

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Ethnocentrism vis-à-vis Ethiopian Nationalism as Reflected in Yismake's Novels, *Därtogada* and *Kibur Dingay*

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Abstract

This paper was intended to make a critical analysis on the state of ethnocentrism and pan-Ethiopian ideology during the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime as reflected in Yismake Worku's two Amharic novels which are titled Därtogada (2009) and Kibur Dingay (2013) respectively. Van Dijk's (1995; 1998) and Wodak's (2009; 2017) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theories were employed to make the critical analysis. The finding of the study revealed that the ethnocentric political system employed during the EPRDF's period has been serving as a fertile and legitimate ground for the proliferation of tribal ideology at the expense of pan-Ethiopian ideology. In the two Amharic novels, the ethnic political system is portrayed as a perilous tool via which Ethiopia's future existence as a unified whole is in question mark. This inspired a strong nationwide mass movement to avoid such a divisive political thought on the one hand and to promote Ethiopian nationalism on the other.

Keywords: Ethiopian nationalism, ethnocentrism, criticism, critical discourse analysis, ideology

Introduction

Literature has enormous functions for the first targeted society. It is used as source of information, entertainment, and most importantly, it serves as a tool to forward critical commentaries on the social and political ills that societies encountered with (Ogundokun, 2021). Using literature as a tool, writers reflect or amplify their feelings about the socio-political conditions of the setting. The writer, as producing machine in the art of creation, thus, operates in line with the beliefs, interests and experiences of the real societal life. Wa Thiong'o (1972, p. xv) underscores that "literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces of the particular setting."

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Debates are evident among scholars on the primary purpose of literature. Some scholars from the discipline of literary studies, for example, argue that literature should focus on achieving aesthetic excellence, “art for art’s sake”. Some sociologically inclined groups, on the other hand, insist that any literary art that fails to address one or more aspects of social reality fails to be an art (Onwuka, 2010, p.60). What seems agreeable in this sense is that taking the middle position which accommodates the two seemingly contrary but collaborative notions. Literatures, to this end, is better conceived as works which aesthetically address some sociopolitical matters of mankind.

As Tewodros (2013, p. 22) asserts literature is the byproduct of history and vice versa. By reading literary products, one can easily understand the effect of literature in history and its counter impact on literature. Therefore, the cultural, political and social contexts of the literary work contribute for a better understanding of it (Anteneh, 2009, p. 188).

The Amharic novel, since its inception as a genre in Amharic literature, has entertained various issues of different political periods. To mention some, novels such as *Fiqir Eskämäqabir* (1965)², *Adäfris* (1970) and *Kadmas Bashagär* (1970) which were produced in the 1960s and in the early 70s are the most noted Amharic novels which came into being in an unprecedented sociopolitical environment – notably in a period when the 1960 coup de’tat attempt (Yonas, 2010) and the Ethiopian students’ movement (Darch, 1974) were evident. These novels are said to be the reflections of the time during which they were written - often acclaimed for criticizing the political and sociopolitical conditions of the time. Many novels which were written after the 1974 revolution, particularly those which were published during the Därg regime are concerned on critiquing the imperial sociopolitical system (Anteneh, 2014, p.189). Some other works, on the other hand, reflect commentaries on the Därg regime. Be’alu’s Oromai, for example, depicts violations of human rights by the Därg officials (Tadesse, 1995).

When the EPRDF came to power in 1991, there was a change in political ideology and state structure that totally changed the sociopolitical environment of the country. The federal state structure experiment introduced then was new both in kind and in political discourse in African continent (Semahagn, 2012, p. 172; Yeshitila & et al, 2016, p.5). In this newly introduced federal system, ethnicity and language became the basis for demarcating regional state territories. As a result, ethnocentric political ideology has turned out to be one of the major issues that take the center stage of discussion among scholars (Aalen, 2002).

Though there are many Amharic novels which were produced in this period, the motivation to conduct this study on the ethnocentric vis-à-vis pan-Ethiopian thoughts was instigated from the intention to understand how these thoughts are portrayed in selected novels published in this particular political period. The researchers then went through the novels published in this period and selected Yesmake’s *Därtogada*³ (2009) and *Kibur Dingay*⁴ (2013) since they share the same notion with regards to ethnic vis-à-vis pan Ethiopian political thoughts.

2 All years indicated in this paper are in Gregorian calendar

3 Page numbers indicated for the extracts taken from the novel Dertogada should be understood in accordance with the 9th edition (reprint) of the novel.

4 Page numbers indicated for the extracts taken from the novel Kibur Dingay should be understood in accordance with the 5th edition (reprint) of the novel.

Yismake is one of the most prominent writers of the contemporary period. Därtogada (2009) [his first novel], which connects Ethiopia's past, present and future, is among his best master pieces. The novel was reprinted eight times and sold within a year time duration. Though it touches the past and prophesizes about the future of Ethiopia, Därtogada most importantly deals with the sociopolitical issues of the time in which it was published (Demeke, 2014).

The other novel, which is the focus of this study, entitled *Kibur Dingay* (2013) uses magical realism as a technique of story narration. The employment of magic to create a man-to-dog transferred major character is the first of its kind in the history of Amharic novel writing. With the exception of the special literary technique the author employed to narrate the story, the novel shares similar notion with that of Därtogada regarding the Ethiopian political condition of the EPRDF regime.

