap or unpaid labour from the majority. Secondly, the advocacy for freedom of ownership of these factors of production leads the country into a dictatorial era.

Therefore, use of violence by the colonizers and the colonized may be extrapolated to the use of violence by both the emperor and the Derg (the military regime that deposes the emperor) and the public in Ethiopia. At first, the public joins hands with the military to depose the emperor, who oppresses his people, only for the military to turn against the people. Violence is therefore experienced from its physical to psychological forms rooted in the conflict between the populace and the two oppressive regimes.

The people use available forms of violence to humiliate, frustrate or counter the governments (or those occupying powerful or prestigious positions) efforts to silence, intimidate and control them. They continue to oppose or ignore government directions regardless of the harsh penalties, thus questioning the authority of the Derg. These people risk dying to let their grievances addressed or heard regardless of the consequences. Therefore, the society is divided into different rival groups that use available form of violence to punish the other.

These divisions are evident in the Ethiopian (in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*) and American (in Mengestu's *Children of the Revolution*) societies featured in the two novels. The ruled seek to affirm their identities, while the rulers are out to express their authority and have their orders followed. At the same time members of different genders (as will be discussed in the third chapter) are subjected to varying forms of violence.

However, Wole Soyinka in *Climate of Fear: The Quest for Dignity in a Dehumanized World*, warns against this perspective to power by governments arguing that "to grasp fully the essence of power, we must look beyond the open *show of force* [original emphasis], the demonstration of overt power whose purpose is to instruct the people just who is master" (30). This is evident in the Ethiopian society under the rule of the Derg (Provisional Military Administration, which took power formally on September 12, 1974). The military administration totally disregards history and culture. They go ahead to employ available punitive measures to demand recognition and obedience from the public. The people respond by using violence in its various forms - they stereotype, gossip about and oppose the orders set by the soldiers, who implement new law and order set by the Derg. Hence, Soyinka with reference to these dictatorial regimes further writes that "open questioning may be suppressed, open debate may be restricted or prohibited by the state or the party of power, but the functioning of the mind, its capacity for critique -even self-criticism - never ceases" (126).

Institutionalized violence is also evident in the American society presented in *Children of the Revolution*, immigrants, where some characters especially those belonging

to the black race (this study will refer to them as the *blacks*) experience loneliness and dejection. The lives of these *blacks* portray a complex relationship between them and the government and the white dominant race. These *blacks* live in purely black residence quarters because they cannot afford decent housing. Their residence is in a state of disrepair and abandonment, and as such the only *whites* (those who belong to the white race) who come to their residence are criminal investigators investigating murders. However, in the final part of the novel there is an influx of middle-class people (also *black* but mostly *white*), and the residence immediately starts changing. The newcomers start trickling in while the poor *black* residents are forced out by inflated rent rates. These poor *blacks* therefore feel that the whites are intruding their haven—the only place they can afford.

Some of these *blacks* are immigrants who travel to America because of the political conditions back home—Africa. They hope that America would offer them a safer place and freedoms of ownership of property, movement and association, which is not always the case. It would be interesting, therefore, to discuss these new forms of violence facing immigrants as well as members of the *black* and *white* communities in America. Jan Abbink, in “Slow Awakening? The Ethiopian Diaspora in the Netherlands, 1977-2007”, writes that “[v]iolence is characteristic of all human societies, but its expression is remarkably varied across cultures” (129). However, I would like to carryout an analysis of violence within the Ethiopian society back in Ethiopia as portrayed in Maaza Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze*.

2.2 *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*

Violence is first pronounced in the relationship between the state (monarchy) and the demonstrating groups. The students are demonstrating to demand for the abolition of feudalism that prevents the peasants from owning land, as well as for people's responsive government. These demonstrations endanger the monarchy that derived its authority from absolute obedience and reverence by the people; hence the monarch is quick to use all measures to curb them. However, the students cling to their convictions, thus violating the order of things within the monarchy. Nevertheless, these demonstrations, together with the intervention of the military, lead to the deposition of the monarch. Although the people spear head this change, the military regime turns against the former.

At the beginning of Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, Doctor Hailu, one of the main characters, is treating a boy who has been shot by the emperor's police. The boy is very young, and Hailu guesses that he must be the same age as his son Dawit. Hailu, out of fear for his son, blames the boy for being shot and also for trying to recruit Dawit. While this is happening in the doctor's room, the boy's mother can be heard screaming from outside and Hailu cannot think of a possible way the students' unrest can influence the political sphere. The monarch has been in existence for more than three thousand years (Mengiste, *Children of the Revolution* 37). Hailu is comparable to the leaders in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, who ask the poor what they are going to fight the settler with (Fanon 50).

Hailu underrates the power of demonstrations by the students, which end up in more and more killings. On the contrary the power of demonstrations, as presented by Fan-

on (*The Wretched of the Earth* 50), rests in destabilization through questioning the authority of the government rather than in physical or other tangible victories. The ability to question or criticize affects the psychology of both the subjects and those in the government. It results to psychological violence on the part of government officials who feel offended by such questions from people who were previously submissive.

Hailu thus overlooks the fact that challenging the monarch, which has been in existence for a long time and has all weapons at its disposal, sends a very powerful message. As a result, he is biased against the injured boy. However, from a closer point Hailu is angry with the boy out of the fear that his son could soon be joining or could have joined these demonstrating groups. It introduces us to inter-generational tensions which are evident in the novel, especially in regard to the colonel's daughter who is involved in distribution of illegal pamphlets. Moreover, it is also encountered in Dinaw Mengestu's *Children of the Revolution* where Stephanos, a major character, prefers crowded buses to his father's comfortable cars and is also involved in distribution of the same illegal pamphlets.

The boy has been shot by the emperor's "highly trained police" (Mengiste, *Children of the Revolution* 5), which uses all violent measures to calm the students. The use of the word "highly" stands out as a mockery of the police force that is supposed to protect the people. Such entanglement may be characteristic of the post colony, as Mbembe argues in a study notable for its attention to the plurality of bodily sensation, through which the state-induced violence exerted on citizens is taken in as fear and

regurgitated as mockery, through jokes, cartoons, songs, rumours, and novels (Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* 14, 16).

The students, on the other hand, are unrelenting in their mission to see change in their society. They form different groups which help in the distribution of anti-government pamphlets as well as staging demonstrations. The government interprets this as a violation of the old order, where the emperor is the chosen one. Having been chosen by God, the emperor's rule cannot be challenged by a human being. It is only God who has the power to depose him. From this perspective, the youth are heathens who are out to challenge the supreme authority.

The above argument is probably the reason why the older generation, which has a more profound perception of the myth behind the founding of the monarchy, is reluctant to change this old order. The old do not approve of the plan by the younger generation to take over positions that were earlier reserved for the royalties. The younger generation, on their part, interpret the hierarchy as a tool of oppression to favour a few and disadvantage the multitude. Thus the students advocate for the revision of the land policies as well as of the relation between the government and the people.

The students finally realize that the emperor fails to act for the good of his subjects, yet the latter continue to adore and obey him. Ideally, the emperor has been chosen by God to guide the society as well as to protect it. It is a contradiction that the same regime turns to killing boys and girls because they are advocating for equitable distribution of resources.

However, some of the youth are also not spared by these make-believe myths about the emperor. Later in the novel, Mickey, a young officer of the Derg, is unable to execute the emperor because of the myths surrounding the emperor.

The emperor was God's Chosen, that the blood of King Solomon and King Dawit flowed in his veins, and Mickey imagined that anyone who dared to corner and trap one of God's own, who dared to defile that divine blood was committing a blasphemous act for which there would be no forgiveness (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 62).

Although the killing is unjustified and constitutes the fall out between the Derg and the people, this reluctance on the part of Mickey points to myths surrounding the monarch. It is rumoured that the emperor can kill with a blink of an eye, which could be the reason why the soldiers who arrest and guard him have their eyes fixed to the floor at all time. The emperor's gaze is equally powerful as dangerous. He is God's chosen one, has a command of angels who can harm those who go against his will, hence killing him would result in instant death. It is therefore interesting to note that the soldiers, who torture the emperor through hunger and detention, are also subjected to psychological torture. The emperor's gaze is as violent as the soldiers' guns.

Nevertheless, not everybody believes these myths about the emperor. Major Guddu, the leader of the Derg, goes ahead to execute the emperor. The emperor dies, and no angels come to his rescue. Although Mengiste does not mention how the emperor's body is disposed, Dinaw Mengestu in his novel *Children of the Revolution* writes that the emperor was buried under a toilet (94). There is no funeral for the emperor.

Major Guddu goes ahead to proclaim terror to all those that seek to undermine his leadership. These are innocent people who are angered by his betrayal. Although the Major promises the people that he would not harm the previous leaders, he goes ahead to execute all of these leaders including the emperor. The Major further argues that his is a socialist government that seeks to uplift the powerless in the society, thus brands all those questioning his regime as the “enemies of the revolution”. Nevertheless, this does not mark an end to demonstrations, as students write and distribute anti-Derg pamphlets, as well as engage in more strikes.

Antonio Gramsci, while speaking about India’s struggle against the English, argues that even the “Gandhi’s passive resistance is a war of position, which at certain moments becomes war of movements, and at others underground warfare” (*On Violence* 159). Consequently, boycotts, strikes and demonstration violate the authority of the state or those in power, hence are acts of violence. In addition, Raymond William argues that Gandhi’s notion of passive resistance or nonviolence “becomes a modality of violence, since such passive resistance or noncooperation is aimed at the total breakdown of the colonial machinery” (*On Violence* 106), and the monarch in Ethiopian case.

Students and other groups that resort to demonstrations either end up in prison or dead. The government is aware of the power that is manifest in these demonstrations; hence the kind of violence that is meted against the students is not spontaneous. Immediately after the deposition of the monarch, the Major invites Cuban and Soviet partners. The Major knows the killing of the emperor would spark a nationwide out-

cry, thus possibly leading to ideological differences and demonstrations. Consequently the Derg adopts socialism to blur the students' course. This is echoed by Solomon who argues that both the *Revolutionary Lion Resistance* (which seeks to counter the violence meted against the public by the Derg) and the Derg are pursuing the same course. The Derg, he says, copy their ideologies (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 202).

The Derg also use other tactics to woo the public to their side. Before the arrest and the eventual killing of the emperor, the Derg airs pictures of starving women and children. Mickey, who is sent by Major Guddu to inspect the situation on the ground, is shocked to witness this major cover-up by the monarch. The site of starving children is very difficult to watch:

Now, in front of him was a small child with head bigger than the rest of his body, crouched in a posture of fatigue that only dying old men should know. His bony skull rested on frail wrists, and he stared into the distance blankly, his sagging mouth host to flies and holes where teeth once grew (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 26)

Upon seeing this boy, Mickey, in a letter addressed to Dawit, "scribbled furiously" that they "eat too much in Addis Ababa" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 26). He has to write and send these letters to Dawit because there is nobody else to share these horrifying experiences with in the field. The administration clerk has been instructed not to share any form of information, but on a lighter note they tell Mickey that he "can read it". Mickey reads about the "unforgiving ground" (Mengiste, *Beneath the*

Lion's Gaze 27) that has cost many lives. Although the people have been ploughing their land, it is as if nature has been angry with the people, since it has not rained for the last two years. In as much as the emperor is responsible for suffering and death of these people, Major Guddu uses this occurrence to set the people against the former. The image of these starving people does not spare Mickey, who remembers his father who used to wake up early in the morning, went to the field, and spent the whole day ploughing just like the animals pulling the plough. His father was a poor man who had no influence in anything around him. He was unrecognized and ignored most of the time to the extent that he had to call his name to ascertain his identity. Mickey's father advises his son to call his name to acknowledge his being in a world that seeks to dehumanize them. The father calls his own name before he dies, something that really disturbs Mickey who expected to hear his name being mentioned.

Mickey is thus conscious of his past and would never want to re-live it. Hailu, who takes him as a "son", consoles him that he will not have to work like his father since he will go to school. This presents the symbolic form of violence, which according to Pierre Bourdieu, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, entails economic subordination of one class by another in the society. After completing his secondary education, Mickey is forced to join the military due to lack of fees, while Dawit who attains lower grades joins the university. However, the friendship of these two boys, who are brothers in everything but "blood", is not affected but Mickey is always conscious of the injustices meted against the poor. Thus the military service seems to offer the only opportunity for mobility upwards and this could explain why Mickey cannot afford to leave it. Mickey sees the deposition of the monarch as an opportunity for the poor and those of lower social standing to rise.

Mickey is convinced that he would belong to the lowest social class for as long as the monarchy exists. As such the deposition of the emperor offers him a window of opportunities. Mickey embarks on a journey towards higher and higher social classes and nothing can stop him. He values his ability to afford good clothes, which he never did when he was growing up but his friend Dawit easily did. Dawit, unlike Mickey, came from a rich background. Mickey is therefore ready to do anything in order to rise in ranks in his military career. Unlike Daniel who chooses to die rather than kill men who had served the country selflessly, he goes ahead to execute former leaders as ordered by Major Guddu.

These executions introduce us to other forms of physical and psychological violence. Major Guddu breaks the promise to the people that justice would prevail and that nobody would be killed. The Major had gone ahead to execute these leaders through a firing squad. This angers the public as Major Guddu unsuccessfully lures the public to his side. This luring is in the form of saturation of the national television with pictures narrating the situation in the hunger torn areas in order to set the public against the emperor.

The camera was merciless. It swept past gaping faces, over destitute land, swung into the belly of the relentless heat and then down again to another body, another helpless mother, another bloated boy (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 50).

The masses, including Dawit, are angry with the Emperor's government for watching the people die of hunger. To intensify this anger, these pictures are alternated by images of the palace where food is in excess.

The documentary suddenly jumped to grainy scenes of lavish palace halls, glided over tables heaped with steaming delicacies, spun past the emperor feeding his lions with extravagant foods, his numerous Mercedes. Then back to the hungry: the skeletal, the dead littering the paths that led out of one dried-up village into another. One small girl, her stomach so distended it looked like it would split, gnawed on a stone (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 51).

Dawit concludes that the emperor is a rich man who has lost touch with the people. Just like the masses, he cannot understand how the emperor can afford delicacies to feed his lions, expensive cars while his people are starving. These images are difficult to watch to such an extent that Bizu, an elderly woman from one of the areas affected by the drought—Wello—becomes very emotional. As a result of this experience the whole city is conscious of the violence meted against the poor by this selfish regime of rich people: “[n]o one would have locked their homes at night. It seemed the entire city was slowly opening their doors and windows, their surprise and stunned anger too volatile to be contained within four walls” (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 52).

Although the airing of these pictures results in a nationwide uproar directed at the emperor and his government, the public soon discovers the hidden truths. They read malice on the part of the Derg, especially after the latter executes all the former lead-

ers. Therefore, the content of these images presents the nature of physical violence meted against the people by the monarch, while the airing of these images constitute psychological violence meted against the public by the military regime that seeks to legitimise their leadership. Consequently, the public and the Derg become antagonistic.

Even so, the Derg forcefully demands loyalty from these people. The Derg goes ahead to order for closure of universities and pursuit, arrest and torture of all those believed to be behind these “acts of violence” against the government. Consequently, their bodies are brutalized into tatters, while others are killed and their bodies displayed in public. These bodies are “easy to find” (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 239), which testifies to the number of killings by the soldiers. The following description of a middle aged man killed by the soldiers attests to the kind of violence facing those who act against their dictates:

His white hair was stained with bloody patches and his dried lips caved in where his front teeth should have been. His ears had been cut off, burnt flesh curled around his eardrums, and he had a bullet hole through his chest. He could have been an older uncle, his [Dawit’s] father’s colleague, an elder statesman. But in this city, on this road, he was nothing but another warning, a rotting message to the living (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 241).

This body is better perceived in anonymity, thus left to rot in the open or to be devoured by wild animals. It is just but one of the many bodies of those who are tortured or killed and then dumped by the soldiers in public squares. They are meant to send a

message to the living; hence it is illegal to move them even if they are your relatives. It is for this reason that Dawit when found by a soldier moving such a body argues that he only intends to conduct a “burial” and not a “funeral” (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 242). Unfortunately both events are illegal under the rule of the Derg and are only punishable through torture or death. Therefore, Dawit has to kill the soldier, which he does, to survive.

This introduces another angle to the kind of violence that is present in the novel, where some ‘victims’ kill the perpetrators. Dawit metes violence against the Derg, first through intention to bury the body of an “enemy of socialism”, and secondly by killing a soldier. However this is not a common occurrence and, most probably, prepares the reader to meeting the man Dawit becomes later in the novel.

Most people die after being subjected to torture. The few who survive have their bodies and souls as a testimony to the amount or intensity of violence meted against them. Such characters include doctor Hailu and the Colonel’s daughter. The Colonel’s daughter is suspected of distributing pamphlets, which is illegal during the rule of the Derg. As a consequence, irrespective of the position of her father, she is taken to the torture chambers. However, as a daughter of a senior military officer, she is not to be taken to Girma, “the butcher” (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 276). Her father plans on taking her to a more humane torturer, who would just make sure that she never engaged in such acts in the future. He avoids taking her to Girma, who it is rumoured that only the ‘unlucky’ victims survive his torture.

Unfortunately, the girl lands in the hands of Girma due to a 'bureaucratic error', survives, but she is still the 'unlucky one'. The girl is in a clear polythene bag when she gets to the hospital. The reader gets to learn that the polythene bag prevents the tortured from soiling the torturer.

Hailu cannot decipher the condition of the Colonel's daughter. When interrogated by the Colonel, Hailu argues that the girl was dead when she was brought to him, which is not the case. On the contrary, he kills the girl when she had greatly improved. Hailu, who is unaware of the identity of the girl as well as the events that led to her current condition, is concerned about her life after surviving the current misfortune. The sight of this girl subjects Hailu to psychological torment. Moreover, Hailu is afraid that the girl would be subjected to more torture:

This girl was too weak to survive another round of interrogation. Even if she lived, she'd bear the scars for life. There would always be deep gashes on her thighs; her feet would never wear delicate heels. She would always walk with a limp. She had been raped, violently. She'd be so ashamed she'd never marry. Her days would be spent trying to prepare for the nightmares that would awaken when the sun died (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 154).

