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COMMON SENSIBILITIES IN FOUR SELECTED ETHIOPIAN DIASPORIC NARRATIVES IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

A critical approach to the Ethiopian Diasporic novels in English, results in cognition of some commonalities in the general emergence of the works. Specifically the narratives - *Held at a Distance: my Rediscovery of Ethiopia*, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, *Notes from the Hyena's Belly*, and *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, which are written by Rebecca Haile, Dinaw Mengistu, Nega Mezlekia, and Maaza Mengiste respectively, have some sort of overlap in certain features. However, various scholars of the area have conducted researches on different aspects of Diasporic works of their choice including the novels under target here, they did not explicate the common features/sensibilities of the works in general. Therefore, this paper tries to explore these common features by using the four selected narratives as a frame of reference with some relevant background information.

Keywords: Diaspora; Ethiopia; Literature

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Diasporic Writings

As a matter of fact, the reason for African migrants to leave their homeland is normally related with the sociopolitical situation of their country of origins. As Kehinde(2008:3) puts it, their leave ranges from "*voluntary migration to forced displacement*." Particularly Many of African writers have been forced into exile and driven away by *need, ambition, and persecution* (Ibid:3). The Diaspora however, are physically detached, their consciousness is never far from association in local issues. Curtis (2005) in Haftu (2012:18) asserts that "*Diasporas have maintained a strong national consciousness although they have been dispersed from their homeland*." And needless to mention that this sort of maintenance and contribution of the Diaspora in the existence of their homeland, is inevitably important for the country, however they are not critically perceived as such. In terms of economy, they are usually hardly considered as a good source of remittance. This is because mainly in Africa, most of the time these people (the Diasporas) are not taken optimistically by the local government for they are victims of the previous local political woes. In relation with this Oucho (2008:9) writes that "*most governments and people in Africa have a very narrow view of the role of the Diaspora*." But In contrast of their negated local perception, these people seem unreserved of part taking in various ways of progress in their homeland.

And when we come to their feelings about their country of origin, we see their emotional attachment vividly manifested in assorted ways; among which are - literary works. Diasporic writings could be taken as maps for the politico- historical features of the country where the story is set. These writings are not only reports of the features, but they are also description and commentaries. Thus apart from their role as manifestations of the life of the Diaspora, political rebuke seems one of the contributions from African Diaspora writings. This is mainly because the African Diaspora writers "*bring the horrors*" in their motherland to the world through their literary explorations. And these writings are important tools both to explain the past (the history), and in order to address the decadence of the neocolonial Africa and to reconstruct its painful realities, Kehinde(2008:2).

Therefore Diasporic writings deal with experiences (dominantly painful experiences), and emotions, of people of the homeland and the coincidences of the migrants in the host land. They also forge new notions of fluid transnational identities through connecting the past and the present, "*the literature opens up spaces for new expressions of a transnational global culture*" (Maver:1). As reflected in the above extracts, it seems that Diaspora literature in any case deals with some common themes- especially a theme of political tyranny, however the range of emphasis might vary as per the interest, skill and experience of the individual writer. Now since the major focus in this paper is that of the literature of the Ethiopian Diaspora, bellow some common features in the areas of theme and general structure

are to be briefly explored, preceded by the unique qualities of Ethiopian Literature in general and the Literature of the Ethiopian Diaspora in particular.

1.2 The nature of Ethiopian Literature in brief

As Kehinde (2008:1) argues that African literature, particularly the novel is "*always handcuffed to history*", it is true that African literature is dominantly made up of its history. And history is all about the political, social, economical, cultural, etc. experiences of people within a specified period of time (mainly in the past), which are again the area of focus in literature. Killam Douglas (2004), discusses three major concerns of African literature. These are *to examine the consequences of colonial rule, to examine the achievements and abuses of postcolonial African governments, and to defend their choice of language*. As stated earlier African Literature and African history are like two sides of a coin, one being the back bone of the other. Thus since colonialism was the experience of almost all African countries (Ethiopia and Liberia in exception), it is the flesh of their history that colonial writers for example, have depicted in their literary works. In the second concern which is about to examine abuse of power of post colonial African governments, is what the unreserved African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwi Armah, Ngugi Wathiongo, Wole Soyinka, etc. have shown us through their enigmatic works. The last point that Douglas has raised is that of language preference/ choice. This is directly related with language politics which is going to be discussed below separately in relation with the Ethiopian Diasporic novels.

It is hardly possible for Ethiopian literature to apply these three major concerns of African literature in the way they are presented here. This is because Ethiopian Literature, having its own unique characteristics, departs from that of world and African literature, however it falls in the same category in the continental divisions. The first unique character of Ethiopian Literature is *the absence of colonial experience* in the country. But here we can replace the term *post colonial* by *post revolutionary* to address the second concern- abuse of political power which was a case in Ethiopia too.