Därtogada was not only a page-turner (Marzagora and Boylston, 2021, p. 1); it has also attracted the attention of literary researchers. Along with other selected Amharic novels from three Ethiopian political periods: the imperial, the Därg and the EPRDF regimes, Anteneh (2014) took *Därtogada* to show how politics is represented in the narrative. His study revealed that the political issues such as the airlifting of Beta Israelis from Ethiopia, corruption and Ethiopian nationalism are entertained in the novel. Most importantly, Ethiopian nationalism and unity through development is stated as one of the agendas addressed in the novel. According to the study, the novel does not give a significant space for ethnicity and religion (Anteneh, pp.213-215). However, the present study argues in addition to a great deal of emphasis given to pan-Ethiopian nationalism, the subject of ethnocentric political matter is also emphasized in the novel.

Another study which was conducted by Marzagora and Boylston (2021) on *Därtogada* focused on themes behind the code in the narrative, the monastic techno Ethiopia ideals, gender issue and the like. According to the conclusion of the study, the novel is a “mystery thriller” – a prophetic and re-mythology of the nation which is rooted in Ethiopian Orthodox Church with specific cultural traits representing a section of the Ethiopian society. [...]. The study criticized the novel for depicting characters from a section of a society whom it refers “Habesha” and whom it considers as a first representative and a promoter of Amharic language and Orthodox Christianity. However, there are scholars who argue that writers often prefer to write their own experience and what they know about their immediate society from which they take their fictional world. In support of this argument, Mar and Oatley (2008, p. 173) state that carefully crafted literary stories are not distorted empirical accounts, but they are instead simulations of selves in the social world. In addition, Hynes (2014, p.163) asserts that novel is a way of thinking out loud to help writers [...] explain their own lives to themselves.

On the other hand, concerning the present novel *Kibur Dingay*, Benatlay (2018) took the novel to study the employment of magical realism in the narrative. Her study revealed the presence of supernatural power, the depiction of obvious facts as super natural issues, the prevalence of the author's reticence, the use of binary oppositions to deal with seemingly contradictory issues and the use of allegories are major textual evidences for the prevalence of magical realism in the novel. Furthermore, the study asserted that magical realism is used to narrate social and political issues of the time. In addition, Gedefaw (2019) made a critical analysis of the novel using deconstruction literary theory as tool and aiming to understand foregrounded meanings. The study showed that binary oppositions are used to show various contradictions which in turn help readers to think critically.

The two novels shared the same notion regarding ethnic politics and Ethiopian nationalism. However, none of the studies mentioned above were concerned on showing the comparative portrayal of ethnocentrism and Ethiopian nationalism revealed in the novels. This study, thus, focused on showing the problematic nature of ethnocentrism [a legitimate political thought to disintegrate Ethiopia] and the need to strengthening Ethiopian nationalism [a neglected political thought] so as to build up a united Ethiopia.

Methodology

Yismake's *Därtogada* (2009) and *Kibur Dingay* (2013) were used as primary sources of data in the analytical discussion section of the study. Analytical discussion on how the two contrary notions [ethnocentric and pan-Ethiopian thoughts] revealed in the selected novels along with nonliterary textual evidences which are dealing with Ethiopian nationalism and ethnocentrism was made mainly using van Dijk's (1995; 1998) and Wodak's (2009; 2017) ideological discourse analysis theories. Van Dijk's theory of CDA was employed in this study as it is more concerned on ideology and ideological representations as beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of groups in a given sociopolitical environment. Wodak's CDA, on the other hand, was used since it is more suitable to analyze texts that embody discursive construction of national identity.

The study is qualitative since construction of meaning was developed through conceptual interpretations which were obtained from the theoretical concepts and from the selected novels about the contexts of the political periods in which the novels were written. In so doing, analysis on the two opposite political thoughts: ethnocentrism and Ethiopian nationalism as they are revealed in the two selected novels was made. The plots of the novels were presented in English translation to highlight the stories and the storyline. To support the ideas raised by textual evidences in the analysis section of the study, important extracts from the novels were also taken, and they were translated into English. Extracts which have related themes were presented under the same subsection of the analysis part.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The term "discourse" is perceived differently in different disciplinary contexts. Thinkers and scholars, who are even in the same discipline, have defined discourse in slightly different ways. Van Dijk (2009, p.247) states that discourse is understood as a theoretical term which is identified by the ways it is produced and consumed- as it [discourse] is understood and represented by the participants themselves. Similarly, Jorgenson and Phillips (2002, p.26) define discourse as a "fixation of meaning within a particular domain". In the same way, Fairclough (1992) defines discourse as an institutionalized concept by which the knowledge stored in the mind of the community determines actions of individuals or groups. Therefore, from the definitions given above by different theorists, one can deduce that discourse is not something that can generally be summarized in a few sentences as it requires details to be addressed.