Hailu decides to poison the girl. Upon her death, the Colonel orders for the arrest of Hailu for further interrogations regarding this death. During these interrogations Hailu reports that the daughter used to call her father's name. This hits the Colonel hard as he blames himself for the death of his daughter.

However, before concluding this father-daughter relationship, I would first like to explore the amount of violence subjected to Hailu who is forced to treat her.

Two weeks ago, he'd peeled the plastic wrap off her. Those hours had been agonizing and tedious, the work delicate and painstaking. He'd scaped and pulled the plastic off centimetre by centimetre, praying as he worked, realizing for the first time how indelicate his hands were, how clumsy and imprecise their hold on the scalpel. Each time he'd paused, he found his own body was burning, aching, and there was the sense that all the water in the world would never be able to coat his dry throat. Once, he'd leaned down to kiss her cheek, and couldn't bring himself to utter an apology for the work he'd been commanded to do, he couldn't acknowledge, in that apology, his own complicity in her suffering. That day, two weeks ago, he'd done the job alone, had demanded that the soldiers leave the room, and he'd answered her sporadic calls for her father with simple whispers: "I am here, I am here" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*).

These feelings of guilt and helplessness tear the doctor apart. He wishes he could apologize to the girl for the work that he has done to save her life but he fears that this might not make sense to him and the girl. As a doctor his major concern should be saving lives but the sight of a young brutalized girl, who arrives to the hospital guarded by soldiers who offer no information about the girl but instead monitor all interactions between the doctor and the girl, introduces a very complex angle to the whole issue. Hailu, a father, thinks that the girl is too young to experience all these brutalities. Secondly, he sees no point in saving the girl only to be taken back to torture

chambers. May be he would have done things differently were he told more about the girl's background.

HE HAD BEEN [original emphasis] a doctor nearly thirty-five years, treated infectious and war wounds with calm efficiency, battled unknown illnesses with cunning, and forethought. He knew the sight of a body better left to die on its own, could decipher the clues that spoke to a life still struggling to hold on. But what could have prepared him for a girl wrapped in a clear plastic sheet (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 119).

Hailu is bothered by the soldiers' directions not to speak with the girl. Furthermore, the soldiers ensure that the girl does not speak to the doctor by monitoring his interactions with the patient (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 121). Although the presence of these soldiers and their concern about the girl arouse suspicion, Hailu has no avenue of uncovering the truth. All he is sure of is that the girl is a victim of torture but the question about the presence of the soldiers lingers in his mind.

He was staring at evidence of the body's wondrous and cursed gift for withstanding abuse. She was a testimony to the stubborn endurance of nerves and tissue, proof of one man's sustained cruelty. We have both caused her pain, what makes me better?" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 136)

As a result of this feeling of guilt, Hailu cannot concentrate, eat or even live his normal life. He cannot even stand up to the role of the father in the family, which is part-

ly taken up by his daughter-in-law. Every action on the part of Hailu, whether at home or hospital, leads to the image of the girl. It is as if he perceives his home comfort as an insult to humanity so long as the girl is in the same condition.

He was in the bathroom adjoining his bedroom, unwrapping a new bar soap. There is a girl in the hospital, far from home, calling for her father, he thought, looking at his palms, and I have done nothing but cause her more pain. Hailu let cool water run over his wrists and trail between his fingers. He turned on the hot water and coolness slid into pleasant warmth that ebbed into a searing heat. He kept his hands under the tap, watched suds bubble and cascade into the drain, then disappears. No matter how many times he washed his hands, he'd have to go back and inspect wounds no human being should have. Animals in this condition would be put out of their misery (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 131-2).

These contrasting images of comfort at home and the girl's experiences in the hospital depict the psychological violence subjected to Hailu. The doctor cannot appreciate the good life at home with the knowledge of the experiences of the girl who is hospital. Therefore, this information and relationship with the girl alienate him from the rest of his family and community. Each time he sees the young girl, his frustrations and desire to 'save' her heightens, so is his alienation from his family and community.

However, even after he had killed the girl, she continues "visiting" him while in prison. These images depict the events that led to the death of the girl in the hands of Hailu. It is as if he is killing the girl for the second time.

The girl had returned and she was bleeding in the centre of his cell. She raised a hand towards him. Would he do it all over again? (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 207).

We can therefore conclude that the killing of the girl by Hailu is not a solution, as he might have wished it to be. It opens up a wound that is very hard to heal. However, it reveals the extent of the cruelty that is meted against the students and other demonstrating groups.

Finally, upon realization of the psychological state of Hailu who is forced to treat the girl, Colonel realizes that he was partly responsible for the irreversible errors that occurred. It is upon this realization that the doctor is telling the truth that the Colonel orders for his release. In addition, the Colonel goes ahead to commit suicide (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 275). Although Hailu is the first prisoner to be released by the Colonel, the state of his body narrates a tragic story.

Hailu had the appearance of a man dragging death with him through life—a Lazarus damned. His back curved deeply, his stomach caved inward. His skin hung loose tucking and folding where once there had been flesh and fat (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 271).

Torture victims are denied food among other basic needs. Hailu loses a lot of weight during the time that he spends in the prison. It takes a lot of effort from his family, especially from Sarah to ensure his survival, although not for a long time. He dies while protecting his family from the soldiers.

Nevertheless, in as much as the people suffer in the hands of the soldiers, the latter also have a share of this violence. These soldiers are forced to either torture or kill family or community members as well as their friends. The soldiers are also alienated from the community, since nobody can trust them anymore as they are perceived as the enemy or strangers.

The civilians live in fear of the state, are alienated from their day to day activities and relationships, thus use available forms of violence to counter the state's violence. They are, for instance, subjected to the *Red Terror* that entails more tortures and deaths. In the novel, Major Guddu declares this state after the failed plot to assassinate him. The period is symbolized by breaking of bottles full of red ink (symbolizing the enemy's blood). Thus, Jon Abbink, while speaking about this period and the kind of violence that marked it, questions the ideological stand behind it.

One can ask what was gained by the torture and killing of children of 12 or of students who were seen as 'guilty' because of being young and being a student? Why strangle people with piano wire? Why expose the bodies of dead youths on the streets of the city for days, to be eaten by hyenas, and forbid their burial? How to explain the demand of the killers to the victims to first dig their own grave, and then be shot into it? Why were relatives ordered to look at the cut and bullet-wounds on the bodies of their dead sons and daughters, and prohibited, under threat of torture, to shed tears or wear black mourning clothes? How to understand the demand of soldiers to the parents of victims to pay a substantial sum of

money to them for the bullets they had fired into the body of their children? (“The Impact of Violence: The Ethiopian ‘Red Terror’ as a Social Phenomenon”, Abbink 137)

The government forges obedience from the people through the use of violence. To defy any set law is equal to wishing one’s death. However, death does not mark an end to punishment. The bodies of those killed are displayed in public, since funerals for such people are not allowed. In addition, these bodies are meant to cause more pain on family members who helplessly watch them rot in public. Finally, as Jon Abbink points out, relatives are forced to “look at the cut and bullet-wounds on the bodies of their dead sons and daughters, and prohibited, under threat of torture, to shed tears or wear black mourning clothes” (137).

2.3 Children of the Revolution

Children of the Revolution by Dinaw Mengestu is, largely, a novel capturing the plight of individuals living in exile. The novel relies on memory to narrate events and experiences that create various characters. It would therefore be important to note that the novel deals with different time frames, hence the use of flashbacks. Stephanos, the narrator and the main character in the novel, has experienced so much within the nineteen years he has been in America, as well as before coming to America. In addition, he is in America because of the violence back home. Terrence Lyons, a critic in Ethiopian exile literature, writes that the “Ethiopian diaspora in North America has its origins in Ethiopia’s violent political transitions and protracted conflicts” (“Transnational Politics in Ethiopia: Diasporas and the 2005 Elections” 266). Stephanos’ friends, Kenneth from Kenya and Joseph from Congo, are also in America due to so-

cial political and economic upheavals back in the countries. Stephanos on his part argues that he came to America to escape the terror back home, and not to seek upward mobility.

Stephanos therefore introduces us to various forms of psychological, physical and symbolic violence meted against immigrants. He avoids everything that reminds him that he is Ethiopian, yet he does not miss to assert his identity as an Ethiopian when situations demand. He laments his stay at his uncle's house when he first came to America.

His uncle, just like most Ethiopians in America, lives in a building occupied almost exclusively by Ethiopians. Stephanos, the narrator, describes this building as an extension of life back in Ethiopia. For example, the common tool of communication is the Amharic language, irrespective of a person's age or gender. Secondly, Ethiopian foods are in the daily menu of most families. Thirdly, the behavioural systems and social hierarchies of Ethiopians back in Ethiopia are replicated in this building. Consequently, it is not a wonder to hear the women gossiping about a girl who has been seen travelling in a car unaccompanied. Fourthly, the old are tasked with nurturing the young. They, for example, ensure that the young learn the order of things in an Ethiopian world. It is this order that Stephanos detests and that leads him to avoid his uncle's house. Lastly, the inhabitants of this building praise and embrace everything that is Ethiopian at the expense of what is American, a trait that is characteristic of those in exile. Stephanos is also a victim of this behavioural trait, but it has taken him seventeen years to partially accept it.

The above building is a representation of the shattered dreams of Ethiopian immigrants. Their desire to preserve their culture, totally ignoring the American experience, is bound to fail. However, as Stephanos testifies, living together unites them, as well as offers them moral strength. Stephanos realizes that an immigrant cannot survive alone in America. This is probably the reason why he visits his uncle's house after receiving the eviction letter. We learn that his uncle manages to meet his basic needs, even though he has a share of his problems. Moreover, he sends some money back home every month and even manages to save some. Stephanos, on the other hand, has nothing to show for the seventeen years in America, which could be as a result of his attitude towards life in general. Stephanos does not seek to make his life any better because he believes that there is nothing better in store for him. He therefore drinks away the few dollars he makes from his store, and cares less about restocking or paying rent for his store.

Through this life story of Stephanos it is evident that immigrants live together not by choice, but because of the loneliness experienced in America. Stephanos narrates the life of his uncle who was rich, had managed to build the best house of his time and employed a number of servants to assist him back in Ethiopia. Unfortunately he had to leave all these behind in search of a safer place, and America turned out to be his place of exile. Nevertheless, his uncle still yearned for a return to Ethiopia, after living in America for about nineteen years. This desire to return to Ethiopia is rather surprising (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 120), especially having in mind that America is more technologically, politically and economically advanced in comparison to Ethiopia. However, as Stephanos attests to, this desire is more profound during the first days in exile.

Although immigrants perceive their countries of origin as the best place to be, they realize, after a short while, that life would never be the same again even if they went back home. It is this realization about the possibility of not fitting in the political and socio-economic spaces they formerly occupied, which make them hesitant to return home. Coupled with the hardships they face in exile, this realization also heightens their loneliness. They fear to start all over again back home. Stephanos best illustrates this strong desire to go back as well as refusal to acknowledge reality.

In those days I believed it was a matter of weeks or months before I returned home to Ethiopia. I spent all my energy and free time planning for that. How was I supposed to live in America when I had never really left Ethiopia? I wasn't, I decided. I wasn't supposed to live here at all (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 140).

He still believed that he had a chance of going back home during his first days in America. However, from the tone that is employed by the narrator we can easily decipher that he now thinks otherwise. Stephanos has come to realize that going back home would mean starting his life afresh. In the case of his uncle, he has to build his home afresh, not to mention that he does not have the money to finance it. Stephanos tries to convince himself that he "didn't want anything from America" (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 139), thus loneliness and meagre earning from his store are not enough reasons to send him packing. He can even afford to look back at his attitude during his first few weeks in America with a certain measure of indifference.

For the first three weeks I was here in the apartment I didn't speak to a single person besides my uncle, and even then our conversations were brief and strained. I rarely left the apartment, nor did I want to. Any connection, whether it was to a person, building, or time of day, would have been deceitful, and so I avoided making eye contact with people I didn't know, and tried to deny myself even the simplest pleasures. I refused to acknowledge the charm of a sunset or the pleasure of a summer afternoon. If possible, I would have denied myself the right to breathe another country's air, or walk on its ground (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 140).

This "air" that he is refusing to breathe could be the only air available for him. This constitutes psychological violence meted against Stephanos while in exile. He had been forced by circumstances to leave home; therefore, in as much as he might refuse "to acknowledge the charm of a sunset or the pleasure of a summer afternoon" in this new place, he cannot go back home. It would soon dawn on him that unlike the weather back home in Ethiopia, where the sun rises almost every morning, summer is most valued in America. His attitude, therefore, only points to the sense of isolation that is characteristic of immigrants.

Stephanos remembers vividly the physical, and to some extent psychological and symbolic, violence that marked his final days in Ethiopia. The students were demonstrating against the military regime (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 126). He had joined those distributing anti-government leaflets, being a member of the student community. This undertaking was illegal and punishable by death, as he later learnt.

Father, who had discovered these leaflets in Stephanos' room, warned his son for engaging in such activities and took the leaflets, is arrested for the same. When the soldiers knocked at their door, searched and found the leaflets in the house, Stephanos' father was quick to claim responsibility. In addition, he was quick to report to the soldiers that his son, who aged sixteen, was twelve years old, thereby excluding him from the revolting university students. Although the soldiers never believed him, they still took away father, not the son.

The soldiers are determined to punish somebody for these illegal acts; hence Stephanos' father suffers the consequences (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 119). Stephanos' mother, who tries to save her husband from the soldiers, is shot in the leg. The family, therefore, watches as their father is escorted from the house. Stephanos laments that this was the last time he and his family ever saw the man who had volunteered to die for the things committed by his son.

In spite of the violence that is meted against him, Stephanos' father demands to be handled with dignity. He asserts his condition to walk himself out of the house, irrespective of the beatings that he receives from the soldiers. This act of defiance is uncharacteristic of the man who, as Stephanos says, cried in weddings and funerals.

I remembered the way he cried in funerals, baptisms, and weddings, how any form of joy and pain seemed to always be too much for him to bear. I remembered him, a tall, slight, discerning man, in his suits and ties and in the long-gaited walk that I struggled to keep pace with (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 119).

He is able to have his demands met by the soldiers. It is necessary to note, as the narrator says, these are times when many people are killed and their bodies displayed in public. The narrator attests to the fact that he and his father come across such bodies laid and guarded by soldiers in a recreational site. His father's defiance is first seen during a walk with Stephanos when he resists the soldiers' orders to turn back. However this seems to me as a matter of maintaining his dignity before his son rather than defiance. It is during these walks that the narrator encounters bodies, either branded "traitors" or "communist" "written in blood on the chest", that "lay rotting on unpaved dusty roads" (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 119).

Irrespective of the motif, death is inevitable for those that defy state orders. The Derg is a dictatorial regime, and as Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski writes, such a regime "classifies men's behaviour according to degrees of loyalty" (*Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* 135). They further argue that "mere absence of opposition to the regime becomes insufficient as proof of devotion to it", therefore, such a government demands "men complete in loyalty" (*Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* 135). Consequently, all those that are deemed to be in opposition are either put in prisons or killed. Stephanos' father, therefore, is killed even after mentioning the names of "big men" he knew in the government. The narrator says that the father was unaware of the fact that most of the people that he was mentioning had already been executed (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 128). This execution of leaders serving under the emperor followed the deposition of the emperor has also been analysed in depth in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. Stephanos' father does not know that mentioning these names implicates his case, since it means linking himself

to the “enemies of communism” and antagonizing the Derg. In addition, these soldiers are very young and have minimal patience with the older generation.

The same change in the younger generation can be traced amongst the youth who are not in the military. Although Stephanos was from a richer background, back in Ethiopia, he joined the rest in fighting for the rights of the marginalised. He detests travelling by his father’s comfortable car. Ironically, Stephanos derives immeasurable pleasure while travelling by crowded buses (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 167).

While I sat comfortably alone in the backseat of my father’s car, there was an entire city moving together, block by city block, with every curve and bump the bus took through the pothole-riddled streets of the capital, like marionettes attached to the same piece of string being orchestrated by the bus driver’s hands. I imagined the crowd exiting the bus through the windows and doors like water spilling out of a jar full of holes, and I imagined them entering much in the same way, except in reverse. I wanted to be with them. I would have given anything to have disappeared into one of those buses, swallowed whole by the crowd, my face and limbs so thoroughly merged into theirs that the words “I” and “alone” could never be uttered again” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 166-7).

The youth are impatient with the state of inequality that characterizes the Ethiopian society of the time. They are angered by exclusion of a majority poor from the mainstream economic activities, which amounts to symbolic violence. Whereas almost all

the roads are full of potholes, a few people continue to acquire more and more wealth. The narrator therefore wishes that all the people would join and become one. This “act of joining” is nearly attained in a crowded bus where people squeeze without claiming any particular space. In addition, this spirit of sharing introduces a socialist attitude that alienates the young Stephanos from a society that disregards the interest of a majority to the advantage of a few. However, America changes Stephanos who now become obsessed with empty trains as opposed to crowded ones. These obsessions emanate from feelings of loneliness and dejection and therefore amount to psychological violence.

Although Stephanos disapproves of his father’s and society’s attitude towards the poor, his ideological stand does not affect his relationship with the family. On the contrary, Stephanos is very fond of his parents and younger brother. He engages in walks with his father, accompanies him to most important cultural activities, as well as family visits. When the soldiers take to beating his father in their house, for a crime he had not committed, Stephanos engages viciously with God.

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 (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 129).

These words depict helplessness and frustrations burdening young Stephanos in the presence of the soldiers. His father means a lot to him yet he cannot save him. The soldiers have already wounded his mother who tries to stop them from taking her husband, thereby proving that they were ready to kill anybody. Since his father dies for his sake, why should he live? He is angry and disappointed with God for being unable to contain the situation, as he imagines He should. These words are filled with bitterness and hatred. These “children of the revolution”, as also evidence in the character of Sarah in Maaza Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze*, are angry with God whom they feel has allowed their enemies to torture them. There exists a feeling that God plays a major role in their suffering, hence is on the side of those that metes violence against them.