The second character is related with *Christianity*. Ethiopia has embraced Christianity earlier from many other African and European countries. This dates back to 31c.A.C when a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority - was baptized by the apostle Philip (Acts chapter 8:27-38), however it was nationalized in the 4th c. (331 A.C) in the country. Thus since then it is part and parcel of the country's history and tradition, which is experienced by people with some sense of proud. This resulted for Christianity to be manifested virtually in a constructive way in the literary works, whereas it is negatively perceived by the African people and writers because of a belief that it is an outcome of colonialism.

Lastly comes the country's ownership of *long tradition of written literature*. This is a country having its own letters, which is also reflected in the Diasporic writings. It would seem that as a result of such exceptional possessions, the country is world widely perceived by many as a source of didactic traditions too. In relation with this, a pre-Christian Greek historian - Diodorus Siculus in Cohen (2008:44), after explaining the proud and conception of Ethiopians for themselves, writes; the report of a typical African-American pamphlet, in the style of a Ripley's 'Believe-It-Or-Not' story. He claimed that "*Ethiopia, that is Negroes, gave the world the first idea of right and wrong and this laid the basis of religion and all true culture and civilization*."

In addition, regarding the country's sovereignty and internal treasures, which resulted in the unique qualities of the local literature, Taye Assefa (2009) precisely puts the following in the international journal of Ethiopian studies :

Ethiopia is the source of the Blue Nile that fed Egyptian civilization and sustains the agricultural livelihoods of its population, a country which had - embraced Christianity long before most European countries did, a country - which at a time of the European scramble for Africa, shocked the colonial - world by delivering humiliating defeats to a major European power, a country - that has a long tradition of written literature and a mosaic of cultures and languages - that is a gold mine for ethnological and linguistic research (Vol.XLII,Nos,1-2:110).

Precisely, because of the country's fabulous indigenous history, Ethiopian literature deviates from that of other Literatures including the continental (African) Literature, however it belongs to the same region. The literature uses the country's experiences as its bottom line like that of literatures of other parts of the world.

In relation with history, even though the country was able to defend its sovereignty from foreign invaders, it was not free from internal political turmoil and communal disorder as a result. The recent principal political problems have allegedly begun in the reigns of *the monarchy* (mainly during the last periods), and *the dictatorial rule*. As Literature

depicts reality, rebukes immorality & violence, and puts history for further reference, there are various literary works (both in local and foreign languages) produced on both the holly and evil experiences of the country. From these literary works, the Literature of the Diaspora exhaustively exhibits the political mess that took place in the country just before twenty/thirty years, during these two consecutive government systems. As a result this class of Literature has its own distinct nature, and commonalities in its literary presentation.

1.3 Ethiopian Diasporic Literature in English

As history tells us in the late 1960s many people /Ethiopians, because of the internal political and economic chaos, migrated to various parts of the world- dominantly to the US. From these migrants, some of them started to produce works of literature based on history and their personal life experience. These literary works as reflected in Rebecca's *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*, Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, Nega Mezlekia's *Notes from the Hyna's Belly*, and Dinaw Mengistu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (the novels which are under consideration here), deal with various dilemma that people have faced (including the authors) in their homeland, while they were in exile and afterwards in the host land. Therefore these works have been serving as informants of the country's history, setting, economy and politics, especially during the two recent consecutive government systems, for which mainly the Dergue regime is infamous throughout the world.

In relation with politics, the literature of the Ethiopian Diaspora is a well crafted representation of the chaos that the whole people of the country in general (directly /indirectly), & the Diaspora in particular have been challenged within that respective time. As per the literary works & the scholars who have conducted study on these works, the severity of the problems is far from complete articulation, most of which having their long lasting effect on the life of the victims. Hardships both locally and in the host land, the effect of maladministration on the life of the people, and the inhuman measures taken by the authorities against citizens, exile, etc. are the expatiated issues in the works.

However this category of literature has its own peculiar features and characteristics as a single whole in terms of various literary qualities, only the dominantly employed common features such as style (way of presentation & language use), theme, setting, narration, etc are to be discussed briefly here.

Several research papers conducted on various aspect of Ethiopian Diasporic Literature, are available in the libraries. The first paper, as far as my knowledge is concerned, is Endalkachew Hailu 's (2008): *The predicament of the Diaspora as reflected in The Texture of Dreams and The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, where the major dilemmas (since hardly possible to deal with all), of the Diaspora both in the home and the host land, are investigated.