A given discourse, by implication "text", can be analyzed by applying different discourse analysis approaches. In this case, Philips and Hardy (2002) forward four different discourse analysis research approaches. CDA, which is employed in this study, is a theoretic-

cal framework that is politically committed to social problems. Furthermore, it focuses on showing the role of discursive practices in maintaining unequal power relation between different groups where it brings about sociopolitical changes (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 64).

On the other hand, there are different but related notions raised by different scholars from different disciplines regarding principles, theories and approaches of CDA. The three notable critical discourse theorists (Fairclough, Wodak and Dijk) have forwarded almost interrelated conceptual explanations about CDA. However, these theorists have slight differences on the emphasis that their respective perspectives rely on.

For instance, Fairclough's CDA is the central theory since its introduction as a discipline (Sheyholislami, 2001). When critical discourse analysis emerged as center of debate among scholars of literary studies and other related disciplines, it was Fairclough who firstly claimed that critical discourse analysis can be undertaken on textual or cultural communications. His assertion on what textual and cultural analysis was that whereas textual analysis emphasizes on what is present, while socio cultural analysis emphasizes on what is absent (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997).

Likely, Wodak's CDA is known as a discourse historical approach, and it mainly follows a complex concept of social critique which embraces at least three inter-connected aspects which two of them, namely, text critique and socio diagnostic critique, are primarily related to dimension of cognition. The last one is action oriented aspect which aims at improving communication by elaborating guidelines so as to reduce language barriers in various social institutions (Wodak, 2001, pp.64-65). According to Wodak (2009), some narrative systems employ topolymical labelings (such as pronouns "we" and "our") so as to construct national identity discursively, and by way of this, a given national identity sought is produced, promoted, and maintained. Wodak notes that this kind of national identity construction is realized using shared historical past, shared culture, political rhetoric on the basis of present situations, future assumptions and the "national body". She in the same vein affirms that national identities which are under threat are maintained, supported and reproduced by perpetuations and justifications by tracing narratives of the past (histories) which in turn influence topos of histories (Wodak, 2017, p. 9).

In the same way, in van Dijk's CDA, ideologies are important elements for social representations of groups which may be expressed in discourses in general and in political discourses in particular. According to van Dijk (1995, p. 245; 1998, pp.128-129), the concept of ideology is associated with other forms of communal mental representations such as specific knowledge and perceptions which are shared by a group. That is to say - social representations (group beliefs, attitudes, ideologies and the like) are by definition more general, and they need to be used by group members in different situations. Therefore, an individual's perception or understanding on a situation presupposes a wider communities' [the group in which that particular individual belongs to] perception on the situation. Ideologies, particularly at social micro level indirectly control social practice, and they are often described in terms of group relation where a given group with a certain ideology is dominant over the other(s) (van Dijk, 2000, p. 35).

The other issue emphasized in van Dijk's CDA is the relationship between political cognition and political discourse. According to van Dijk (2002, p.207), there are also

socially shared political cognitions which in turn form macro-structures such as groups and institutions. An ideology that is acceptable by a given society or group might not be suitable for those who identify themselves as another group. As a result, there exist ideological competitions between different groups in which each group try to promote their ideology, and to overrun the other group. This is often done by attempting to establish a counter ideology that disproves the perception of the other group(s).

The Context of the Study: The Political System of Ethiopia since 1991

The question of equality of nations and nationalities, which has long roots back to the 1960s, has eventually brought about a federal [ethnic] state structure when the EPRDF took power in 1991. The federal system is structured by regions that used language and ethnicity as criteria of demarcation between the regions. The ethnic federal system is legalized by the 1995 constitution which grants self-determination of nations, nationalities and peoples up to secession (Aalen, 2002).

The ethnic federal structure has come with both merits and demerits for the country in general. As proponents of the idea argue, it is useful particularly for nations and nationalities in terms of developing their languages, cultures and traditions which have been suppressed by the previous centralized regimes. In the federal structure, regional states are given the mandate to administer their respective regions. They also use their respective local (regional) language(s) in the government bureaucratic processes. Students learn school subjects in their mother tongues, and courts use regional language(s) in court hearings (Alem, 2003; Temesgen and Mansukhani, 2022).

However, many argue that the ethnic federal system has come with many drawbacks and limitations. The first one is that the ethnic federal system has been used as a fertile ground for the emergence of ethnic based parties, associations, and media that widens the ethnic differences that have been narrated as an ideology and political discourse. These situations have deepened ethnic divisions within the country. As the government organized regional states basing ethno-linguist federal lines, it divided some ethnic groups across borders, and smaller groups in regions identified with larger groups. Such a federal system in the country has led to ethnicisation of territories among regional states in which there rises a tendency for exclusive control of territory by the supposed ethnic group. Additionally, the Ethiopian state has been involving in the regulation and codification of ethnic identity. This is due to the use of ethnic otherness as a key instrument of organizing the Ethiopian federation (Siraw, 2015; Bekalu, 2017; Takele, 2021).

Even if the [ethnic] federal system is positively viewed as a system that gave recognition to nations, nationalities and peoples of the country, many scholars highly criticized the establishment of regions based on ethnic lines fearing that it facilitates tribalization, ethnic conflict, disintegration, and the disappearance of the nation from the map of Africa (Wondosen and Zoharic, 2008, p. 10).