While in America Stephanos is haunted by memories of his father, both in his sleep and wake. The distance between Ethiopia and America only heightens his emotions towards his father. He remembers how his father never got a decent funeral, as it should have been. He regrets all these, knowing too well that there was nothing he could have done. As a matter of fact, he had left Ethiopia the following day after his father’s arrest. Having seen enough bodies displayed in public, the narrator is aware of the damage that the soldiers are capable of executing to an individual. He, therefore, refuses to imagine that his father’s face was ever altered after these tortures, which is a rare case.

I did imagine involuntarily while still awake and staring across the living room to the glass doors that lead out to the balcony I sometimes imagined leaping off. In my mind, his face was untouched, free from bruises or

scars the soldiers might have left, his eyes, nose, and mouth impossibly perfect (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 119).

He clings to the image of the father he was so fond of, and who loved him back. He is convinced that his father remained the same after this torture. This refusal to acknowledge reality, as a result of physical harm, amounts to psychological violence in the character of Stephanos. I would therefore argue that this refusal to acknowledge reality gradually leads to despair and estrangement experienced in the character of Stephanos later in the novel, especially when he abandons his store.

It is as a result of this felt need to honour the dead that Dawit, Sara and Melaku in Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* move the bodies at night, before the beginning of the curfew. Dawit, for example, risks being killed by insisting that he wants to move Iilta from the sun. Iilta was a daughter of their house servant. They had grown up together. Solomon, Dawit's friend, advises him that if he wanted "to save people" he should "save the living...Those who are dead are not worth dying for" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 181). Nevertheless, this does not deter Dawit.

Unlike Dawit in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* by Mengiste, Stephanos, in *Children of the Revolution*, does not try to move the body from wherever it is left to rot by the soldiers. Customary dead bodies are supposed to be buried and failure to do so could be perceived as disrespectful. Stephanos fears and hopes that his father would be disappointed in him. He hopes that his father "understands" that moving a body is very dangerous because the soldiers could easily kill him. Since he chooses to stay alive,

he refrains from moving these bodies. He collects his father's body and undertakes all funeral rituals befitting him in his mind.

I gave him a wonderful funeral, complete with all of the rites the dead deserve: a body, casket, and flowers, along with a priest and a cast of mourners who followed him all the way to his family's burial ground just outside of Addis. All of that happened on that couch (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 119-120).

This mental engagement is in line with the need to conduct a funeral that agrees with the departed person's and family socio-economic standing. As such, the Derg subjects the bereaved families to psychological violence by preventing them from mourning their dead. According to the dictates of the Derg, an "enemy of the revolution" (all those who question the authority of the Derg) should not be mourned. Consequently, these directives subject women, who are traditionally obliged to wear black for a period of one year to mourn their departed, to psychological violence by preventing them from mourning. Jon Abbink, therefore, while discussing the plight of Ethiopians during the Red Terror, presents this prohibition to mourning as a well orchestrated move to instil fear among the public.

But the dramatic aspects of this arbitrary production of corpses in the Ethiopia at that time revealed one thing: the emergence of another organized and 'rational' state-terror campaign to utterly de-humanize the opponents' from within its own society, and a complete intimidation of the bereaved so as to make them mute, preventing them from even considering the possibility of appeal or redress. It also constituted full negation of cen-

tral cultural values of mourning, proper burial, and commemoration. The fact that people were also killed without the slightest indication of what their 'guilt' could have been in itself part of the logic of theatrical violence: for the state to justify itself in this way is superfluous, because acting in the name of the higher collective ideology of social revolution, it could not be wrong. All this amounted to an ultimate objectification of the victims, equalling them to disposable trash which was never of any use ("The Impact of Violence: The Ethiopian 'Red Terror' as a Social Phenomenon", Abbink 138).

Accordingly, the prohibition to mourn is meant to cause a lot of pain and only makes sense when perceived from the point of view of contention between the dominant and subordinated groups. Those that are left behind live in fear of being the next victims. The people are most terrified by the fact that there is no legal system to prosecute those that are suspected of having committed certain crimes. The soldiers have the power to suspect, arrest and make a verdict, which in most cases is against the interest of the people. These killings together with the uncertainty of one's life span amounts to both physical and psychological violence. It is out of fear of being the next victim that Stephanos' mother advises her son to seek refuge in another country.

Although Stephanos successfully runs away from violence in Ethiopia, he is introduced to new forms of violence in America. This sad realization by immigrants is echoed in the poems written by his friend Joseph. Joseph is a Congolese exile (although he still calls his country Zaire). His poetry, which is a reflection of his life, engages with characters who "begin in hell, they come out just a moment, and then

they return” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 169). The narrator argues that his poetry is like *commedia*, except there is no heaven. Furthermore, his poem is contrasted with Dante’s “Some of the beautiful things that heaven bears” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 169), which happens to be the earlier title for *Children of the Revolution*. It points out to the tragic advancement of immigrants from the time they decide or are forced to leave their countries, step into another country burdened with too many painful memories—yet full of optimism, to the time that they realize the impossibility of achieving much in these new places.

The narrator traces the life of Joseph from the time he steps on the American soil up to the time that he cannot stand being seen at his place of work. During early days in America, Joseph loved his job at the *Colonial Grill*. He was “proud of this job although “he could never have admitted it” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 168). He was not offended when forced to learn the names of the important people who came to eat at the hotel. He was even happy to report to Kenneth and Stephanos these important people he had the honour of serving during the week. In addition, in the course of his interaction with these big people, most of who were high ranking political leaders, he had developed a liking for city’s politics. However, his “interest in the city’s politics lasted only as long as it took him to know the faces behind it” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 168).

Stephanos, on the other hand, dislikes his work place from the first day he is introduced to the American labour industry by his uncle. He dislikes the way his would-be boss handles him. Secondly, his would-be boss and his uncle discuss him without ask-

ing for his opinion. The man goes ahead to inquire whether Stephanos would mind working late and lifting heavy objects.

He pointed to my skinny arms and asked my uncle if I had any problems lifting heavy objects, if I had any objections to working late-night shifts, if I could be trusted, in general, not to steal from the hotel or its clients (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 141).

His uncle is quick to answer that Stephanos has no objections. Stephanos is hired immediately. But just before getting down to work, his boss squeezes his “right bicep once for good measure” only to immediately stretch his (Stephanos’ boss) hand for him (Stephanos) to shake. Stephanos is at loss with words for the hatred he feels towards his boss. He wishes he has the “courage and strength to crush every bone in his hand” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 141), which he does not. His uncle who seems to like his boss is only masking. No sooner do they move from the presence of their boss than he calls him a “fucking bastard” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 141). Stephanos cannot bear with the symbolic violence meted against the blacks, thus later quits saying that he could not believe that his father died and he was spared so he could go to America to carry heavy luggage (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 142).

Joseph, unlike Stephanos, who was very optimistic when he started working at the *Colonial Grill*, soon develops a dislike for his place of work. Donald N. Levine, while discussing the integration of Ethiopians in the diasporas, in the essay “On Cultural Creativity in the Ethiopian Diaspora”, argues that immigrants “assimilate whatever of

the host culture they must in order to survive, and then to become more generally modern, yet all the while maintaining traditional bonds and patterns” (217). However, as evident in the character of Joseph, this is not necessarily long-lived. The interplay between the expected behaviours in the host community and the desire to maintain “traditional bonds and patterns” weighs down on these immigrants. Consequently, Joseph’s optimism in his ability to succeed in America is soon overtaken by pessimism. It is during these later days that he becomes obsessed with Africa. The narrator says that there was “hardly a single thing in Joseph’s life, though, that hadn’t become a “metaphor of Africa” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 100).

There wasn’t a sport played in the world that couldn’t be better grasped by the African mind. And as for politics, who understood its weight, capriciousness, and value better than the citizens of a continent devastated by coups and tyrannical old men? (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 100)

This excerpt depicts the frustration of the younger generation of immigrants. Terrence Lyons, while discussing the plight of young Ethiopians living in North America in “Transnational Politics in Ethiopia: Diasporas and the 2005 Elections” argues that “[s]ome of these young Ethiopian Americans have moved toward a “Habesh” identity that emphasizes the historical glories of Ethiopian’s imperial past, the orthodox highland cultures, and transnational cultural figures such as Bob Marley and Teddy Afro (Mohammed)” (271). They mythologize Africa with disregard to its current state, irrespective of the African country of origin, and are very quick to blame every evil on the older generation. Joseph is impatient with these “old men” whom he later refers to

as dictators and who are “busy reshaping their countries for their own liking” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 101). He regrets the end of what he refers to as the “golden era” in Africa, that is, the sixties. It was only during this period that Africa, as well as America, was close to achieving freedom (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 170).

These young immigrants argue that the African continent has retrogressed to a point of no return. Violence is inevitable in Africa, as in the case of Zaire, where, as Joseph argues, weapons are part of them (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 220). Ironically, even after these wars are over, many immigrants chose to continue living in exile rather than go back home. It is this contradiction which, when pointed out by Kenneth, silences Joseph for sometime. Kenneth asks him why he should not go back to Africa rather than keep singing about it.

“If you miss it so much”, he yelled at him once, “why don’t you go back? Then you don’t have to say every day, ‘This is like Africa, that is like Africa’. You can’t go back, though. You would rather miss it comfortably from here instead of hating it everyday from there” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 100).

The narrator says that Joseph had no words to respond to the above remarks. The words are too loaded with bitter truth that immigrants would rather keep unmentioned. Life in America is unfavourable even for those immigrants who go to school. For example, Joseph physically drops out of the University of Michigan, but psychologically continues to be a student in the same place. He holds on to the University of

Michigan sweat shirt (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 70) for the rest of his life in the novel. He even uses his expired students' identity card to access the University of Michigan's library facilities. This unfinished business has a connection with Joseph's dream of attaining a PhD in the same institution.

Stephanos too has his share of frustrations with the education system in America. He briefly attends Virginia Community College after he had stopped working. However, sooner than later, he realizes that his identity as a black immigrant would not allow him to achieve as much as he desired. He refutes the college's motto, "Taking You to Where You Want to Be" when he sees it in a billboard seventeen years later.

After seventeen years here, I am certain of at least one thing: the liberal idea of America is at its best in advertising (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 98).

He has come to realize that there is more than meets the eye within the American context. Although the constitution stipulates equal rights for all, the same is not true on the ground. His identity as a black immigrant limits his opportunities. Although going back to Ethiopia is never a solution, opting to stay in America is equally not a solution. Consequently many migrant groups retain and amplify attachment to their identity's territorial aspect, even if they are physically distant from or unlikely to visit that territory. Ironically, his mother and uncle, and their family at large, are very impressed with his new identity as a student. They would do anything to help their own acquire education in America, which is rarely the case. As Stephanos points out, education was never a factor that contributed to his migration from Ethiopia to America.

The first aim of a refugee is to survive, and having done that, that initial goal is quickly replaced by the general ambitions of life. I didn't leave Ethiopia to attend classes in northern suburbs of Virginia, but to hear the story told then, that was what I had done (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 98).

In as much as one would want to question his decision to drop out from college, the issue of identity cannot be ignored. His family members are only seeking a better life for their son. They are aware of the hardships facing immigrants, who are treated differently both at school and places of work. Kenneth, for example, is forced to work during Christmas. To make matters worse, he is alone in the office for the whole day. In addition, he is even late in joining his friends for the evening beer. Stephanos makes fun of him for overstaying in the office even in the absence of his boss. He inquires whether this was a trait characteristic of a "perfect slave or immigrant?" (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 182)

Kenneth, unlike Stephanos and Joseph, comes from a very poor background back in Kenya. He laments that the only thing that his father owned at his death was a picture of Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 186). He can not afford to go back to Kenya before he acquires enough skills to secure a better job as an architect. This is his dream job. He braves the poor working conditions at his place of work because he cannot afford to lose his job.

In an attempt to fit in the American culture, or to compensate for these frustrations, Kenneth secures a very large television set. He does not switch it off even when he is out of the house. In addition, he purchases a car that would be his “first entry into a long-awaited form of American commerce” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 10). The narrator adds that Kenneth imagines that purchasing a car would “lift him above the fray” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 11) and is out to assert his newly acquired identity as an economically stable man. Unfortunately, even this ‘first entry’ is faced with a lot of difficulties especially when the three—Stephanos, Kenneth and Joseph—go shopping for Kenneth’s car in a rented cab. Kenneth orders the two to wait for the dealership to come for them outside the premise, which never happens (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 12). This could be because of their identity as black Africans, although it could also be that the dealership never comes for prospective buyers while they are still in their cars. It is only later that Kenneth manages to purchase a second-hand (and badly conditioned) European red Saab.

Unfortunately, all these endeavours leave Kenneth frustrated and lonely. The narrator, while living at Kenneth place, witnesses heightened loneliness that haunts his friend. The narrator adds that Kenneth’s scepticism, contrary to his reason of being an engineer, emanates from this sense of loneliness. Consequently, Stephanos soon moves out of his friend’s house after finding Kenneth speaking and laughing with himself while drinking beer.

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 laughing

hysterically to himself. The only light in the apartment came 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 (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 145-6).

Although Kenneth works extremely hard, tries his best to fit in the American society, he does not get the compensation he deserves. He puts on the face of a happy person to conceal the rage within that weighs down on him. Nevertheless, he does not change his attitude towards work. He continues working with unequalled vigour, knowing that there is no better option. He employs mannerism that characterise men in positions of power. For example, he believes that such men hang up the telephone abruptly (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 35). This is what he does when he either calls or is called by Stephanos while in the office.

The issue of race, which contributes to psychological and physical violence weighing down the black community, is best illuminated in the character of Judith. Judith is a lonely white woman who acquires a house in a purely black residence. She is a mother of one daughter, Naomi. Her husband, Ayad, a Mauritanian, abandons them after some family disagreements (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 57). Her troubles are replicated in scholarship (where she tries to rethink history) and her career as a university professor [where she confesses seeing herself after "twenty years in the future saying the same thing over and over again to students who stayed the same age" (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 54)]. This touches on the new historical approach where the past is neither consistent with the present nor the future as well as

the possibility of “histories”. Although she is on sabbatical leave, she is not quite sure whether she would go back into teaching.

Her identity as a white woman does not trouble the residence at first, until other white people start moving into the residence. This initiation pushes the rent up forcing some people, who have lived in the residence for a long time, out of the residence. Having lived in the residence for such a long time, the people consider themselves as the rightful residents, yet they do not own these apartments. The decision about who is to live in a particular house solely lies with the owner who, like any other business minded individual, goes for the highest bidder. Therefore the owners rent them out to those that are willing to pay higher rates, thus evictions become the order of the day as richer people move into the residence.

Nevertheless, before discussing the impasse between those who claim to be the original residents but cannot afford the inflated rent rates, and those considered to be intruders because they are newcomers who can afford to pay higher rates, I would wish to reflect on the life of Judith in this new residence, as well as how it affects her daughter and Stephanos. Judith is running away from the past. This is not her first time to do so but the first time she lands in a purely non-white residence. She purchases and renovates a four-storey house that has been in ruins for a long time. A rift emerges between her and the other residents from the time she sets foot in the neighbourhood. This rift is deepened by lack of communication between Judith and other members of community. Therefore, this gap in knowledge about her life is filled with rumours.

It is rumoured that she is a very rich lesbian. These rumours originate from construction workers employed in her house. It is through them that the narrator learns “that the woman was a lesbian bitch with too much money in her hands. She was fucking the architect on the side (you could tell by the way they always went off to some room when she came by), which explained why he was such a bastard himself and why he probably got the job” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 17). Furthermore, the construction workers cannot understand why she would want a bathroom in every floor. Secondly, they cannot understand why she had a big library and bedroom. Therefore it is on the basis of these speculations that they conclude that she is a lesbian: “All you had to do was look at that short hair and nearly flat chest to see it” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 17).

These rumours lose conviction after Judith brings her daughter Naomi. Although a young girl of eleven years, Stephanos testifies to her intelligence and ability to command. She tells Stephanos that the world was not doing much to contain the global AIDS crisis and that the “American foreign policy in the Middle East was a failure”. Naomi knows how to get what she wants no matter what. However, at the same time she is lonely and laid back. She is neither white nor black. Stephanos says that she has “lighter than black but darker than white skin” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 20). Her love of reading books that does not match her age. Stephanos later learns that the disagreement between her parents affected her as she had to transfer to different places and schools.

Her mother, Judith, is in search of peace of mind, which can only be found when her daughter is under her care. This is seen in the way she fiercely protects her daughter. She designs her house with a bathroom in every floor so that her daughter can lock herself in any floor when she does not want to see her. This is a compromise between the two, where Naomi is requested never to run away from home. Judith tells Stephanos that her relationship with Naomi changed after Ayad, her husband, left them.

Consequently, Stephanos become the go between the two, their friend as well as confidant. Naomi enjoys Stephanos' company at the store especially when reading *The Brothers Karamazov*, one of the books that she has borrowed from the library. The reading engagement between Naomi and Stephanos saves Judith from battles with her daughter. Judith, on the other hand, engages in a rather complex relationship with Stephanos.

Kenneth and Joseph, as well as Stephanos to some extent, are critical of Judith being Stephanos' friend. At first, Kenneth and Joseph even doubt that there is a white lady in the neighbourhood. Besides Joseph having dated a white lady back in Kinshasa (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 63), white and black intimate relationship is almost unimaginable. But Judith is a different white lady. She handles history, which according to her is partly marked with racial and gender prejudices, with a lot of care. The narrator says that she was a university professor in "another life" (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 54), meaning that Judith no longer identifies with her past as well as that of her country. This is probably the reason why Judith relocates to a blacks residence and believes is most ideal for her. The people she is running away from belongs to her former socio-economic class, as confirmed by Ayad who gets a

chance to visit her in this new residence, and would not wish to visit leave alone live in this residence.

The presence of Judith, however, takes us back to the standoff between the ‘original black residents’ and the ‘intruding white newcomers’. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the first group as the black residents and the second one as the white residents. The black residents, out of fear of being forced out of the residence, result to violence. They organize meetings that seek to implore the city leadership to intervene. This intervention would mean stopping the white people from moving into the neighbourhood, which is impossible from the perspective of the authorities. The councilman who is said to have been invited does not show up. Stephanos thus argues that it was possible that the councilman “had never been asked to come in the first place” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 198). White people are the subject of the meeting and are simply referred to as “they” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 199).

I don’t know who they think they are. What are they doing here anyway.

They have their own neighbourhoods and now they want ours too. It’s bad enough that they have all the jobs and schools (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 200).

Black residents argue that this could be their only affordable residence, thus to push them out of this residence would mean rendering them homeless. As a result, Judith finds herself in the receiving end. All the frustrations and anger are directed to her. The narrator says that her presence was purely a “chance to demonstrate her high-minded concern, her belief in participatory democracy and Emersonian ideals”

(Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 197). However, the black residents do not care much about these “Emersonian ideals” that challenge history, rather they are concerned about their immediate problems. Consequently, Judith is silenced when she tries to speak during the meeting (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 201). Mrs. Davis, a kind-hearted neighbour, is unable to control the members, although she disapproves of silencing Judith (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 201).

Judith’s misery does not end there. Her car is later vandalized, while parked outside her house (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 205). Although nobody is clear about this occurrence, Stephanos reads it as a sign.

I realized after overhearing a few conversations that what stood out most, more than Judith and her car, was the house. The formerly rundown, four-story brick mansion that had been abandoned for as long as I lived here. Look at it now. It was shining. I actually heard someone use that word. That shining big house. There was more than just a sense of mystery to its transformation (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 209).

These speculations by Stephanos are confirmed after Judith’s house is set on fire (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 219). The man who sets it ablaze is a victim of evictions, and who had lived in the residence for most of his life. The *Washington Post*, as reported by the narrator, features this man Franklin Henry Thomas.

Born just a few blocks away from my [Stephano's] store, Frank, as he was known, had lived in the Hampshire Tower for eighteen years with a wife and two children. He worked odd jobs around the neighbourhood and city as a handyman. In the summertime, he rode a bicycle around the city offering illegal cable television connections to the people on the street....He was a man who made his living simply hawking whatever meagre wares he had (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 224-5).

Franklin Henry Thomas, just like other black residents, leads a hand-to-mouth life. The community depends on him for these illegal connections, since they cannot afford to pay for legal connections. He is a criminal through the lenses of the law, but a companion and important entrepreneur in the residence. The black people feel neglected and disconnected from the mainstream American society. Frank is a bearer of the fighting spirit thus even Stephanos, whose friend's house Frank had set on fire, admires him.

I was surprised, when I first saw the picture [in the Washington Post], how closely he and I resembled each other. We had the same narrow face and broad forehead. Had I lost all of my hair and grown a beard, and aged perhaps just a few more years, we could have passed for brothers. Inside my store, with no one around, I said his name often to myself. Franklin Henry Thomas. Franklin Henry Thomas. Sometimes just Frank, sometime Frank Henry. The name was so decidedly American, so quintessentially colonial in its rhythm and grandeur. I began to think of Franklin Henry as my conspirator in life. I even thought briefly of visiting him in jail so I

could tell him that I alone understood why he did what he did (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 225)

Stephanos understands why Franklin Henry Thomas commits the act. Frank symbolizes people that have been neglected by the government and who have to use whatever means of violence available to affirm their fluid identities. The narrator argues that the name Franklin Henry Thomas is “so decidedly American”, yet the bearer of that name is not treated like one. The plight of the black race in America occupies Stephanos to the extent that he forgets or ignores the fact that Henry has set Judith’s house on fire. It reveals the depth of symbolic violence meted against the black community in America. Henry is a hero in the eyes of most blacks in the neighbourhood because he has defied all odds to protest against the order in American society, but a criminal through the eyes of the law. Although Franklin Henry Thomas is fighting his own battle, from Stephano’s perspective, he embodies the last retort of the oppressed.

2.4 Conclusion

Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* offers background information on physical and psychological violence that is witnessed in Ethiopia before and during the reign of the Derg. This novel can therefore be read as historical fiction documenting these difficult moments. However, through the use of a particular family and community within the Ethiopian nation, Mengiste showcases the effect of these forms of violence at the family as well as communal levels. Mengestu’s *Children of the Revolution*, on the other hand, illuminates life in exile from a wider perspective. The three major characters, Kenneth, Stephanos and Joseph, are from different African countries. Stephanos an Ethiopian immigrant, Kenneth is from Kenya, while Joseph is from Congo. The three

characters are also subjected almost similar forms of violence, both in their home countries and in their place of exile. Their lives are marked with a vicious cycle of violence. Consequently, the latter novel is richer in memory, as I have elaborated in the next chapter, where I discuss how different characters use memory to narrate their experiences.

CHAPTER THREE: MEMORY AS A MARKER OF IDENTITY

This chapter deals with different ways in which characters engage with the concept of memory. It captures both the positive and negative effects of memory (as experienced by different characters). It also inquires about the effect of memory not only to the victims, but also those implementing state orders. In addition, the chapter interrogates the effect of witnessing difficult experiences as well as not experiencing the same. In this regard, the study argues that the witnessing and remembering have a bearing to a person's identity. Therefore various strategies of narration of memory, with regard to the different ways the two authors narrate difficult experiences, are also analysed.

3.1 Introduction

Shoshana Felman in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* asks a very fundamental question: "How is the act of *writing* tied up with the act of *bearing witness*?" (206) Felman goes ahead to inquire about the relationship between reading and experiencing difficult situations: "Is the act of *reading* literary texts itself inherently related to the act of *facing terror*?" (206) This is in reaction to Claude Lanzmann's film, *Shoah*, which depended on first hand testimonies by witnesses of the Holocaust. Felman found out that witnessing has a lasting effect on the subject. Since witnessing is hardly avoidable, those living through harsh times are never spared. Such people are either made stronger or destroyed by the events that they witness, which make up their memory. Since the last century was marked with many conflicts, for example the first and second world wars, colonization and decolonization, Felman concludes that we are living in the "age of testimony". All those that witness a certain event or phenomena are not free of the same, because of the power

of memory. Felman therefore describes witnessing as a “historical crises” that becomes, “in all senses of the word, a *critical* activity” (206).

To testify—before a court of law or before the court of history and of the future; to testify, likewise, before an audience of readers or spectators—is more than simply to report a fact or an event or to relate what has been lived, recorded and remembered. Memory is conjured here essentially in order to *address* another, to impress upon a listener, to *appeal* to a community. To testify is always, metaphorically, to take the witness’s stand, or to take the position of the witness insofar as the narrative account of the witness is at once engaged in an appeal and bound by an oath. To testify is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative, to others: to *take responsibility*—in speech—for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general (non-personal) validity and consequences” (Felman, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* 103-4).

Memory is part and parcel of testimonies. The narrator narrates by recollecting past events or experiences. However, the narrators are selective on what they narrate, based on why, who and where they narrate. Consequently, the narrative should be tackled with a lot of care, but through the use of objective criticism. The ability to narrate testifies to the effect of these events on the identity or the character of the narrator. This study therefore operates on the assumption that identity is best captured in the stories we tell about our lives.

Shoshana Felman goes ahead to problematize witnessing. Felman critiques the “epistemological tradition of the western world” where “witnessing is based on, and is formally defined by, first-hand seeing” (*Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* 106). Citing the case of the three categories (the Jews as the victims; the Nazis as the perpetrators; and the Poles as the bystanders) of witnesses in the film *Shoah*, Felman argues that they are “here differentiated not so much by what they actually see (what they see, although discontinuous, does in fact follow a logic of corroboration), as by what and how they *do not see*, by what they *fail to witness*” (*Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* 107). Felman observes that the three categories gave differing testimonies about the same event. Therefore, the acts of seeing, remembering and testifying are affected by a person’s identity.

Susan Gubar, in her book *Poetry After Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* (2003), introduces another angle to this debate on testimony and remembering when she argues that those who fail to witness a tragic event are also affected. Such people are faced with the difficulty of knowing what was witnessed. They have to rely on information gathered from those that witnessed. However, this information is altered, based on the identity of those remembering or narrating. Therefore, failure to witness significant events makes a person gullible to lies, distortions, and rumours.

This study therefore identifies ways through which different people remember as well as give testimonies. As such these remembrances and testimonies are influenced by a person’s identity but at the same time influence their identity. Consequently, these testimonies and recollections illuminate the identities of various characters in Maaza

Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Dinaw Mengestu's *Children of the Revolution*.

3.2 *Children of the Revolution*

The novel addresses the plight of African refugees, particularly Kenneth, Joseph and Stephanos, who are living in the United States of America. The three characters recall their lives as lived in African countries of their origin—Kenya, Congo and Ethiopia respectively. The stories of their lives are evidently unique, based on their identities as black African refugees living in the US. These immigrants acquire a new identity as a result of physical and spiritual dislocations. Their movement from Africa to the US, in the case of Stephanos, Kenneth and Joseph, constitute physical dislocation while their memory of Africa constitute spiritual dislocation.

Solomon Addis Getahun while speaking about acculturation of Ethiopians living in America through education, in “Sedat, Migration, and Refugeeism as Portrayed in Ethiopian Song Lyrics”, writes that “the consequences of living abroad [is among other things] the individual’s adaptation of some of the customs of the host society” (348). Exiles have to alter their strongly held customs and beliefs, in order to create space for the new ones. Such individuals are unaware (or do not care, in the case of those running away from wars) of hardships encountered in exile at the time of departure from their original homelands. The major dilemma that faces such immigrants is how to fit in the new community, entertain a new culture, but at the same time to retain their culture. Consequently, Donald N. Levine, while speaking about the cultural creativity of Ethiopians living in the diasporas, reflects on this dilemma facing these immigrants:

The central experience of each immigrant group consists of unavoidable conflicts between their natal culture and social ties and the different culture and social connections of their new home” (“On Cultural Creativity in the Ethiopian Diaspora” 218)

These immigrants are confronted with challenges of either totally ignoring or completely embracing the new culture. In the first case they risk alienation from their “new home”, or losing their “natal culture” in the second case. Losing one’s “natal culture” is arguably impossible since, as this chapter elaborates further, characters recall even the past they seek to avoid. As a result, this past affects their daily lives. Levine therefore argues that this conflict between “natal culture” and the culture of the “new home” is most prevalent in the first generation immigrants. The same is evident in the characters of Stephanos, Kenneth and Joseph. Stephanos, alluding from his father, says that “[a] man is not defined by possession but the company he keeps” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 60).

The three immigrants argue that they have to stay together because they share a common African experience, which is reflected in their conversations and actions in helping or guiding one another. However, through further scrutiny one cannot help but wonder whether they are together because of their common experience or their present status as exiles? I would argue that the two factors are true, whereby their status as exiles brings them together and their identity as Africans cement their friendship. In addition, this shared experience also ensures their continued stay in America, ideally in the same residence, even when their host community seems to ignore them.

Joseph and Kenneth live in a residence particularly chosen to boost their social and economic standing. They are poor immigrants who either have not fully accepted their current identities or have not been fully accepted in these new homes. They engage in lowly paying jobs, thus their socio-economic standing in the society is at the bottom of the American hierarchy. To counter this reality, Kenneth and Joseph live in a suburb, which is hardly affordable. Levine discusses the problems faced by Ethiopians living in the diaspora with regard to integration, which include the risk of living in the extremes.

On the other hand, those who want to live well in the new milieu sometimes run to the other extreme, especially if they work in careers, from science to banking, in which displaying some adherence to Western cultural values and behaviours is indispensable (“On Cultural Creativity in the Ethiopian Diaspora” 217).

Stephanos adopts a ‘don’t care’ attitude, while Joseph and Kenneth resort to any available means of merging them into the mainstream American culture. Joseph and Kenneth buy furniture and very big television sets that would help them to adhere to “Western cultural values”. Satirically, their television sets are never switched off, even when the two are out of their houses (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 10). Stephanos, on the other hand, seems least disturbed by where he lives, but is very sensitive about where he works. Stephanos resigns from the job that his uncle helps him secure for reasons relating to his identities. Immigrants, Stephanos argues, are recruited into jobs that only they can accept. They have no option but to work under poor conditions for meagre payments.

Therefore, the three have to stick together to avoid the loneliness that marks their personal lives. Godwin Siundu while discussing the plight of East African Asians, in *Home and Community in East African Asian Writings: A Reading of Moyez Vassanji and Yusuf Dawood's Novels*,² argues that characters who are estranged by “both place and people” have to appropriate spaces in other ways:

[A]ppropriation of space is one of the ways in which many characters deal with estrangement from both place and people; it is also within the space that new communities and links are forged to create a sense of security that is further strengthened by invoking memories of the past times. This way, the characters are able to imagine new senses of homeliness and fashion more adaptive selves (Siundu 110).

Taking the case of Stephanos, Kenneth and Joseph, one would argue that immigrants are alienated “from both place and people”. Their houses are like ruins or monuments. The kind of furniture in these houses, in the case of Kenneth and Joseph, reminds them of what they would want to be or acquire, but cannot because of their identity. They cannot afford to live in better residences because of their meagre earnings. Thus Joseph and Kenneth try to cover up this reality by living in a suburb that they can hardly afford. Furthermore, the three can only afford to hangout in cheap clubs where only poor blacks and immigrants frequent.

Secondly, their places of work completely alienate them from the American economical, social and political spheres. These work places present immigrants as “second class people” based on the way they are treated. Their bosses are aware of the strong

attachments between immigrants and their places of work, since they consider themselves very lucky after securing any kind of employment. Faced with the high likelihood of missing another job, immigrants develop an intimate attachment to the current job. For example, given a better option, Joseph would have left his place of work.

Therefore, the narrator employs memory to enlighten the reader about the past that could have a bearing on the present. It is hence common to find digressions (flashbacks) in the novel, as the narrator digs deep into the past to explain the actions or inactions of a given character, including himself. The African experience, in the case of Stephanos, Kenneth and Joseph, affects their lives in America. This experience, I would argue, is manifest through memory. Siundu while discussing the identity crises facing the East African Asians, points out the fact that “all these aspects of narration intersect with the dynamics of memory to bring out the idea of multiple consciousness and reconstruction of home.” (*Home and Community in East African Asian Writings: A Reading of Moyez Vassanji and Yusuf Dawood’s Novels* 109)

Although residents of the US are thought to have a lot of money, immigrants encounter quite a number of problems while trying to live this dream. Kenneth, for example, moves from Kenya in search of economic stability, which he hopes to realize in the US. The narrator describes the kind of poverty that forces Kenneth into exile, saying that Kenneth’s father owned only a photo of Kenyatta upon his death. Going back to Kenya is not an option for Kenneth, rather a constant reminder as to why he has to make things work in America.

Jan Abbink maps out the change that occurs in the immigrants from the time they move into their new homes up to the time that they become accustomed to the new places, with optimal precision. He writes that the “[p]olitical refugees in the 1980s may have been more tolerant of this [new environment] because their arrival in a new country made them feel safe and out of danger” (Abbink 371). In the same breath, Solomon Addis Getahun, while referring to Ethiopians immigrants, argues that immigrants are impressed by life in the United States, especially in regard to “the abundance and variety of goods, and the skyscrapers” (“Sedat, Migration, and Refugeism as Portrayed in Ethiopian Song Lyrics” 354). However, these hopes and optimism are dashed out soon after immigrants start to demand more than just security. This can be linked to the realization by most immigrants of the possibility of never going to go back to their homes, even after the war is over (Abbink 372), “[t]hus communities are created and recreated in the new host-land setting” (Abbink 371).

During the first days in America Kenneth plans to study architecture and later return to Kenya as a qualified architect. He would then design houses that would impress many people. However, the reader only gets to know about Kenneth’s dreams through memory, since enough time has elapsed to make him realize that he is never going to achieve any of these dreams—of attaining an undergraduate and later a Master’s degree in engineering (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 146).

The reason why the three characters have to prove their worth, or have to assert their identities, is attributable to the fact that they are away from their homes. Immigrants are convinced that exile is only a temporary home, where they have to keep proving their relevance. They have to fit in the contemporary trends, in these new environ-

ments or risk being singled out. They dread becoming the centre of attraction, but treasure disappearing in the crowd. Nevertheless, this is not as easy as it might seem, to some extent, it also acts to remind them that they are in exile.

It is therefore a common practice to find the three trying to reconstruct their history, which seems to get blurred as time goes. Stephanos, for example, has forgotten how his father looked like. He cannot recall where the scar on his father's face "is". To end this confusion, Stephanos has to sit on the table, lean on a chair, to check which side of his father's face the scar "is". In the end, he has to be reminded that his father is dead, when he wonders how he would tell him apart from other old men (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 10).

In spite of the freedoms that immigrants "enjoy" in the US, they still romanticize Africa, but to certain points. Back home, in Africa, dictatorial rules is the order of the day, thus the US is the most desirable place to live. The narrator is aware of the impact of the presence of immigrants to the host society, America, thus he decides to be invisible. The narrator is in America by chance not choice. In addition, his presence is greatly influenced by circumstances back home, rather than himself. Jan Abbink, while discussing the plight of Ethiopians in the Netherlands, says that "often the host country is an accidental choice" (Abbink 364). Consequently, Stephanos makes it clear that he is not in America to make money.

Here in the Logan Circle, though I didn't have to be anything greater than what I already was. I was poor, black, and wore anonymity that came with that as a shield against all of the early ambitions of the immigrant, which

had long since abandoned me, assuming they had ever really been mine to begin with. As it was, I did not come to America to find a better life. I came running and screaming with the ghosts of an old one firmly attached to my back. My goal since then has always been a simple one: to persist unnoticed through the days, to do no more harm (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 41).

Therefore, the best way to survive in this new environment would be to disappear in the crowd, which he does. Nevertheless, the “ghosts” that he is running away from still haunt him. His tactics of wearing anonymity do not work as he would have imagined. What haunts him most is in his body, mind, and memories.