As feared by scholars, many ethnic conflicts caused deaths and injuries of many people and burning of assets which are evident in most of the regions. Ethnic conflicts between Amhara and Oromo in Oromia regional state, Oromo, Amhara and Gumuz in Benishangul Gumz regional state, Oromo and Somali in Somali regional state, Oromo and Gedio in Oromia regional state, and so forth have been recurrent phenomena (Bekalu, 2017; Hagmann and Abdi, 2020; Berihun, 2021) with an increasing intensity from time to time.

Ethnocentrism Vis-à-vis Ethiopian Nationalism in *Därtogada* and Kibur Dīngay

The synopses of the Novels

Därtogada vividly presents Ethiopian old days' wisdom that is buried beneath the visible surface of our perception; a bright future of Ethiopia that looks forward to better days. The setting stretches from the monasteries of Lake Tana to the United States of America and Israel. Similarity, the theme ranges from spirituality to high-tech advancements, and the major characters move from a monk and a nun to a medical doctor and a security agent. In between all these extreme ranges of setting, theme, and characterization, various social and political issues are entertained.

The plot of *Därtogada* revolves around the past, present and future fate of Ethiopia. The novel is packed with complicated stories with multiple themes. Ethnic politics, poor natural resource utilization and backwardness that affect Ethiopia's sociopolitical state are emphasized

The story line, when summarized in a linear position, begins at the monasteries of Lake Tana where Sipara and Miraj were raised up. The two characters were brought to the monasteries by Abba Finhas and Abba Jemberu respectively. As they get matured, they were made to stay in separate monasteries to avoid fornication. Afterwards, Sipara was taken to Israel and became a MOSSAD⁵ agent, and Miraj joined the Ethiopian army where he met Xingida. Miraj and Xingida later moved to the US by the help of Meroda, a CIA⁶ agent. Miraj then studied medicine and have got the chance to meet a famous NASA⁷ scientist, engineer Shagiz who always gets heart surgery. Meanwhile, Miraj learnt that he has the same tattoo with engineer Shagiz which reads DERTOGADA [written in Amharic letters] that remained mysterious. Later on, Miraj received a secret message which urged him to go to the homeland. As he goes along the way he was directed, he came across a science station named DERTOGADA located underneath the lake, where he met many important individuals.

5 Central Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations- one of the three major intelligence organizations of Israel

6 Central Intelligence Agency- a US government agency responsible for national security and intelligence

7 NASA -National Aeronautics and Space Administration- a US government agency that is responsible for science and technology related to air and space.

Miraj then went back to the US to bring Shagiz to homeland which was realized by the help of Meroda. The man they brought was, however, not the real Shagiz, but a man who is exactly similar with Shagiz- a man with a timing bomb in his head. A MOSSAD secret agent who had taken the mission to attend the activities of scientists in the science station was caught and presented for trial where Miraj was one of the judges. Identifying who the judge is, the agent started to cry and admitted that he is Sipara, Miraj's old intimate. The story ends when an explosion [of the bomb from the head of the man] which destructed the science station happened.

The other novel, *Kibur Dingay* by the same author, is a fictional narrative where a man who can turn into dog through magic took the role of the major fictional character. Magical realism, combination of "magic" and "real" was employed as a technique of narrating the story in the novel. Adding some magical elements, the narrative presented the realistic view of the social as well as the political condition of the time. The magical realism literary technique used in the novel gives the narrator a free space to criticize some sociopolitical matters, particularly the ethnocentric political system.

The novel narrates the story of Dedimos Dori who could magically change himself into a black dog. Dedimos, being a dog, accidentally found himself somewhere in a dense forest which he couldn't identify the location. The dog moved forward quickly to get out of the forest. Along his way, he came across a dying donkey, which he never dares to eat though he felt so starving. As he got out of the forest, he came across a residential village where some foreigners and Ethiopians live. The dog stayed there for five days with a German woman, named Gilli.

After five days, the dog left Gilli and he moved to Yirgalem. The dog, along his way, witnessed embarrassing deeds - unkind people who overloaded their cart horses and greedy butchers who did not dare to give him a piece of meat. The dog also heard debates between groups of people about the death of the late prime minister and other sociopolitical issues on his way to Addis Ababa.

The dog narrates that he travelled most of the distances from Shashemene to Addis Ababa hiding himself in trucks. When he had arrived at Addis Ababa, he suddenly stopped walking at Qality prison for reasons which are not clear even to him. Then, on his arrival at home, he witnessed his wife making love with a dishonest man named Kelemintos in a car. The dog later wanted to regain his human status, and he thought of getting the magic paper to realize this. He couldn't get the magic paper that helped him to change directly from dog to man. Another possible alternative came to his mind - that it is possible to change him, first, to a python and then, to human. That perfectly worked for him, and he regained his human position and started to live with his children.