Stephanos, for instance, opens a store not because he intends to make a lot of money, but rather to create time to read (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 40). Readings stands out as the only venture that transposes Stephanos from his miserable life. He barely makes enough to sustain himself, yet he sends money to his people back home. Although he does not buy into the American myths of riches, the narrator has to satisfy the dreams of those living in Ethiopia. However, he does little to secure these riches.

I send them money once every few months when I can afford to, even though I know they don't need it. I do it because I am in America, and because sending money home is supposed to be the consolation prize for not being home. For Christmas last year my mother sent me a money order

worth three hundred dollars, more than all the money I had ever sent
(Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 41).

Stephanos is not willing to leave America, regardless of the improved social, political and economic conditions back in Ethiopia. Although the country, Ethiopia, has stabilised, he prefers living the US to Ethiopia. Ironically, he spends day and nights dreaming about Africa. Africa is a place of fantasy, a place to dream about, but not to live in. The fact that his mother sends him money does not change his attitude towards Africa. Stephanos has set his own limits both in regard to social and financial expectations. His identity as an immigrant, he argues, set these marks. He is keen not to expect too much.

I thought I had long since learned to keep those expectations in check, but it happens anyway, doesn't it? We forget who we are and where we came from, and in doing so, believe we are entitled to much more than we deserve (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 44).

These sentiments are in reaction to the “overindulgence and inflated expectations” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 44) that engulfs Washington D.C. in spring. Kenneth has offered to drive the two, Joseph and Stephanos, to an undisclosed location to celebrate the “end of a hard day” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 44). Stephanos is uncertain of whether he deserves all this special treatment. He recalls the hardships that Kenneth goes through at work and the boss who likes teasing the latter. Kenneth's boss always inquires whether the former is still “fighting the good fight” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 44). This is satirical because Kenneth's boss

participates in the exploitation of the former. Nonetheless, the three still enjoy themselves.

However, their merry making sessions are short-lived. No sooner do they go back to their houses than the reality of their predicaments dawn on them. Memory, in this case, acts as the barrier between what is happening in the mind and what is really happening back home. In the minds of these characters, Africa is inhabitable, for it is full of ghosts that terrorize them in their sleep and their waking moments. In addition, it is a place of absence. It is in this regard that Terrence Lyons argue that the “[t]he trauma of violent displacement is vivid in the first generation’s minds and is often kept alive in subsequent generations through commemorations and symbols” (“Transnational Politics in Ethiopia: Diasporas and the 2005 Elections” 267).

These “commemorations” and “symbols” are evident in the character of Stephanos who still has and adores a cufflink given to him by his father (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 50). Although cheap, it reminds him of his father and as he puts it “a symbol of his father’s dominion”.

War experiences claim the lives of their loved ones. A mental journey through their lives back home reminds them of who and what ought to be there but are not there, as a result of the war and other social, political, ideological, religious and economical strives. Consequently, these characters fail to appreciate what are in existence, for example the existing family members, only to dwell on what has ceased to be. For example, Stephanos rarely talks about his mother, who even goes against all odds to send him money; rather he is obsessed with his dead father.

Africa is a place of bitter memories. It is a place that arouses images of war, of torture, of suffering, fear and death. Therefore, most of remembrances about Africa are packed with violent scenes. The lives of Stephanos, Joseph and Kenneth are comparable to those of the girls from East Africa, in Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*, who resorts to selling cigarettes at night, thus introducing a new social group in London. Nazzruddin, a character in this novel, depicts the helplessness and loneliness that haunts these exiles.

You've talked a lot, Salim, about those girls from East Africa in the tobacco kiosks, selling cigarettes at all hours of the night. They've depressed you. You say they don't have a future and that they don't even know where they are. I wonder whether that isn't their luck. They expect to be bored, to do what they do. I suppose it must be dreadful for them when they have to go back. This area is full of them, coming to the centre because it is all they know about and because they think it's smart, and trying to make something out of nothing (*A Bend in the River* 279).

Just like Joseph in *Children of the Revolution*, who is nostalgic but is not ready to go back home, these girls prefer to live in the "centre". However, their preference of these new homes to their original homes does not stop them from dreaming about their homes. However, Joseph fears that time would erode their memories, which "are like a river cut off from the ocean. With time they will slowly dry out in the sun" (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 9). Their memories tell of a vacuum that amounts to psychological violence. After spending some time in London, and wit-

nessing the kind of life led by immigrants, Salim in Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* rethinks the relationship between the past and the present.

That illumination I held on to, about the unity of experience and the illusion of pain, was part of the same way of feeling. We fell into it—people like Indar and myself—because it was the basis for our old way of life. But I had rejected that way of life—and just in time. In spite of the girls in the cigarette kiosks, that way of life no longer existed, in London or Africa. There could be no going back; there was nothing to go back to. We had become what the world outside had made us; we had to live in the world as it existed. The younger Indar was wiser. Use the aeroplane; trample on the past, as Indar had said he had trampled on the past; make the dreamlike scenes of loss ordinary (286).

Although the present is undesirable, the past that harbours a lot of pain is also unbearable. Therefore, the best way to survive would be to “trample” on this past. However, this trampling of the past does not guarantee one a better life, but to a certain extent it distracts one from the present that they seek to avoid. Salim therefore adopts Indar's (his friend) ideas of using a plane to trample on this past. The underlying idea is that since the plane speeds, it is able to cross different time schedules within a short time. Consequently, those travelling in the plane seem to have skipped some part of their lives.

Stephanos, in *Children of the Revolution*, is in search of his identity as an Ethiopian émigré. Through his story, that implicates his family and friends, Stephanos opens up his life for the readers. This is a major step on the part of the narrator, who prefers keeping to himself, as well as disappearing in the crowd. Subsequently, the reader understands why immigrants are not ready to go back to their Africa.

Stephanos, for example, either doesn't like his uncle's obsession with order, or is unable to maintain it. His uncle accuses him of "lack[ing] the ability to maintain structure and order" (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 126). His uncle has letters dated many years back, whereas the narrator has no single picture "that dates back more than ten years" (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 127). Stephanos who is unable to maintain order blames it on his life, which is marked with discontinuity. He argues that the past is discontinuous with the present, thus he can "never find the guiding principle that relegated the past to its proper place" (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 127). Therefore, virtue of maintaining order that characterises life back in Ethiopia repels him.

The image of Africa is only a claim of identity for Africans, irrespective of place of residence. Africa is the place that they were born, the place where their ancestors lived, and is therefore the only place where they don't have to explain their presence. Annie H. Gagiano in her essay "Concepts of Exile in Dambudzo Marechera's Early Works" explains how African writers living in exile mythologize Africa. Although they are not ready to go back to Africa because of the evils they are likely to encounter, they still paint it in a better light than the diasporas. In connection to this, Gagiano cites the case of Dambudzo Marechera, who, in spite of growing up in the slums, "de-

liberately mythologize his origins to include a paradisaal, rural element, a verdant scene from which he has been exiled” (8). This implies that although some writers decide to live in exile, not everything about Africa is evil. In the same vein, some characters in *Children of the Revolution* mythologize Africa.

As a result of these admirable traits about Africa, exiles have to deal with psychological deprivation. These “children of two worlds” have to negotiate their space in these two worlds. In exile they are strangers, while they are far removed from their original homes. They occupy a marginal location, between their home and their current places of residence in exile. Cheikh Hamidou Kane in *Ambiguous Adventure*, while referring to Samba Diallo (a black African) who visits Paris, writes that those living in exile are haunted by “spiritual absence” (150).

Their fruitless efforts to fit in the new environment and feelings of “the unloved” alienate immigrants. Consequently, people living in exile run the risk of losing their identity, which eventually happens upon adoption of new identities. Nevertheless, through memory such people interact with the past that also has a bearing on their identities. They have to cling to their past since “forgetting the past is a sure way of forfeiting a group’s history” (Siundu, *Imagining Home and Community in East African Asian Writings: A Reading of Moyez Vassanji and Yusuf Dawood’s Novels* 108). However, this act of remembering is burdensome; for “remembrance comes with the burden of accepting and trying to live with some harsh aspects of that history” (Siundu, *Imagining Home and Community in East African Asian Writings: A Reading of Moyez Vassanji and Yusuf Dawood’s Novels* 108). Remembrance of traumatic histo-

ries is yielding to the extent that it helps to “cleanse the group that remembers its unpalatable past” (Siundu, 108).

3.3 Beneath the Lion’s Gaze

Memory provides missing information about the past. This information is relayed to the reader through exploration of characters’ minds, as well as third person narration. Consequently, remembering influences characterisation, as well as thematic considerations.

Hailu is a doctor at Mekonnen Hospital, is married to Selam and has two children, that is, Yonas and Dawit. Hailu is critical of the changes facing his community. Through memory, the reader understands the character of Hailu, as well as that of his wife and children.

Hailu belongs to the older generation that respects the emperor, for whom he is and not what he does. He recalls attending a special ceremony by the emperor to welcome the young graduates that have the chance to travel out of the country for further studies. The emperor gave him a watch (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 7), which in later years reminds him of the powers vested in the emperor. He recalls how the “emperor’s piercing eyes, rumoured to hold the power to break any man’s will, had bore” (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 7) into him. This direct contact with the emperor is probably the reason why Hailu is reluctant to support demonstrations against their leader (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 7).

However, most of the youth, as evident in the character of Dawit, have not had physical contact with the emperor, hence their memory is considerably free of the myths surrounding the emperor. They stand a better chance of questioning the authority of the emperor, unlike the older generation. When Hailu finds a gun in Dawit's room, the latter is adamant that the youth have to fight the monarch. He questions his father's authority.

Dawit spoke over the noise in Hailu's head. "You can't do anything and you know it. You don't understand. You don't even know the right question to ask. You want to control me and try to pretend there's nothing happening in this country." Dawit wiped his eyes, swallowed the pain in his throat. "We have to keep fighting. We're different from your generation. Just because someone has authority doesn't mean they should be respected" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 172).

These words are heavily loaded and allude to different experiences of the two generations. The older generation is not open to questioning those in positions of power, especially God's chosen ones. Consequently, Dawit mourns the limited political and social scope of his father who "doesn't know what he can't see; he can't see what he can't understand" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 172). The younger generation, on the other hand, is open to changes, even if these changes seek to challenge existing myths. They swear to fight for justice irrespective of whoever they brush shoulders with. However, not all old people buy into the myth about the emperor, as seen in the character of Major Guddu.

Memory enhances the reader's understanding of the character of Dawit. Selam, Dawit's mother, leads her son to believing that he has roots in a family of great fighters. When Dawit finds Fisseha trying to have sex with a servant, Mulu, he beats him. Dawit finds Ililta, Mulu's daughter and Dawit's friend, helplessly witnessing her age mate having sexual advances with the woman who takes care of him. The bond between mother and son is very strong in that Dawit only shares about this occurrence with her mother, even though Hailu treats the boy without pay, his mother, Selam, had made him believe that he is a fierce fighter.

She would understand in a way no one else in his family could. She would remind him that in his veins ran the blood of her father, one of Gondar's fiercest fighters, and she would tell him that hope can never come from doing nothing (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 24).

Selam encourages his son to fight. She gives him justification as to why he might be more aggressive than other youths. It is this spirit of aggression, evident in the character of Dawit throughout the novel, which lures him to fighting or questioning those in authority. Everything, including a dance, which is taught to Dawit by his mother, can be linked to fighting.

His mother had taught him to dance *eskesta*, had spent hours and days with him in front of a mirror making him practice the controlled shiver of shoulders and torso that made up the traditional Ethiopian dance. The body has to move when the heart doesn't think it can, she'd said. She lifted his arm, clenched his fist around an imaginary weapon, and

straightened his back. My father danced before going to battle; the heart follows the body (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 10).

Dawit is taught that his heart doesn't have to "think" for the body to move. He is also made to believe that fighting means following the steps of his forefathers, thus making them proud. Therefore, the fact that he is from a family of great fighters is enough reason to engage in a confrontation. To make matters worse, Selam sings war songs to lull Dawit to sleep.

There were days when he'd spent the whole afternoons like this, leaning against her legs she sewed or stared out of the window, listening to the hypnotic lilt of her voice as she told him of her Gondar, a land of noblemen and castles. The melody of her favourite lullaby stepped forward from his memory and into the room. Dawit hummed the tune, a series of simple notes. He draped his arms over her legs, then laid his head on the bed, making sure that a part of him touched a part of her. He relaxed, the crown of his head solidly against her leg, he let his breaths deepen and then slow into soft sighs. His songs ebbed into silence, and Dawit fell asleep, comforted (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 36-7).

This character alienates Dawit from his father. Dawit thinks that his father is a coward. On the contrary, Hailu is concerned that his son is exposing himself to a lot of danger. His late wife had entrusted Hailu with taking care of their sons, especially during these times of war. Thus Hailu feels that his son is frustrating his efforts just

for the sake of it. Dawit, on his part, is determined to join the students' riots regardless of his father's warnings.

The tensions between them were drawn tighter lately. Only dancing seemed to ease his agitation. He felt trapped in his small bedroom, in his large house that spoke, if nothing else, of his father's dominion over the family. There would be another rally tomorrow afternoon. He was determined to go, no matter his father's orders, despite his promise to his mother to stay away from all political activity (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 11).

The dance is the only thing that makes Dawit happy while in his father's house. This is the dance that he had been taught by his mother Selam. It sends him away into another world, "away from the reality of a house without a mother" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 11). In this new world he swears to "put water into [his]...bones and dance until [his]...heart obeys" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 11). To counter loneliness, Dawit switches on the radio, listens and dances to the tunes that remind him of his mother. These tunes, however, capture the interest of Hailu who eaves drops into his son's room.

A FAINT MELODY [original emphasis] slid from Dawit's room into the living room where Hailu was resting, and threw him back to the days of his youth, when his and Selam's families had gathered inside his grandfather's *tukul* and drunk honey wine in celebration of the new couple's impending first child. His cousin's *washint* had filled the small hut with tunes

of love and patriotism, the hollow reed instrument needling a plaintive voice into the revelry. She had been seventeen; he, an arrogant twenty-eight-year-old with an awkwardness around this girl who sometimes looked at him with childish mockery. I am your husband, he'd told her, sitting on the steps of her father's house, and will remain faithful to you even while in medical school in England. She'd grown quiet, unimpressed by his chivalry [original emphasis] (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 11).

The song that Dawit is dancing to reminds Hailu about this day in his youth. He was in love with the beautiful Selam. He was to travel to England for further studies as his wife waited for his return. Dawit is the only one who plays these songs in the house, which remind Hailu of his unpalatable past. This is probably the reason why Hailu does not like Dawit. Furthermore, Hailu is afraid to be around Dawit after the death of Selam. He orders his son to look at their dying mother to conceal his fears.

He wanted to hide the fact that his son's presence sent a wild panic through him. Dawit reminded him too much of Selam, he had her nose and forehead, the tilt of his head was hers. Hailu could accept a dying wife, he could continue to hold this slowly cooling body for as long as he needed to, but he couldn't cope with the living traces of his wife in his son. It reminded him of what he would always miss (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 105-6).

Hailu fears that Dawit would always be there to remind him of what ought to be there but is no more. Although he loved his dead wife, he still cannot stand to see her in his son. Dawit, on the other hand, feels that his father never takes time to understand him. Selam was Dawit's close friend, closer than his girlfriend Lily. He confided in her things that could not be shared with another.

Upon Selam's death, Sara becomes Dawit's best friend. It is not a wonder that the two later engage in collecting and helping community members identify dead bodies. His girl friend Lily does not support any form of resistance against the Derg. Dawit decides to break up with Lily after he realizes that the latter is self-centred. Just because the *Kebele* (person who distribute food rations) in her place likes her, she argues that socialism is the best thing that ever happened in Ethiopia. She ignores the fact that many people are dying, while others were still in torture chambers. Sara therefore becomes Dawit's closest friend, to the extent that they almost become intimate. This is seen in their discussion following his fall out with Lily.

He clung to her, leaning into her so heavily that it nearly tipped her over. His hands found the back of her head and he turned her face towards him. He looked into her eyes and without a word touched his lips to her cheek, then pressed, and Sara let him. She didn't resist when he took her chin and raised her mouth to his (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 213).

Sara is Dawit's sister-in-law, married to his brother Yonas. The death of his mother leaves him with nobody to confide in, especially after the revolution that sees Lily change (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 210). This intimate encounter makes Sara

to wonder about Dawit's state of mind. On the other hand, Sara probably lingers for sometime before stopping Dawit because of loneliness. She misses her former husband (Yonas has greatly changed) but cannot afford to say so (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 246).

Sara, just like Dawit, traces her origin in a family of fighters. When Emama Seble cautions her against joining the battle, she replies that it would be hard to sit down and watch as people suffer. Her anger is directed at the Derg regime that is not sparing even pregnant women. She cites the killing of a pregnant woman (by a "kebele dog"), former worker at a printing press, "that these murderers [the Derg] thought was counter-revolutionary" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 234). Her use of vulgar language can be linked to her deviant character, especially when pushed to the wall. The Derg had not only killed this pregnant woman but also Berhane, her friend's youngest boy.

Sara is most concerned about what the children will say when they grow up. She fears that the children, her daughter Tizita in particular, will think that they "didn't fight back" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 234), which is equally tragic. She is a "daughter of patriots" who "charged at Italian rifles with spears" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 235). She goes ahead to single out her aunt who "was burned from those chemicals they dropped from the plane" but "she tried to fight soon as she could" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 235). Emama, unlike Sara, witnessed this war. Emama Seble not only confirms Sara's ideas about her aunt, but goes ahead to celebrate Sara's mother who "fought in bed with one of them [Italians] and strangled him" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 235). Regardless of all these, Sara is not

ready to “wait patiently while the people are dying” (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 235). She has to fight no matter the outcomes.

Sara disregards Emama Seble’s words that fighting would not make her “any more Ethiopian”: “[i]t won’t bring back anything” she has already lost (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 235). Emama further argues that the best thing for Sara to do would be to stay away from this fighting and ensure the safety of the remaining family members. Nevertheless, Sara, a fighter by blood, cannot buy these ideas.

“Nobody gets punished enough. If we don’t do something, we have to suffer for their wrongs for generations,” Sara said. “My mother knew this.”
(Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 235)

Her mother had taught her that fighting was the only right thing to do when circumstances dictated, a lesson she was ready to follow especially during these trying moments. Memory, therefore, moulds her character. In as much as she would want to be like other women in the society, her past cuts her differently. In order to get a better understanding of how memory determines or shapes the character of various characters, I would like to study the character of Sofia.

Sofia is a house servant employed by Hailu. She is a mother of two sons, Robel and Berhane. She is widowed, following the killing of her husband Daniel, who refuses to execute those formerly in Emperor Selassie’s government. The killing of her husband tears her apart, especially because she chooses to keep it a secret from her sons (Men-

giste 233). She is completely heartbroken after her youngest son, Berhane, is imprisoned and later shot during a march to pledge loyalty to the Derg.

Sofia is unhappy with the poverty that they are living in. In as much as she can handle the absence of her husband, she is not prepared to see her children living in such poverty.

She could cope with the hollowness of Daniel's absence. She'd already begun to learn ways to mask the empty side of her pillow. She'd started to sleep with one of Daniel's shirts next to her head. She vowed to do this for the rest of her life. She planned to wake each morning before her sons, tuck the shirt back in a plastic bag, and preserve a bit of her husband every night. She could do this until the day she died. It would not be enough, but it was something (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 170).

These words are in reaction to her son's first day at work. Berhane will be selling newspapers next to where her elder son cleans shoes. Her worries are confirmed after Berhane goes missing and is later killed. Sofia regrets having allowed her son to sell these newspapers in a dangerous environment, regardless of the fact that they were in dire need of money. As a sacrifice, she decides to bury Berhane together with her husband's shirt, which she treasures so much, so that he will have his father (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 267). She mourns her selfishness in keeping the shirt, which still has "the scent" of their father, to herself (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 267). Sara, however, stops Sofia from doing this telling her that she had given

her sons “so much of their father. Memories” (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 267).

Sofia regrets not having a photo of her dead son. She therefore decides to look at her son for a long time and never to forget what ‘they’ [the Derg] do to her son (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 267). In addition, she goes ahead to unwrap the sheet covering her son and talks to him about how they met with Daniel (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 267). Berhane is later buried. However, the funeral does not mark an end to the relationship between Sofia and her dead son. A monk who lives nearby reports to Solomon and Dawit that Sofia comes “every day and sleeps next to the grave before the curfew” (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 292). This is the way in which Sofia mourns her son. Sofia’s character, as I have already argued, is completely different from the character of Sara, whose past defines her as a fighter.

When Tizita falls ill, Sara confronts God without fear or reservations.

“This one is mine”, Sara said. “This one, I’m keeping”.

“She’s a thread woven into a larger cloth, like all of us. If you take one, you break the others along the way. It must be fixed (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* 84).

She begs God not to take Tizita since she was part of their “larger cloth”, which is their lineage. Tizita is her only daughter, following two miscarriages, thus her death would mark an end to their family tree. Sara sees this as a matter of life and death, hence she does not hold back while addressing God.

You. You have cursed this womb and torn yours out. Mixed my blood with premature ash. You have heard my bitter cries and sat silent to my prayers. You have made me into nothing but the mother of one, the daughter of none, a woman carrying twin monuments of grief. Leave me alone. Let me be as I am. I ask for no more. Sara prayed. If this God demanded blood, if her father and mother and two babies weren't enough, then she would give of herself until he was forced to concede, if not out of compassion and justice, then out of a damning guilt born of having watched his own son die on a cross while pleading to a father who had forsaken him (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 96-7).

Sara points out the failures of her God. Her God had failed to save His son who died while pleading for mercy from his father. Sara, therefore, argues that if her God does not save her daughter out of "compassion" then it should be out of "damning guilt of having watched his own son die on the cross while pleading" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 97) with Him. Sara's anger is fuelled by the knowledge of her mother's promise to God. Her mother had promised God that if she escaped from "that Italian [whom she fought in bed] into safety" she would baptize Sara at St. Gabriel's Church, which she did. Sara's mother, therefore, told her daughter that since she kept the promise Sara would always be protected. Their God has failed Sara's mother. Therefore, Sara's memory of this broken promise probably explains her attitude, which is completely different from that of Sofia who has lost both her husband and youngest son but is still patient with God.

3.4 Conclusion

The act of remembering is highly influenced by the identit(ies) of the subject. People remember what is of great importance to them, or what they chose to remember. The way they remember is also influenced by their identities. Consequently, memory dictates on the choices they make in their lives as well as the kind of lives they lead. Sara, in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, decides to join the war because her character cannot afford to sit as people are tortured, raped or even killed. She argues that her mother had fought in a more tragic battle against the Italians. As a daughter of her mother, she argues that she has to fight. In addition, Dawit, still in the same novel, joins the war after being influenced by his mother's stories of origin. His mother helps him trace his roots amongst the greatest warriors of the nation. As a result, he joins the fight to honour the spirit of his ancestors, which he believes reigns in him.

However, memory does not only lead characters into fighting, but also into desolation. Stephanos, in *Children of the Revolution*, leads an isolated lifestyle as a result of his past. Although he lives in deplorable conditions, his choices of places of work, friends and residence is heavily influenced by his identity. This also applies to the characters of Joseph and Kenneth, still in the same novel. Memory is therefore crucial in constructing and defining the identity of various characters.

CHAPTER FOUR: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE TO VIOLENCE AND MEMORY

This chapter analyses violence and memory using gender lenses. It explores how members of different gender, men and women, are subjected to different forms of violence. It also investigates how gender influences what a character remembers. Finally, the chapter also sheds light on the two authors who are members of different genders.

4.1 Introduction

The war is indiscriminate in regard to physical and spiritual displacement of members of affected communities. It affects people of different gender and social, religious, political and economical backgrounds. In addition, it is influenced by and also influences the past, which constitutes memory. Generally, the war affects the whole community causing some lapses relating to adherence to and emergence of new cultural practices. Although the war is indiscriminative in the way it affects the community, members are affected differently based, among other things, on their gender.

Gender refers to allocation of expected attributes and behaviours to members of the male and female sexes through cultural prescriptions. Gender relations are therefore entrenched within the social, cultural and religious systems of a given community. Both masculine and feminine genders are taught gender-based roles and expectations, as well as how to relate with members of their or opposite gender. In order to maintain the status quo, communities introduce and exercise various sanctions, pertaining to adherence to set gender relations and expectations that range from public humiliation, psychological or physical punishment to ex-communication. In most African

communities women are taught to be submissive and loyal to members of the masculine gender, whereas the latter are taught to dominate over the former. Lise Ostergaard writes that gender relations are structures of power and dominance.

Gender relations are constructed in terms of the relations of power and dominance that structure the life chances of women and men. In other words, gender divisions are not fixed in biology, but constitute an aspect of the wider social divisions of labour, which in turn are rooted in the conditions of production and reproduction and reinforced by the cultural, religious and ideological systems prevailing in the society (Ostergaard, *Gender and Development: A Practical Guide* 6).

Men and women are assigned different roles that reinforce their social and economic standing. In most cases gender based roles marginalise members of a particular gender to the advantage of the other. Women, for instance, are allocated the role of caregivers. They take care of their children, and families at large, as well as perform various domestic chores. These activities performed by women, however, are not economically quantifiable; hence the women lag behind in terms of economic advancement and/or recognition. This is true within the African set up where “gender divisions” favour men at the expense of women. In addition, women lack avenue for redress, since gender relations are a conscious endeavour by the members of a particular gender to marginalise the other, hence these attributes and behaviours are reinforced through cultural and religious practices. Therefore patriarchy equate questioning gender relations to doubting the existence of such communities as well as their religious and cultural beliefs.

Theodora Ezeigbo observes that gender “is constructed along psychological, cultural and social lines” (qtd. in Akoete Amouzou 97), unlike sex that is biologically inclined. This perspective is also echoed by Akoete Amouzou, who writes that “[s]ex biologically defines individuals and classifies them into two social categories. Gender [on the other hand] attaches cultural roles to this classification of people into sexual categories” (“Reconceptualising Gender in Nigerian Literature: The Dynamics of Womanist Ideology in Flora Nwapa’s Fiction” 97). Gender is therefore a construct of a given society that assigns different roles and attributes to members of the male and female sexes. This means that men and women, in spite of their biological differences, are recruited into their respective genders through related guidance and teachings. Therefore, gender differentiated roles are enshrined in the culture of a given community.

Even though the term ‘gender’ is used to refer to the masculine and feminine genders, it is more inclined to the latter within the African context. The masculine gender is, in most cases, in control, while the female gender is relegated to the margins. The African context presents a patriarchal system. Within a patriarchal system, males exercise power over their female counterparts. Consequently, the feminine acquire a lower status in comparison to those of the masculine gender. This maltreatment of women by the men cuts across social, economic, political and textual spheres. In the African textual world, women are subservient to men both in terms of writing or literary advancement, as well as characterisation. Amouzou with regard to Nigerian literature, therefore, argues that the manner in which male writers mistreat female characters is representative of the wider society. The way they “treat their female characters re-

flects the disdainful, indifferent or at times cruel manners in which women are regarded in Nigerian society” (“Reconceptualising Gender in Nigerian Literature: The Dynamics of Womanist Ideology in Flora Nwapa’s Fiction” 97).

Although diminished representation of female gender is not always the case among male writers, especially in the contemporary literary world, there is need for more women writers. Some critics argue that female writers illuminate on the holistic nature of the women through characterisation. However, unlike female writers in other parts of the world, African women writers present a world that is more tolerant to members of the both genders. Some of these female African writers have come to embrace womanism which is a black outgrowth of feminism.

Unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between women, men and children and wants to see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand. Womanism is communal in its orientation and goes beyond the husband and wife situation. It is an ideology in which the destiny of distressed peoples can be urgently discussed in a meaningful context to avert disaster, not just to talk abstractly (Amouzou, “Reconceptualising Gender in Nigerian Literature: The Dynamics of Womanist Ideology in Flora Nwapa’s Fiction” 102).

Womanism is therefore one of the guiding principles for most of the African female writers who seek for a peaceful coexistence between the two genders. This concept coincides with Sara Suleri’s approach while dealing with the experiences of a Pakistan woman in her book *Meatless Days* (1991). Womanists, just like Suleri, do not

seek to alienate the men from the day to day affairs of the family; rather, they wish to incorporate them. It would therefore be interesting to explore how Maaza Mengiste in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Dinaw Mengestu in *Children of the Revolution* portray members of opposite genders before, during and after the symbolic, physical and psychological violence witnessed in the Ethiopian society.

4.2 Beneath the Lion's Gaze

Maaza Mengiste presents a disintegrating patriarchal system as a result of the war. The history of Ethiopia can be traced back to the actions and inactions of the most powerful patriarchs. In short, Ethiopia is “a kingdom of men” (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 107). Men occupy all political positions, whereas the women are placed in the margins. Women do not contribute in social and political debates and decision making, thus their voice is silenced. A woman is secondary to a man.

Within the family set up the man decides, while the woman follows. The most important role for the female gender is to bear and rear children. This can be viewed from social, economic, and political perspectives. From a social perspective women are supposed to bear children for their husbands, as well as pass on cultural traits to them. From an economic perspective boys and men are supposed to inherit their father and also advance their philosophies. Lastly, from a political perspective, a man's power can be measured by the number of children he has, especially boys. This is the reason why the Colonel threatens Hailu by torturing or even killing his children.

Women are therefore influenced by these societal expectations to have a very intimate relationship with their children. The number or sex of their children determines their value in the society. Male children are preferred to female; hence, most women are led to want to have boys. The biggest misfortune that could possibly occur to a woman is to be barren or childless. A woman does not necessarily have to be barren to be childless in this community. Since women are not allowed to remarry in the event their husbands die, young brides who lose their husband can easily die childless. In addition, if the husband and all the children are killed, a woman will most likely die childless.

Emama Seble is one of the women who have no child. She is marginalised, irrespective of the fact that she had a child who died at a very tender age. Her loneliness is seen when she decides to mourn her husband until her death. Culturally, a woman is required to mourn her husband for a year. During this time she is supposed to wear black. In addition to mourning their husbands for a year, women are not expected to remarry. This adds to their loneliness since the death of their husbands, in the case of those who are yet to have children, means that they would die childless. This unfair treatment of women by the men, through societal norms, characterises the African set up. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira in her autobiography, *A Letter to Marima Ba*, explores the kind of suffering women have to undergo as a result of imprisonment or death of their husbands. These women have to brave all odds, including poverty, insecurity and loneliness, to bring up their children (13).

In spite of all the above, the society seems insensitive to the plight of the women. It would seem obvious that a childless widow is lonely, but not in a patriarchal system. Emama Seble has no words to express her conditions or how to deal with the same; hence she resorts to keeping to herself as well as wearing black. However, the community misinterprets her actions, branding her a witch. Emama Seble is probably doing this out of loneliness that emanates from losing a husband while still childless, whereas the community equates her actions to those of a witch. Children who disobey their parents or elders are threatened with being taken to Emama Seble. Moreover, even adults fear her. For example, the Shiferaw, who is feared and terrorizes all members of the community, buys into these make-believe rumours about Emama Seble. The Shiferaw fears Emama Seble to the extent that the latter has the audacity to abuse him.

Ironically, women turn to Emama Seble for guidance, motivation and advice. Sara, for instance, relies on the wisdom of Emama Seble to survive the hardships facing her at home. In addition, when Tizita falls ill, Sara turns to Emama Seble. This is after all medicines administered in hospital fail. Emama Seble uses traditional methods and medicines to cure Tizita. Although Sara is very thankful of her daughter's health, some people still interpret these traditional methods as acts of witchcraft, but these feelings about Emama Seble are not voiced.

When Berhane is shot dead by soldiers, Sofia orders Emama to bring him back to life. Sofia argues that since Emama Seble was able to cure Tizita who was almost dying, she should be able to bring Berhane back to life. Sofia either is too traumatized by the death of her son or ignorant of traditional medicine, which she interprets as witchcraft. However, I would like to think that Emama Seble's affiliations and character

makes it easier for anyone to misinterpret this method of traditional cure. Nonetheless, Sofia turns to her for help when everything else fails to work.

Berhane is shot and killed during a march organized for some of those imprisoned by the Derg. He is imprisoned for being linked with the assassination of a prominent member of the Derg (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 217). After the investigators lack witnesses, they turn to Berhane who was seen selling newspapers at the scene of this killing. Although a very young boy of seven years, he has been forced by circumstances back home to engage in this business. His mother Sofia is a poor widow. His brother Robel works as a shoe shiner and both supplement her mother's meagre earnings. Unfortunately, Berhane is implicated in the fall out between the Derg and the public, and ends up being killed. He is killed during a march to pledge loyalty to the Derg. As expected of any child, Berhane does not appreciate the significance of the march and therefore makes the mistake of being carried away by events outside the goal of the march. Berhane, who is out to fasten his oversize pair of shorts, is shot dead by the soldiers as the community watches.

The character of Berhane introduces us to the issue of masculinity within the Ethiopian society presented in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. Berhane believes that he is a man. He wears Robel's clothes not only because his mother cannot afford new clothes, but also because it makes him feel and look like a grown up man. He even goes ahead to wear Tizita's favourite colour to impress her. Although he does not know what has happened to his father who has gone missing, he plans on how to bring him home. He even defies his mother's orders of not talking to soldiers, when he asks one of the soldiers about the whereabouts of their father. Sofia knows that

their father had been killed while on duty as a soldier, but decides to keep it a secret. She is therefore afraid that the soldiers might have known about her husband's misfortune, which they would be very willing to share with the boy as an act of causing more pain to Daniel's (Berhane's father) family.

Daniel is among the very first people killed after the Derg takes over from the emperor. He was killed for refusing to carry out Major Guddu's orders of executing previous members of the ruling class—under the emperorship. These are some of the people who had helped the country through tough times, especially during the Italian invasion. Daniel's remembrances about the character and the actions of these former leaders make it hard for him to execute them, but his other option is death. He is therefore killed as other soldiers are instructed to carry on with these executions.

Unaware of the circumstances that led to his father's death, Berhane believes that he would find his father through whatever means, even if it meant fighting. This could be the reason why he does not fear the soldiers. Just like the other children of his age, including Tizita, he has heard about the ruthlessness and the hostility of soldiers while dealing with civilians. To counter this violence, the children have devised abusive language against the soldiers. Tizita tells her mother that soldiers smell like goats. Tizita, just like other children, fears and hates soldiers, but not Berhane. The latter knows that it is only through the soldiers that he might ever learn the truth about his father. When he is arrested, he thinks about the possibility of finding his father more than the risks facing him.

However, boys or teenagers who try to look like grown up men are not a new thing in the Ethiopian society. Dawit, too, rushes into manhood. Although a determined and selfless boy—later a man— his character alienates him from other people in the family and community at large. Consequently, he needs a person who understands his personality, which cannot be contained within his father’s social world, and whom he finds in the character of Selam and later Sara.

To start with, Hailu, as I have already mentioned, is very critical of the students’ demonstrations. He does not see how such activities can depose the monarch that has been in existence for more than three hundred years. However, it is probably out of fatherly concerns that he very critical of these demonstrations. He is aware of the character of his son Dawit whom he is sure would join these demonstrations. Secondly, he is the one who treats those that are hurt during these demonstrations. Therefore, Hailu knows how much force the monarch, and later the Derg, can employ to curb these uprisings.

Dawit, on his part, thinks that his father is a coward for not supporting the use of violence against the monarch. Instead Dawit adores Selam who has taught him to be a fighter. Selam introduces his son to the ways of her people, where fighting is the most adorable virtue in a man. Masculinity within the Ethiopian context is almost synonymous with being violent. Members of the male gender who are not violent do not qualify to be men. The men, including Dawit, have to search and preserve their identities as men through fighting any force that stands on the way of the community.