Analytical Discussions

Deconstructing the Ethnocentric Thoughts

In *Kibur Dingay*, one can notice debates among characters on the contemporary Ethiopian politics. These debates, among other things, reflect the problematic nature of ethnic politics - a problem that is very tough to solve. In a conversation between anonymous characters about the socio-political matters of the contemporary Ethiopia, the following statement is evident: “የጎሳና የሃይማኖት ጉዳዮች አስከፊ ሁኔታ ላይ ናቸው።” (Issues of *ethnic* and religion are at a very intense stage) (p.72). In this statement the narrator shares his/her understanding about the current political situation. Van Dijk (1999) discusses, when one speaks, reads or writes, he/she uses his/her mental models as the cognitive basis of discourse production and comprehension process. It seems that the character develops such an attitude from the sociopolitical environment where ethnic political ideology is criticized and pan-Ethiopian thought is promoted. The narrator and the anonymous characters in *Kibur Dingay* represent the social position which applauds the pan-Ethiopian thought. This thought, therefore, is not a spontaneous creation of the narrator’s or characters’ minds, but it is rather socially acquired and constructed.

In this regard, van Dijk(1995, p. 257; 1999) discusses, when one speaks, reads or writes, he/she uses his/her mental models as the cognitive basis of discourse production and comprehension process and “discourse is one of the major means and condition of socially shared minds”. From Dijk’s conception of discourse production and comprehension processes, it is possible to say that the perception of an individual on a certain issue equates the perception of the society. As shared ideologies influence the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of the language user, it can be manifested at specific and concrete events in the form of storytelling and argumentation as noticed in the novel.

In the same novel, the dog narrates that it noticed people debating on the cause for the death of the late Prime Minister. By the time an individual from the group mocks the cause for the death of the prime minister is being busy of bulky work, another character ridiculously replies as follows: “የሰራ ጫና የለባቸውም ማለትማ አይቻልም።ተቀናቃኝ ፓርቲ ለማፍረስ ደከመዋል ፤ ጎጠኝነትን ለማስፈን ደከመዋል ፤ ኢትዮጵያን በዘር ለማደራጀት ደከመዋል...” (Of course, it is impossible to say that he was unoccupied. He has been working laboriously to eliminate opposition parties, foster narrow mindedness and establish tribal groups...) (p.68). This extract strengthens the issue discussed above. It affirms van Dijk’s notion of context model in discourse processing that group beliefs, attitudes and ideologies that belong to a certain group can be manifested and expressed by individuals in specific events and situations. The extract is all about the narrow and tight political space for the opposition and the government’s investment in radicalizing ethnocentrism. It is also to show the extent to which ethnocentrism is deliberately intensified by the leader(s). Accordingly, the ridiculous response of the character(s) presupposes the position of the group to which they are members.

For many reasons revealed in the novel, the narrator seems to feel hopeless with regards to Ethiopia's future. Several important questions are left unanswered. The narrator feels that Ethiopia suffers from lack of courageous citizens who dare to pay sacrifice for their motherland. In this particular case, the criticism that directed to the government goes beyond the individuals operating in the political system. It criticizes all who identify themselves as 'Ethiopian' for not being patriots like the old generation. “ለዚህ ሃገር ለህጻን ተሟግቶ ፣ ለህጻን ተጠልቶ ፣ ለህጻን ተገርፎ ፣ ለህጻን ታንቆ የሚሞት ለው ማን ይሆን?” (Who would pay sacrifice for this country in defending truth, of being victim of hatred for truth, of being tortured for truth and of facing a bitter death for truth?) (p.55). It seems that the narrator criticizes not only the government, but also the generation who dares to sleep quietly when the country suffers from multiple sociopolitical problems. The reproach goes to all fellow Ethiopians, the new generation, who seem loss sense of patriotism. In this regard, we can note that past generations are remembered for their selfless sacrifice of their unreserved lives for the nation. Emperor Tewodros II, His Holiness Abune Petros and more other patriots are publicly known patriots to mention some. When it comes to younger generation, as portrayed in the narrative, patriotism, loyalty, truthfulness and the like are buried under selfishness and tribalism. By condemning the generation in the contemporary period, it tries to regenerate a new one with qualities of the past generation.

The novel reveals that the regime, ethno-linguistic in its character, has brought about sociopolitical problems. The situation is described this way.

በዚህ ዘመን ተስፋ ማድረግ አጻጻፎ ነው። ተስፋ የሚጣልበት ንብረት የለም። ተስፋ የሚጣልበት ሀልም የለም። ተስፋ የሚጣልበት ፓርቲ የለም። ተስፋ የሚጣልበት ወንድ የለም። ሁሉንም አደንገዘው ታልፎ ሁሉንም አላሽቀውታል።

Hoping of something these days is hardly possible. No more promising asset; no more promising hope [vision]; no more promising party [political]; no more promising compatriot. They made everything dull and worthless (p.132).

In the extract above, the narrator describes his/her desperate feeling about the economic, social and political matters of the country. When saying “No more promising asset... hope ... political party...compatriot ”, it is to mean that the economy is harshly embezzled; people are left with no ambition to achieve; the opposition political parties are doomed to be nonfunctional, and people are brainwashed and made dull by the regime's ethno centered rhetoric. Here, it seems the negative phrase “no more” is repeatedly used to overstate the multiple problems Ethiopia faced.

Ethnocentric ideology in a sense is divisive and a form of self and other representation by which 'in-group' and "out-group" attitude is formed. In such attitudes, the 'in-groups' are often represented positively whereas the "out-groups" are represented negatively. Consequently, there might be usage of rhetorical means such as metaphor and hyperbole which excludes one group from the other semantically and lexically (van Dijk, 2002). Social conflict is, therefore, cognitively enhanced, discursively sustained and reproduced by excluding "out-groups" or "others" from "in-groups". *Därtogada* tells us that such the

manifestations are evident in Ethiopian- that in a place where one was born and grown up is perceived as the 'out group'. These systems, as van Dijk explains, are in environments where there are social and political inequality, or by elite discourse otherwise.

The ethnic based political system is a fertile ground for ethnic rhetoric that classifies people into different Ethnic groups which eventually leads to the formation of "otherness". The novel here divulges that the issue of ethnic "other" is becoming a very tough problem in Ethiopia. The following text from the novel supports the issue raised above.

እኛ ሀገር ደግሞ ባደግንበት ቀየ ባደግንበት ምድር ወዘ ልውጥ እየተባለህ ትኖራለህ። ለሀገርህ ባዳ ሆነህ አያገባህም እየተባለህ አፍህን ጠመንጃ ሸብቦት ብታውቅ እንኳ እንዳለውትህ ሆነህ ትሞታለህ : :

In our country, you are labeled an outsider in your own homeland and your own village where you grew up. You leave and die stranger like one who unnoticed everything for you are warned that the matter of your country does not concern you with a loaded gun pointing to you (p.108).

One of the unique features of ethnic political ideology is establishing systems that classify people in different ethnic groups. The given excerpt showed how "otherness", which has been installed in the minds of the people, brought about the formation of ethnic others. It is legally supported that individuals from a certain ethnic group are not legitimate citizens in a region which does not belong to their own ethnic group. The novels portray that the formation of ethnic otherness is one of the sociopolitical problems in Ethiopia. The semantic representation of the words "stranger" or "outsider" in the narrative describes how one is labeled based on the language he/she speaks, or from which ethnic group he/she is regardless of his/her being a human creature, or of being Ethiopian at least.

In *Därtogada*, the ethnocentric political system is denounced. The narrative makes critical commentaries on ethnocentric ideology that gets legitimacy in the sociopolitical system. It, for example, criticizes ethnic based political parties which were established in the name of a given ethnic group. As reflected therein, so as to deal with tribalism and restore unity among Ethiopians, dissolving political parties which were established in the name of ethnicity is required. The following statement declares that there should not space for ethnic based political parties in the political environment. "ዘርንና ንሳን ተመርኩዘው የሚመሰረቱ የፖለቲካ ፓርቲዎችን መምታት ነው።።።።።። የአገሌ የዘር ፓርቲ የአገሌ የዘር ፓርቲ እያሉ ህዝቡን የከፋፈሉት እነሱ ናቸው።" (Those ethnic and tribe based political parties shall be banned. That is it. They are divisive forces which brought about disparity among the people) (p. 177).

It is evident that Eritrea's secession was an incident happened after EPRDF had taken power. The narrator is an Ethiopian nationalist, and it seems that he/she is very much disappointed with Ethiopia's division into two states. Stating the previous political phenomenon like the secession of Eritrea as tangible evidence, the narrator in *Kibur Dingay* describes his/her pessimistic feeling about the future fate of the country. In the novel, the narrator is uncertain about Ethiopia's future stating not only what happened to Ethiopia in the past times, but also the uncertainty on what tomorrow holds to the

country. “እናት ሀገር እትኖሩኛም ገጣሲ ኢርትራ ሆኗል። የነገውን አናውቅም ።” (Part of the motherland, Ethiopia becomes Eritrea today; we don’t know what tomorrow holds) (p.150). In the extract above, the narrator seems to stress on the fact that political ideologies that result in disintegration and division of people results in being pessimistic to the future state of one’s country.

(Re)constructing the Ethiopian National Identity

While narratives in both novels attempt to criticize the ethnocentric attitudes on the one hand, they advocate national unity by establishing an articulated counter-ideology on the other. A very important hint showing Ethiopian nationalism propagation in the novel *Kībur Dīngay* is the character’s declaration of himself as a natural Ethiopian. The statement reads as: “እትኖሩኛልኝም ማንም የመጸውተኝ ሳይሆን በደም ያገኘሁት ነው።” (My being Ethiopian is not a charity by someone; it is rather a natural gift) (p.44). In this declarative sentence, Ethiopian national ideology is promoted. It strongly opposes the ethnocentric ideology that prioritizes ethnic identity than national identity to identify an individual. In most semantics with nationalist ideology, ideological discourses are oriented typically towards some important issues such as self-identity description and/or promotion of nationalism. The statement quoted above describes how the character identifies him when it comes to his true identity and how he has got it using some ideological semantics.

Some ideological semantics which embody and by extension promote pan Ethiopian ideology are evident in the novel, *Kībur Dīngay*. The ideological semantics such as “እትኖሩኛልኝ” (being Ethiopian) (p.44) is a natural gift which one can obtain “በደም” (in blood) (p.44) are used to strengthen the abstract pan Ethiopian ideology. Similarly, the terms “እናት ሀገር” (Motherland) (p.150) in the same novel, equates the country with a biological mother, portraying national ideology. This gives a kind of flavor of motherhood and shows people’s affection to their country. The term “ሀገሪ” (my home land) (p.75) in the same novel shows belongingness and deep love to one’s country. These ideological semantics are overloaded by a great deal of pan-Ethiopian ideology.