However the search for identity as a man, in most cases, leads to emasculation. The men who engage in fighting leave their wives and children at home. Men are supposed to protect their community, which is only attainable through the use of violence to counter violence meted against them. However, some are hurt, while others killed in the battle field. Those that get injured are taken back home for treatment and care by their wives or members of the female gender. During this time their authority is contested, since they are at the mercy of their women.

In addition, even those that survive the killings are haunted by memory of the battle field. During one of the searches Dawit hides in his room, as Sara confronts the soldiers for coming in their house without a search warrant. After this encounter Dawit accepts Sara into their group, irrespective of the fact that he had earlier argued that she could not join their group because she was a woman. Secondly, Dawit who is rumoured and celebrated as the saviour of his community, is comforted by Sara like a child when the going get tough for him. This hero is like a child before Sara.

Hailu's character too alienates him from the rest. During his times as a doctor, Hailu pays less attention to the plight of others, but concentrates more to satisfying his ego. He sticks to his time schedules irrespective of the needs of other people. In addition, he does discuss his feelings and worries with his wife, even when his wife demands to be left to die. This might be the reason why Selam, his wife, is most open to their son Dawit. The death of Selam tears Hailu apart, yet his identity as a man does not allow him to share with anybody, including his sons and daughter-in-law. The doctor keeps these frustrations, of failing to save his wife, to himself, thus affecting his productiv-

ity. At home he cannot fully stand up to the role of a father, hence the fall out with his sons.

His failure to save Selam intrudes on his past glories. He is only the best doctor in his mind and those of patients and relatives he had treated in the past. It was even rumoured that he had even treated a person who was dead. His failure to treat his wife discontinues this past with the present.

Later, when a girl – the Colonel’s daughter - is brought to him for treatment, he ends up killing her. Hailu discovers a lot of resemblance between the girl and his wife Selam. Selam was of the same age with this girl when they got married. Moreover, the girl reminds him of his late mother. The three women appear to him as the victims, each in her own way – and moreover, Selam appears to be a victim of his own negligence. The memory of his wife and his failure to listen, fulfil her wishes and probably save his wife bars him from reality. In spite of the fact that the colonel’s daughter is recovering at a commendable pace, Hailu reads only the negatives. He wonders how the girl would survive the trauma of having been tortured and the possibility of being tortured once more thus concludes that the only way of saving her would be to poison her.

Selam had earlier demanded to be left to die, but the husband heard none of it. Therefore, Hailu imagines that the girl desires death to life, which he gives to her. Hailu is content that he has acted as any father would for the good of their son or daughter. However, this act can only be interpreted as murder. Hailu is arrested and imprisoned for more than nine months. During his imprisonment he learns that the girl is the

daughter of a colonel who never holds back during tortures. Hailu is tortured to the extent that walking is a hard task at the time of his release. At home he is spoon fed by his daughter-in-law Sara, until he partly recovers. Therefore the long journey taken by Hailu in search of identity and maintenance of the status quo as a man ends up emasculating him.

Dawit's character is in complete contrast with that of his father. Fighting is synonymous to bravery in the world of Dawit, thus his father, who is critical of fighting, is a coward. Dawit braves all odds to prove his identity as a man. He realises that his father is not attending to the needs of the family, as a man should, thus his father is a rival. Hailu has 'neglected' his role as the husband of his sick wife, and Dawit takes it head on. Selam has been requesting her husband to leave her die, but the latter would never hear of it. Dawit does not understand why his father would not let Selam die. He therefore visits the hospital in the absence of other family members and engages in personal conversations with his mother. He has a lot to share with his mother, because they understand each other best.

Dawit is therefore 'twice orphaned' by the death of Selam. He loses his confidant and mother. Consequently, he has no desire to go home, but more reasons to fight the military regime. During one of the public displays of dead bodies, he rubs shoulders with the soldiers the wrong way. The haunting sight of a girl he had known since childhood is too much to take, and as a man he decides to fight back. Although he is restrained by his friend Solomon, who tries to put sense in his head, he swears to help his childhood friend (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 180). Dawit's indulges in his manly character to the extent that he overlooks the dangers facing him as a young

man. The soldiers can easily kill him, display his body in public, but this cannot tame him.

Nevertheless, it is not only the men and boys who suffer; the women also suffer as a result of the rule of the Derg. Hailu's head nurse is tortured and her daughter is killed. Although Hailu is tortured and even suspected to have taken part in the killing of the colonel's daughter, none of the members of his family is touched. The colonel even tells him that he knows the teaching schedules of his son Yonas, as well as all the actions of Dawit, yet he does not arrest or hurt any of them. However, in the case of Hailu's head nurse—Almaz—the colonel does not hesitate to kill her daughter. There seems to be a double standard in the way tortures are carried out. Children of poor single women and widows are prone to tortures and executions. Examples of these children of poor and widowed mothers include Berhane, Ililta and Almaz's daughter.

Therefore, the war affects members of the two genders differently. The women come out of the war physically weak, but emotionally stronger. During the war some are widowed, while others have to witness the death of their children or husbands. This is one of the strategies used by the Derg to instil fear and force loyalty among community members. In other instances, others, including young girls, are raped by soldiers, tortured and their bodies displayed in public just like those of their fellow men.

Irrespective of these inhumane acts against members of the female gender, they end up being empowered by the war. Before the war the women are there to be seen and not to be heard; they have no right to air their opinions. Men are entrusted with decision making both at the family, community and national levels. A woman who acts

otherwise is seen as a rebel and bad influence to the rest. Women, for example, are not allowed to divorce their husbands, no matter the condition of their relationships. The men, on the other hand, have the option of marrying a second wife, if the first one is not enough for them.

Maaza Mengiste presents a community where women are subordinate to men. In the first place, husbands are secured by fathers for their daughters (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 160). Secondly, upon being married, a wife is not allowed divorce. As it turns out, the husband has to allow for a divorce, which rarely happens. Sara's father turned down his wife's plea for a divorce. It is for this reason that Sara Selam asks her prospective husband, Hailu, the following questions before their marriage:

“Will you let me leave if I want? Will you let me come back to my father's house if I ask? Will you ever keep me against my will, as my father once kept my mother?” (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 11)

The society is dominated by men, who relegate women to the margins. Men are allowed to marry more than one wife, while married women are not even allowed to air their dissatisfaction. Sara's mother who is tired of her marriage is prevented from ending her marriage.

In cases where women go to the battlefield, they have to juggle between their roles as mothers, care-givers and soldiers. Genevieve Brassard, while discussing Irene Rathbone's works about women during the First World War (which entails her personal experiences in the battle field), argues that women in the battle field are ex-

pected to assume that they are not going through what everyone is experiencing. On the contrary, they are supposed to create a homely environment. In so doing, women become comfort givers who, in a number of cases, forget or ignore their problems so that others may feel that there is nothing to worry about. This is a very tasking endeavour, since they deal with those that are hurt, some who are about to die, and even organizing on how to dispose of the dead. Women offer comfort to those that are hurt in the field.

Women unsettle traditional wartime boundaries between home and the front, since they are expected to recreate a bit of homeland comfort and cheer abroad while also working hard in a dangerous environment (Brassard, "From Private Story to Public History: Irene Rathbone Revises the War in the Thirties" 46).

After the war is over, women have to take care of those hurt in the battle field (the case of home-based care) and also offer moral and spiritual support to their children. According to Patrice Higonnet, "women experience war over a different period from that which traditional history usually recognizes, a period which precedes and long outlasts formal hostilities" ("From Private Story to Public History: Irene Rathbone Revises the War in the Thirties" 46). They have to prepare their families before the war, and counsel them after the war. In the case the man of the house is killed in the battle field, it is the women that take over as the head of these families.

Therefore, and ironically, some of these women are very strong, stronger than most of the men they interact or live with, and who the society expects to be in control. Sarah stands out as one of the strongest characters in the novel. She works with Dawit, who is also a very strong character, and both move bodies displayed in public by the soldiers. This is a very risky and hard task, but both are qualified for the task. She leaves her husband at home and ventures into the night together with Dawit and Melaku.

Sarah also takes over the role of her father-in-law, Hailu, who is seriously affected by the political upheavals and assassinations in the country. Moreover, she takes care of her children, other women, his father-in-law (especially after surviving tortures), and the community in general. She stands up against injustices against his community, in a very witty manner to avoid arrest, but also to ensure that she succeeds. This can be seen in her battle with the man who is the custodian of their community, the Shiferaw. Sara prevents him from poking his nose into the affair of the Hailu's, which is aimed at protecting Dawit who is revolting against the Derg. Although the war is too complex and disastrous, she creates the best environment possible for her family and community.

Sara's mother too, whose husband stops her from going back to her father's house, is very strong and courageous. A lot has been said and rumoured about her, and she is still an inspiration and a role model for most women. Emama Seble, a woman who lived during the Italian invasion, narrates to Sara how her (Sara's) mother "fought in bed with one of them [Italians] and strangled him" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 235).

Emama Seble is also a very strong woman in the novel, who uses her identity as an old and lonely widow to challenge and question men that nobody else can dare to challenge. Emama Seble even uses offensive language against Shiferaw. She also accuses Hailu of failing his role as a man. Her appearance, dressing code, is a source of fear for many people in the community. She wears black, all the time, which scares even the most courageous like Dawit.

However, she is a source of inspiration for most of the characters in the novel. Sarah, for example, is encouraged by Emama Seble when things are too hard for her. Emama Seble observes that Sara's mother was celebrated by all the women in Addis because of her bravery: she was able "to give birth, unlike some of [them]" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 235). Therefore, she questions the history that is told from a male perspective. Ideally, only men are believed to have fought in the battles. Nevertheless, she ignites rumours that Sara has Italian blood, a thing that the latter vehemently refutes. But the point is clear that both Emama Seble and Sara's mother are self driven, determined and brave women.

However, women characters are subjected to gender based violence regardless of their strong personalities. Sara's mother, a woman and a wife, has to adhere to the dictates of her husband. Therefore, the spirit of Sara's mother, and not her actions, is her defining feature. Sara is determined to propel the history of her family from a female perspective. Her mother, who is already dead, deserves to be remembered and if possible mythologized by generations and generations to come. She is an inspiration for many women who, like Sara, feel that they have a role to play in the running of the community, but the community fails to give them a chance or acknowledge them. In

addition, these women are a testimony to the fact that leadership (including resistance) is not a privilege for the male gender.

Sara, therefore, decides to join the battle. She joins her brother-in-law, Dawit, in collecting the bodies that are left to rot in public. Since this is illegal, they have to work at night, before the curfew begins. As a woman, she is supposed to be at home, taking care of her family, but she is a special woman. She has the blood of fighters. Sara's mother fought the Italians, and her father almost died fighting in one of the battles; "[i]t's the way... [she] was raised" (Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* 234). She braves all odds, leaves her husband in bed, goes out with other men (Dawit and Melaku), in order to fight for rights of the oppressed who are stopped from mourning their dead.

At first, Dawit is not sure whether Sara, a woman, can undertake the hard job of collecting dead bodies, until when Sara confronts two soldiers who are searching their house. All the men of the house, including Dawit and Yonas, are silenced, but not Sara. Dawit hides in his room, while Yonas watches as his wife is bullied by the two soldiers. Nevertheless, Sara doesn't give up, and a result saves Dawit who is hiding in his room. Dawit is embarrassed upon realization that Sara is stronger than all the men in the house.

However, Sara also becomes victim of domestic violence. She is slapped by her husband who cannot take her criticism. This is after Tizita falls and hurts her stomach while under the care of Yonas. Sara blames Yonas for Tizita's fall. She goes ahead to blame the men in the family for the illness of Selam, her mother-in-law. The family,

except Dawit, don't do much to help their mother who is in hospital. And as Sara says, they are praying for their mother to die in peace. Sara, a woman from a family of fighters, fights back. This catches Yonas by surprise, but he later regains his composure. Sara, who engages in the most dangerous act of collecting bodies, cannot be slapped by a man who is unable to visit his father in prison, without fighting back.

Therefore, the war destabilizes the status quo that relegates women to the second position. Men, who take to fighting the Derg through guerrilla warfare as well as civil unrest, either lose touch with their families or get hurt or killed. The women, who take over the running of their families, have to conceal the absence of their husbands to their children in the best way they could master. In so doing, the women learn how to manage their families on their own and to make and trust their own decisions. Even at the community level, women are chosen to head committees, since the men are either absent or cannot be trusted by the Derg. The war, therefore, introduces the women to the political spheres both at the family, communal and national levels.

When the men come back home from prison or their hideouts, they experience some sort of awkwardness while trying to claim their previous position. They realize that the women were doing considerably well without them. As a matter of fact, their presence invites insecurity in their homes, since the Derg keeps monitoring them. In addition, the Derg makes all the decision in regard to when to be in the house, what is to be eaten in their houses and whether a member of the family would be taken to prison or killed. Consequently, the men have no role to play in their families, since it is the women who cook the food that is secured through government rations.

In extreme cases, for example the case of Hailu, men come back home completely incapacitated. They cannot feed, clothe or move on their own, thus they are reduced to babies. The women have to spoon feed, clothe, move and clean them. This takes away all their dignity and remaining powers. After such encounters the men would rather watch things happening than influence their flow. The women have no option but to take full control over their families.

Moreover, more women enrol for tertiary level of education. Unlike the times of Sara and her mother, when the women rarely went beyond secondary school, more girls starts attending university education. For some like Lily, Dawit's girl friend, they even brave all odds to go abroad for further studies. Lily risks her prospective marriage to her sweet heart Dawit by accepting the offer to travel to Cuba. In a nutshell, the war in the two novels enlarges the domain of the women, while the men lose ground.

4.3 Children of the Revolution

Stephanos tells a story of three male immigrants living in America. The three men, who have been displaced from different African countries, meet and interact with men and women from different social, racial and economic backgrounds. The story is, therefore, told from a male perspective. Although the story is about these three men, a number of women, including Judith, are implicated in the flow of this narrative.

Judith, a white woman, moves into the neighbourhood that is predominantly occupied by blacks. Before her coming the only white people seen in this neighbourhood are either those investigating crimes or arresting some criminals. Judith settles in a house

next to Stephanos'. Kenneth and Joseph find it hard to believe that a white woman has settled in Stephanos' neighbourhood. To make matters worse, Stephanos go ahead to claim that he has had a conversation with this woman, which according to them was impossible. Their identities as immigrants impact on their self esteems, especially when dealing with women. Therefore, the fact that blacks, including immigrants like Stephanos, are not ready to interact with white people, shows the amount of loneliness subjected to Judith by having to settle in this neighbourhood.

In as much as one might want to think that Judith has settled in this neighbourhood out of her own choice, it is important to point out that she is running away from her past. Judith has just divorced her husband. She is in this neighbourhood as a way of protecting her daughter Naomi. Judith argues that the residence that Naomi was accustomed to living with her father was not the best place. As a matter of fact, Judith tells Stephanos that Naomi used to run away from home every time she disagreed with her mother. Judith has therefore built a house which has a bathroom in every floor so that her daughter can lock herself in either of the floor until she is ready to face her mother. This house has been designed by a mother to protect her child.

Black residents see the house as a mockery of their poverty. Most of them can barely afford an apartment, no matter how cheap it is, before the influx of white people to the residence. They even satirically brand it as the "shining big house" (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 209) to express its intrusion in this poor residence. The house was a formerly ran down four-story brick mansion that had been abandoned for as long as the narrator lived in the residence. This transformation to a single house lures

more whites into the residence, hikes rents, thus forcing some of the poor people out of the residence.

The presence of Judith, which is symbolized by the shining house, creates rivalry between the blacks, who claim to be the original residents, and the whites, who are arguably the strangers. The blacks are angered by this intrusion into their neighbourhood whereas the whites cannot understand why they should not be allowed to purchase property or live in any part of America. The blacks, on their side, argue that the whites have been living in purely white residences that the blacks cannot afford, thus the former should stick there. Nevertheless, it is not only the whites who pour into the residence, but also the middle class blacks who seem to have suddenly discovered this residence.

Since the poor blacks cannot stop the newcomers through a court injunction, they resort to use of violence. The residence that Judith had turned to for privacy and safety becomes a battle field. At first she is stopped from airing her thoughts during a meeting convened to address the welfare of residents following a number of evictions. Later, her car is vandalized and her house eventually burned down.

The presence of Judith illuminates on the dating profiles of Stephanos, Joseph and Kenneth. For instance, it reminds Joseph of his life back in Congo where he had dated a white woman (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 63). In America Joseph is not open to such privileges of dating let alone a white woman. Stephanos, on the other hand, has never dated a white woman. To make matters worse, Joseph reminds

Stephanos that he has never been in a relationship of any kind beyond brief-one-night encounters since coming to America (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 109).

The absence of female friends in their lives affects them. Stephanos, for example, does not care much about his personal hygiene, as well as that of his house. His store is also a total mess. The store is neither clean nor organized. There are number of items in the shelves, which have already expired. However, Judith's presence changes the character of Stephanos. The latter starts worrying about his looks especially body complexion, structure and appearance.

After we hung up the phone I went back to my bathroom mirror. I stared hard and long at my reflection. I ran my hands through my hair and turned my head from one side to the other. I was determined to find something that someone like Judith could describe as beautiful. It seemed entirely possible if I turned my head the right way, smiled the proper smile, and made sure the light hit my face at the correct angle. I lifted up my chin and turned my head a few degrees to the left. I smiled with only the right side of my face. I washed my face, dried it, and then washed it again. With each blink a new face looked back at me, simultaneously handsome and grotesque and nondescript. Who was I? That was all I wanted to know (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 109)

The presence of a woman in his life makes him think about his identity. Beyond these concerns with his personal hygiene, lies the bigger question of identities. But first it is important to interrogate changes in the character of Stephanos, which have a link with

the society's role of a woman. A woman is supposed to take care of their male friends or partners. A man, on the other hand, is incapable of taking care of himself, let alone another person. These are gender based myths that encourage men and women to marry, as well as discouraging those that might want to lead a single life. It seems like Stephanos' appearance starts to matter when he meets a woman he is interested in.