As van Dijk (2013) puts ideologies such as communism, socialism, racism, ethnocentrism, patriotism and the like have something to do with systems of ideas especially with the social, political or religious ideas shared by a social group. “Group members who share such ideologies stand for a number of very general ideas that are at the basis of their more specific beliefs about the world [...]” (van Dijk 2013, p.7) and the specific beliefs of the group members could be revealed in promoting an ideology and/or criticizing its contrary. Related to this notion, promoting pan-Ethiopian ideology is revealed in the novel *Dārtogada*. One of the characters in the novel raises Mengistu Haile Mariam’s case. Mengistu, was a leader who ruled Ethiopia for 17 years, and his motto was “Ethiopia First”. When one unfolds pages of the novel, he/she comes across statements which praise Mengitsu H/Mariam. Notwithstanding his ‘brutality’ and dictatorship on those who

oppose him, he is portrayed as a hero in the novel. In describing his patriotic deeds, a beggar asks for coin in the name of Mengistu, whom he refers courageous and brave. The following extract reveals how the beggar represents Mengistu Haile Mariam. “ሰለ ጅግናው መንግስቱ ኃይለ ማሪያም ን አሁንም ኢትዮጵያ ትቅደም፤ ሆኖም ይውደም የምትሉ ጣል ጣል አድርጉልኝ : :” (In the name of the hero Mengistu H/Mariam, any one of you who would love to say ‘Ethiopia first; death to the corrupt’, please drop me pieces of coins) (p.125). The importance of this statement in the narrative is to forward critical commentaries against the government. That is to show how officials in the political administration are ethnocentric and corrupt compared to the Därg officials. The perception that is established in the beggar’s mind about patriotism is the reflection of the society’s perception which he is a member.

Election 2005 is one of the most important historical events in the Ethiopian politics. Immediately after the election, political instability took place in the country, particularly in the capital city, Addis Ababa. The instability happened for the facts that the oppositions were not willing to accept the result of the election claiming that there were voting fraud and other election process irregularities. The political instability caused for the death of hundreds of supporters of the oppositions and imprisonment of opposition leaders (Abbink, 2006; Carter Center, 2009).

It is evident that the political atmosphere, particularly in the post-election period was tough, and the political fever is also revealed in the novel. The novel depicts that monks and nuns in Däga Estifanos were holding prayers for the political matter taking place in the country at that time. As far as the political problem was highly intensified, daily information was sought, and a monk was forced to buy a radio on a day after the election though listening radio was prohibited in monasteries. By the time the monks hold discussions about Ethiopia’s political matters, the case of Eritrea was raised for one of the monks named Abba Gebregzi, an ‘Eritrean decent’, who remained in Ethiopia for his strong belief that he is an Ethiopian. When a monk tries to question the nationality of Abba Gebregzi, the other monk argues about Ethiopians false ethnic division. As to him, an Ethiopian identity is truer than ethnic identity regardless of where one was born; in south or north, in west or east; from which ethnic group he/she is or which religion he/she worships. The statements read as follows:

እነ ዘርዓይ ድረስ የሞቱላት አገር ኢትዮጵያ ናት ኤርትራ አይደለችም! እነ ራስ አሉላ አባነጋ የምፅዋው የአሳት በር... የኢትዮጵያው አጥር... ሲጠብቃት የኖረችው ሀገር ኢትዮጵያ አይደለችም ወይ? ደቡብም ተወለድ ሰሜን ምስራቅም ተወለድ ምዕራብ ግድ የለኝም።ዘርህን እዚህ ገዳም ውስጥ የጠየቀህ ካለ ንገረኝ። ማንም ዘርህን አልጠየቀህም።ኤርትራ ውስጥ ብትወለድና እትብትህ እካ ቢቀበር እትብትህን የበለው ምስጥ ግን ደቡብ ኢትዮጵያ ላለመገኘቱ እርግጠኛ አትሁን።ጋምቤላ ተወለድ።እትብትህን ጋምቤላ ውስጥ የበለው ምስጥ ግን አፋር ላለመድረሱ እርግጠኛ አትሁን። [...] የማሳያፍርህ ነገር ቢኖር በኢትዮጵያዊነትህ ማመንህ ብቻ ነው። በቃ።

It is not Eritrea, but Ethiopia that patriots like Zer’ay Dires scarified their lives for! Was it not Ethiopia that was protected by patriots like *Ras Alula Aba Nega*, the flame gate, the guardian of Ethiopia? I do not care whether you were born in south or north, in west or east. Tell me if you are asked

about your ethnicity in this monastery. No one asks you about that. You must not be certain that where you were born gives you[r] identity as you do not know what belongs to you is not limited in where you were born. The only thing that you never feel ashamed off is your being Ethiopian. That is it (p.214).

Hall (1996) as cited in Wodak (2017, p.16) asserts that “[n]ations and national identities as systems of cultural representation are based on (grand) historical narratives, which usually emphasize origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness.” The extract above revealed the use of grand historical narratives which recounts patriots of the past who defended Ethiopia’s sovereignty. Obviously, Ethiopia is a nation which has never been colonized. The Ethiopian national identity maintenance, (re)production and promotion is based on such supposedly grand common historical narratives. Ethiopian nationalism ideology is thus used as a counter discourse against ethnocentric ideologies.

Maintaining, (re)producing, or supporting national identity is undertaken using various ways. Using toponymical labeling to show solidarity or union are some of the ways in which national identity is constructed (Wodak, 2017). Related to this, it is evident that Eritrea became an independent state in 1993, during the first two years of the EPRDF period. Despite Eritrea’s secession and its independence, the long lasted relationship between the two nations is still an important issue in literary works. The following text from *Därtogada* explained how Ethiopians and Eritreans feel towards one another.

በእርግጥ ድንበር የሌለው ምድር እንዴት ሀገር ሊባል ይቻላል? እንዳውም ኤርትራ ውስጥ ያሉ ወገኖቻችን እንኳንስ እኛ ግመላችን እንኳ ባንድራችንን ያውቃል ፤ አረንጓዴ፣ ቢጫ፣ ቀዳን ነው የሚሉት አሉ።አንድ ቀን መልሰን እንደምንገናኝ ተስፋ አልቆረጥንም።አውሮፓ አንድ ሲሆን ፣ በአንድ ገንዘብ መገበያዬት፣ በአንድ ሺዛ አገር ማቋረጥ ጀምሮ ፣ አንድ ሰንደቅ ዓላማ ሊያውለበልብ በሚጣጣርበት ወቅት እዚህ የእኛ መሰንጠብ ትኩረት ነው።

For sure, how could a country without boarder is referred to as a nation? For that matter, our fellows who reside in Eritrea say, “Let alone us [Eritreans], our camels identify the green, yellow and red flag”. I hope we will be re-united one day. It is sad to see Eritrea’s secession by the time Europe is yearning to cross borders without visa, use the same currency, and be recognized under the same flag. (pp. 139-140).

The novel tries to convince that the secession of Eritrea is not merely based on the good will of the people. Using the great deal of attachment Eritreans have to the [Ethiopian] green, yellow and red flag, as an example, it narrates how the Eritrea’s succession is unnecessary which happened by the time Europe is yearning to stay united. The topolymical labeling pronouns “we” and “our”, and the Ethiopian flag with “red, yellow and green” color that we get in the extract above designate an attempt to reconstruct a discursive Ethiopian national identity which seeks an eventual reunion of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

It is not only the pan-Ethiopian nationalism that is entertained in the narrative but also the ways by which Ethiopians get out of problems such as poverty and backwardness. It seems the narrative prophesizes problems related to ethnic division could be settled if Ethiopia is civilized in science and technology. The following extract deals with what happens to Ethiopia when it is advanced in transport services.

ይታይህ ያኔ የሚኖረው አንድነት... ይታይህ ያኔ የሚኖረው መፈቃቀር...ይታይህ ያኔ የሚኖረው መቀራረብ...ይታይህ የተሰበሰበው የኢትዮጵያ አንድነት ሲበገገ...ይህ ነው አውናዊ አንድነት . . .

[Just look at the unity to come...look at one another's love to come...look at the togetherness to come... when the wrecked unity gets recovered. This would be real unity...] (p.197).

The construction of modern transport services is emphasized in the above extract. The construction of high speed rail way both at underground and ground level is taken as a blood vessel to connect all Ethiopians who reside in different corners of the country (p.237). The story in the novel depicts that if such civilizations come true, unity will be no more an issue for Ethiopians. It presents what happens if Ethiopia is developed, for example, in transport technology, and tries to install a strong sentiment of the name Ethiopia in people's mind so as to establish patriotism.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to show how Yismake's two Amharic novels: *Dertogada* and *Kibur Dinay* portray the issue of ethnocentrism and pan-Ethiopian ideology. The (con)textual analysis conducted on the two novels revealed that the novels are devoted to promoting pan-Ethiopian nationalism on the one hand and denouncing the ethnocentric thoughts on the other.

The study showed that narrators and characters in the novels have negative perception on the ethnic political system which according to van Dijk is a shared belief of the group to which they are members. In the same way, it showed that pan-Ethiopian ideology served as an attempt to struggle against the normativity of ethnocentric ideology, and by extension as a resistance against the regime. The study indicated that the ethnocentric political system has resulted in classification of people by which 'ethnic other' is formed. Furthermore, the new generation is represented as 'false conscious' product of the system, and severely blamed for being submissive to the system, or for not being patriot like its forefathers. By condemning the new generation, the novels attempt to regenerate a new one with qualities of the past generation.

On the other hand, a discursive kind of national identity (re)production and maintenance is revealed in the novels. In this regard, discourse semantics which embody abstract national ideology are employed to promote pan-Ethiopian thought. Ethiopian grand narratives of the past: patriots, war triumphs and topomycal labeling that promote unity

and togetherness are also employed so as to reproduce an inclusive Ethiopian ideology. The narratives, therefore, insist on the necessity of learning from the past to build a generation with a patriotic spirit.

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