However, his identity as an immigrant lowers his esteem. He does not understand why a white woman would be interested in him. He is yet to come to terms with his conflicting identities, and therefore wonders which of these multiple identities Judith would be interested in. Nonetheless, this does not stop him from desiring to be a better man, a lesser embarrassment to Judith. He starts grooming himself and cleaning his house, especially when Judith promises to give him a rare visit.

Judith's daughter Naomi also influences Stephanos. The latter starts to care about the cleanliness of his store, as well as the condition of his stock. It is during these clean ups with Naomi that he realizes that some of his stock has already expired. This relationship between Stephanos and Naomi introduces the former to the role of being a father. Stephanos has to withstand the character of Naomi who is very sharp, critical and inquisitive about events and behaviours. Naomi even has the audacity to question the role of the American government in the Afghanistan war. Judith, on her part, is happy that her daughter has finally found a person she enjoys spending time with. She therefore allows her daughter to stay at the store with Stephanos as much as she likes. This is better than when Naomi used to run away from home to undisclosed locations.

However, the residence is unsafe for Judith and her daughter. Whether in the store or any other place, Judith requires her daughter home by five.

The only rule Judith had for Naomi was that she always had to be home before five, just as the early winter sun was beginning to set. Judith picked that hour because it had been at roughly that time of day that a young man had approached her on her way home from my store and asked her if she liked to suck black dick. As she was walking past General Logan, the young man pulled out his penis and then broke out in laughter and went running back to his friends, who were watching from the benches only a few feet away (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 32).

This experience instils fear in Judith, who worries that her eleven-year-old daughter might be subjected to the same ordeal. As a mother, she is afraid that these boys might even rape her daughter. These boys have nothing to do. They hang around the residence. They are the same boys who are involved in various criminal activities witnessed in the neighbourhood. It is ironical that Naomi, either out of innocence or naivety, says that she is not afraid of the boys. Judith even imagines that her daughter would have dealt with the incidence better than she did. Unlike her mother, who restrains from looking at the boy, Naomi argues that she would have “kicked him where it counts” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 33).

The boys are a creation of the society. They are children of poor residents who drop out of school for different reasons or cannot find employment after completion of studies. The boys seem to lack better ways of proving their manhood except by mo-

leaving women and young girls. Some of them are even drug addicts. It is as a result of this awareness that narrator says that he could not blame them for breaking into Judith's car.

We all essentially wanted the same thing, which was to feel that we had a stake in shaping and defining what little part of the world we could claim as our own. Boys even younger than the ones standing outside had fought and killed one another all over Addis for that exact reason, and they were at it again now throughout more of Africa than even Joseph, Kenneth, and I cared to acknowledge. At least here, in America, they had this corner to live their lives as they pleased, and if a few of them took to throwing bricks through windows, then we could not judge them" (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 211)

The boys have a lot of energy which they need to dispose of. Hence, if they are not offered jobs to do, they are bound to use this energy towards negative results. The author fails to present even a single boy within the black neighbourhood who is well behaved. We only see those attacking women and girls along the streets as well as kissing girls. As readers, we can only guess that there might be some good boys in the school attended by Naomi. Although the girls are presented as being innocent, we rarely get to meet them in the novel. The only girl the reader gets to meet is Naomi. She is neither white nor black, having been born of an Arab father and a white mother. Naomi is presented as a very brilliant and analytical girl; one who surpasses her years.

Naomi is quick to observe and inquire about the behaviour of Mrs. Davis. The latter is a black widow that lives alone. Through Naomi's inquiry, the reader learns that Mrs Davis sweeps the streets at the peak of her loneliness (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 28). Since she lives alone, she has nobody to speak or share her frustrations with. Although Stephanos lives near her, the two rarely interact, save for a number of times when Mrs Davis checks on him after failing to open the store. Even during these rare moments we do not encounter meaningful or long conversations that go beyond greetings. Unlike Stephanos, who has Kenneth and Joseph as friends, Mrs Davis seems forgotten by the society.

In spite of the society's attitude towards Mrs Davis, she stands out as a very caring and selfless person. The fact that she is a widow and has no children living with her does not stop her from taking care of other people in the community. She is aware of the loneliness that engulfs Stephanos and how it affects his day to day live. She also monitors the relationship between Judith and Stephanos. Unlike some people who might want to dismiss Stephanos as a lazy and don't-care person, Mrs Davis seems to appreciate his plight. Therefore, she monitors Stephanos to ensure that he does not get himself into more troubles.

On the weekends the voice monitors my comings and goings, scrutinizes my clothes, tells me to polish my shoes, asks me whether or not it's going to rain, makes me pitchers of sweet iced tea, encourages me to come to church, and more recently, can sense my loneliness and occasional despair and tries to wash it away with a firm grip on my hand and a wet kiss on my cheek (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 95)

Stephanos has almost given up on himself due to past experiences that haunts his present and future. He has decided or been forced to disconnect with the American society that alienated him from the first day he arrived as an immigrant. Mrs Davis seems aware of the fact that Stephanos' attitude is not going to help things get better; but at the same time his 'positive' behavioural change was unlikely to change much. However, she does not tire from encouraging and supporting Stephanos in the best way possible. Mrs Davis takes care of the store when Stephanos leaves it unattended upon receiving an eviction letter. She stays in the shop, probably attending to the customers, while Stephanos conducts a journey to different residences in Washington DC. This journey constitutes the plot of the novel. It during this journey that the narrator remembers or recalls his life in Ethiopia, his journey to America, first days in America, up to the time when he is facing possible eviction from his store for failing to pay the monthly rent.

Stephanos walks out on his store. He goes ahead to wonder whether this is the same feeling in the case of a man walking out on his wife and children (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 74). This correlation is rooted in the interaction between Stephanos and Judith, where he learns that the latter and her daughter had been abandoned by Ayad. Stephanos and Judith have much in common; they are lonely. Judith lives with her daughter in a purely black residence, while Stephanos is a black immigrant who lives alone. This commonality binds them together for some time until personal fears and feelings of insecurity hit back. Stephanos does not see how he can measure up to Judith's husband.

I could see myself trying to measure up at family dinners and cocktail parties, and as a result, always falling short. How many times would I have to stare into a mirror and compare myself against Judith? I could go on second-guessing myself forever, and perhaps even find some consolation to the routine, but I saw now that all it would take was one fleeting moment of scepticism on her end to confirm all of my inadequacies, validate all of my doubts, and send me running back to the corner I came from. Our insecurities run far deep and wide to be easily dismissed, and Judith, without knowing it, had hit that central nerve whose existence I was reluctant to admit, but that when tapped, sent a sudden shock of shame and humiliation beneath which everything else crumbled (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 135)

The “corner” that he has been living in is full of fellow immigrants. Stephanos does not belong to the kind of life led by Judith or other Americans, rather to that of immigrants who are normally poor, hopeless, insecure and lonely. The phrase “our insecurities run deep and wide to be easily dismissed” (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 135) reveals the obvious commonality among immigrants. Consequently, this realization on the part of Stephanos marks the beginning of a gradual breakdown of their relationship. It is the same awareness that has prevented Stephanos from dating any woman while in America. Even Joseph, who had once dated a white woman while in Congo, is not spared by this feeling of insecurity. He would rather stay single and lonely than confront the same woman whom he was dating back in Congo. This is attributable to economic and social insecurity facing male immigrants in exile. Male immigrants are aware of this inadequacy that constitutes their identities and are there-

fore quick to disengage in any activity that would reveal what is obvious but would rather be hidden.

This feeling eventually prompts Stephanos to end his relationship with Judith. This follows Judith's utterance that Stephanos may have "gone and picked the wrong family" (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 133). Stephanos interprets the statement to mean that he is less of a man Judith expected him to be. In addition, he concludes that Judith thinks that her former husband was the perfect man Stephanos could never win against.

The picture was complete now. I could see him, Judith's former husband and Naomi's semiabsent father. I imagined a tall, sandy-skinned man with oval wire-rim glasses and smart, well tailored suits like the ones my father used to wear. Someone who spoke with a crisp accent, whom women described as being gorgeous. I imagined academic conferences, family vacations on windswept beaches, and late-night dinner parties. A confident and assured voice that knew how to order wines, talk to salesclerks, and command the attention of a room. Someone I knew I could never stand against (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 136-7)

Stephanos, in contrast to Ayad, is insecure, thus lacks confidence and a commanding voice. There is not much in Stephanos that arouse interest among women, whereas everything about Ayad impresses women. In addition, Ayad is employed and can afford to tour the world at his own free will, unlike Stephanos, who runs a completely ran down store that is facing closure. To make matters worse, Judith is a university

professor who has already bought and renovated a house within a very short while and obviously not Stephanos' match. Stephanos, therefore, concludes that Judith is keeping him as a substitute for Ayad who had abandoned her.

I took another look around at Judith's living room, with its oversize Christmas tree and absurdly lavish presents. If what Judith wanted was another African to substitute for the one who had left her, then she was right, she had chosen poorly. I was not that man (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 136)

He therefore 'breaks up' with Judith. His relationship with Judith places him on the pedestal to be judged by all. His identity as an immigrant, however, does not allow him to open his life for all to see and judge. He would rather wear a certain mask of anonymity and nondescript than invite the public into his life. In addition, we get to see that immigrants are quick to judge themselves harshly, even in situations when the other does not seek to belittle or questions their ability or actions. Stephanos, therefore, opts to sleep with prostitutes, who do not care about his feelings, personality, identity or past experiences. These prostitutes are members of the black community and young girls who are either out to make a living or who have been influenced by feelings of loneliness. Stephanos feels comfortable while relating with prostitutes than ordinary girl friends, as is witnessed when he sleeps with a prostitute to cover up for the loneliness of spending Christmas (the first Christmas that he has high hopes of spending with Judith) alone after Judith writes informing him about her absence.

We lay down on the couch first, and then later the bed. I wanted to be more than just half-present, which is to say I wanted to see myself fully and honestly, naked in my bed with a woman whose real name I would never know. I took pleasure in feeling another body under me and on top of me. I buried my head in her chest and treated her as if she were someone I loved. It was purely 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 (Mengestu, *Children of the Revolution* 163)

The “context of the evening” entails a man who has been abandoned by his lover at the time he most needed her. The man therefore uses a prostitute as a substitute for his lover. It is this context that explains his actions as well as gives “meaning” to what Stephanos is doing or imagining to be doing.

These women who are labelled ‘prostitutes’ play an important role either in helping these men adjust to the harsh realities of life as immigrants and exiles or in finding their identities. They belong to the black community which constitutes the less privileged group; hence they have to employ any available means to sustain their lives. Although they don’t necessarily need to have migrated to America at the same time as Stephanos, Kenneth and Joseph, their identity as blacks alienates them from the mainstream American citizenry.

However, these women continue with the same service role as the women in the Ethiopian and even the American societies who are only seen for their role as care givers. These women are expected to improve the quality of life of the men in their community; thus they are not expected to pay much attention to the quality of their lives. When Stephanos' relationship with a Judith fails, he opts for the comfort of an anonymous woman who only offers sex and does not question about his past, history, or identity.

4.4 Conclusion

Women acquire new roles during difficult times or wars. These roles include feeding for their children as well as providing all other basic needs. Although the women appear to be most affected by various forms of violence, the war empowers them. They take on positions of leadership that are previously a preserve for the men.

The men therefore loose some of these powers preserved for them. In most cases, the men end up being emasculated since the military regime and the whites, in the case of the American society, ignores and suppresses them. These men include Yonas, Hailu, Dawit, Stephanos' father, Kenneth, Joseph and Melaku, who have to heed the dictates of the Derg in order to survive.

Therefore, most of the boys are killed while trying to act as men. These include Berhane and Dawit in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, who disregard their own safety for the glory of their manhood. In addition, the young Stephanos, in Mengestu's *Children of the Revolution*, leads to the death of his father. These boys buy into the myths of manhood to the extent that they are unable to decipher the real-

ity on the ground. Using the symbolism of the lion, as encountered in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, these young men aspire to be the bravest of them all. They aspire to be as well as live their lives, even during this hard and dangerous time, as the brave lions in the jungle. However the girls too are brave, only most of them don't spend a lot of time trying to look or live it, and are also killed or tortured through physical harm that includes rape. An example of such a girl includes the Colonel's daughter who is tortured by Girma.

Finally, gender differences on the part of the authors have a bearing on the two novels. Maaza Mengiste in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* is more concerned about the family unit while Dinaw Mengestu in *Children of the Revolution* is most concerned about the political sphere.

THE CONCLUSION

Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* employs an omniscient narrator to recall an immediate past, while Dinaw Mengestu in *Children of the Revolution* uses the first person narrator to recall events that happened seventeen years ago. Therefore, the two novels cover different time frames. However, violence is evident in the two novels of my study. The two novels narrate, although differently, the circumstances surrounding the deposition of the monarch and eventual take over by the Derg. These transitions of power are marked with a lot of violence meted against the subjects as well as government stooges. The study has analysed three forms of violence that include physical, psychological and symbolic.

Memory stands out as a major determinant of the identities of various characters. I would therefore comfortably argue that "we are what we remember". Different characters engage in acts of violence guided by what they remember. In the case of Stephanos, Kenneth and Joseph in Mengestu's *Children of the Revolution*, the three are partly united by their African experiences. They share these experiences in all their encounters, thus presenting themselves as a group. Dawit, Sarah, Berhane and Mickey, in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, engage in the war guided by their varied identities. Dawit and Berhane are out to express their identities as men, while Sarah wishes to be perceived as a "daughter of fighters". Lastly, Mickey wishes to fast track his upward mobility.

Although the war, as well as various conflicts, affects both men and women, women are most affected. They are doubly oppressed. They are oppressed by men, including their husbands as well as the soldiers. The soldiers humiliate men in front of women

and children, while the men try to reclaim their manhood by physically or psychologically assaulting women within the safe confines of the home.

The two authors, however, present varying amount of violence meted against the men. The men are subjected to ridicule, indignity, and physical harm. They are questioned, tortured and humiliated in front of their families, up to the extent that they cannot face them after such encounters. Their authority in their families is thus jeopardized, and their role in the community completely faced out. Therefore, women take over positions of power during and after the wars, both at the family, communal and national levels. This follows the exit of men from the political and social spheres as a result of imprisonment, restrictions by the Derg as well as guerrilla fighting tactics.

Maaza Mengiste maps this transition better, since her book is set in Ethiopia before and during the rule of the Derg. She tells her story from a female perspective. Mengiste traces the journey taken by Ethiopian women from the time that they are excluded from tertiary school curriculum up the time when some girls are able to travel abroad for further studies. Although Mengiste is more concerned about the plight of women in the society she is able to bring men and women at the same table without having to neglect either gender. Her works depicts the holistic nature of the society.

Mengiste uses the family of Hailu to tell the story of a disintegrating Ethiopian society. The national narrative is implicated in the activities and experiences of this particular family. The heroes that Mengiste paints are people that we can easily relate with and who also have their own faults. Their experiences at the family level lead them to engage in actions that affect the nation at large.

Mengestu, on the other hand, although writing about different time frames and settings, concentrates on what is happening outside the house. In as much as the reader gets to know about what happens inside the house most of the activities happen outside. In addition, the story is told from a male perspective. Therefore, the reader only learns about the experiences of women (only Judith and her daughter Naomi) through the narrator. Most of the activities take place along the streets, in the bars or at the place of work. To some extent, this is attributable to the loneliness that haunts the houses of most of the major characters in the novel and who prefer to stay away from their houses.

However, the two writers successfully depict the holistic nature of violence. Although the amount of violence that is meted against the public by the state does not match the violence employed by the latter, the latter also employs some forms of violence. Violence emerges as a two-sided-sword, which cuts on both sides. Therefore, any individual, group or country that uses violence against another should be ready for counter-violence.

Various experiences of violence lead different characters to different turning points. As a result of this, such characters get to understand other people better and also become better persons. In Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, Dawit realizes that there is more to being a man than fighting. He gets to understand that even those people who are not involved in physical battles have their own battles. In addition, he gets to appreciate his father, whom he previously thought to be a coward. He also appreciates the role played by the women and their abilities in joining the men in the

fight. After his encounter with the soldiers who come to search their house, he realizes that Sara might be more courageous than any other person in the house.

Secondly, Sarah, who indulges in her family myths, argues that she is a daughter of a patriot and a fighter at that. Because her mother had taken part in many wars, she decides to do the same. This character makes her deviate from societal norms. As a woman she is supposed to obey her husband and share any information with him. After taking part in the searching, collecting and identifying dead bodies, Sarah realizes how much she misses her husband. She also realizes how much she has been hurting her husband by keeping secrets. She shares her experiences in collecting dead bodies with her husband, thus reconciles with him.

Third, Yonas, who at first is very critical of the character of Dawit, gets to appreciate it. Dawit is arguably a courageous and selfless boy and later a man. When Hailu decides to hand himself in to the authority after his incidence with the Colonel's daughter, Yonas wishes he could stop him, but courage fails him. He wishes that Dawit were around. True to this, Hailu chooses the best time that Dawit would not see him leave because, as he argues, his son would never let him leave. After Hailu is imprisoned Dawit visits the prison building daily although he is denied entry. Therefore, Yonas gets to appreciate this distinct courage and selflessness in the character of his brother. In addition, he gets to appreciate his wife who braves all odds to collect bodies at night.

Fourth, Hailu acknowledges the unequalled role of Dawit in the family, and understands why his wife argued that Dawit was the best child. He is moved by the character of Dawit who risks his life by visiting him in prison. During the interrogations of Hailu by the Colonel, we learn that the latter knew of it. Nonetheless, Dawit is ready to do anything just to free his father. It is for this reason that Hailu misses Dawit so much while he is in prison. At the end of the novel, Hailu dies while protecting the family just like Dawit would have wished him do.

Finally this development with regard to characters is not very distinct in Dinaw Mengestu's *Children of the Revolution*. Mengestu presents characters that are in utter disillusionment at the end of the novel. Kenneth and Joseph resign to working in places of work that they very much dislike, while Stephanos walks out of his store. Therefore, although the characters are involved in a journey towards self realization their conflicting identities blur their course.

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