The next two works conducted in the same year, are Haftu Kahsay, and Dereje Mulugeta (2012). Haftu Kahsay (2012) deals with *The ideological plane in selected Ethiopian Diasporic prose narratives in English: a comparative study of political philosophy*, (The targeted novels include: *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, *Give Me a Dog's Life Any Day: African, Absurdities II*, *Held at a Distance*, & *Notes from the Hyena's Belly*). In this work after dealing with the ideological political planes of the respective writer of the novels individually based on textual evidence, a comparative analysis of Political Philosophy is conducted at the end.

The other prolific work is Dereje Mulugeta (2012): *A Thematic Analysis of Beneath the Lion's Gaze and Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*. Here various individual and common major and minor themes of the selected texts are dealt.

Thus based on reading of these indispensable works, & the texts themselves (including my previous readings for term paper investigation while conducting course projects), this paper is produced to show the common sensibilities across the Diaspora as reflected in the selected works and the role of this class of literature in depicting the country's historical, geographical, cultural and linguistic treasures for the English speaking world. These literary commonalities seem to mainly revolve around setting, theme texture, etc..

2. COMMON SENSIBILITIES IN THE SELECTED NARRATIVES

2.1 Setting

Identical setting is among the major features that the Diasporic novels possess in common. Scholars argue that the use of English language in Ethiopia became a new experience mainly after the return of Emperor Haile Selassie from England where he was a refugee during the Ethio-Italian war which took place 1936-41. Afterwards English was introduced to the schools as a medium of instruction, & later in the early 1960s some writings in the language began to be produced locally.

Based on the above claim, relatively creative writing in English, which has a brief history of only two decades, is a recent phenomenon, when compared to Amharic literature that traces its history back to the first half of the 14th century. Ethiopian writers' strong literary background in Amharic language, and the low emphasis given for English language in Ethiopian schools, which resulted in the inadequate mastery of the language, are the responsible factors for this laggard development and paucity of Ethiopian literature in English, Debebe Seifu (1980:3). But now a days particularly because of globalization, writings in English language began to be produced in larger amount.

The preference of writers to use English language for their writings, was made based on various intentions. Among their reasons was seeking access by the wider international audience, which is mainly the case for Diaspora writers (Abiola, Irele et al. 2004:174). In fact the use of English language in diasporic writings seems mandatory since most of the works have been produced in the host land where foreign languages (dominantly English), are communicated as a common tongue.

The '*massive migration*', of Ethiopians to the west & the US began after the 1974 revolution -as a result of the political turmoil in the country- "*following the down fall of the Haile Sellassie monarchy and the reign of the military dictatorship rule*" Dereje Mulugeta (2012:24). However there were small number of people in the west earlier before the coup, later on the number of migrants became increasing in higher amount- "*the greatest number of Ethiopians coming to the US from 1983-1993*" ,Hodes (1997) in Endalkachew Hailu(2008:8).

However the migration had begun during the last periods of the Emperor Haile Sellasie (as a result of the coup.), it was aggravated during the whole time of the dictatorial rule. This migration was made in the hope of searching for a better future like that of the exodus of the Bible, in which the Israelis were leaving Egypt immensely to get a better place (the hope of land-Ken 'an). The migrants were in search of places free from violence, poverty, civil war etc., even though they did not experience (and have not been experiencing) things as per their expectation. These people then (migrant Ethiopians), were not reserved from speaking their dreadful experiences through print artistically, and this results in the production of Diasporic literature. Therefore this class of Ethiopian literature (both fiction and non-fiction) started to be drastically produced mainly following the 1974 revolution in the country. Some of the texts are very recent in publication, however the story inside takes us back to that particular setting- the historical spoil of the imperial& dictatorial rules respectively.

The story of each novel, is set in nearly similar time-the reign of the Dergue, and the monarchy to some extent specifically, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. And in relation with place the stories in the novels are set half in the homeland and half in the host. Locally Addis Ababa (Rebecca, Maaza, Dinaw), jigjiga (Nega), and other towns mainly in the north such as Bahir Dar, Gondar, Axum, Lalibela, etc. are places where parts of the stories, are set. On the other hand in the foreign lands, particularly American states such as Minnesota, are used.

2.2 Thematic Commonalities

As the case of the past is mentioned above, a significant number of Ethiopians migrate to the various countries of the world legally or illegally in search of a better future or others. Hence, migration is a direct cause for the emergence or development of diasporic literatures in Ethiopia. At various times, mainly from the 1970s onwards, with two sorts: voluntarily or forcedly, peoples of various background and age migrate to the various countries in the world. As a result, diasporic literature is a recent phenomenon used to describe the various experiences of the people particularly that of the diaspora while they live in the various settings. And the word "*diaspora*" is used to refer to, those people who live in the host land except the diplomats, celebrities, sport peoples and artists who are temporary and formally moving to the host land for purpose.

The selected narratives *Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia* by Rebecca Haile (2008); *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* by Maaza Mengiste (2010); *Notes from the Hyena's Belly* by Nega Mezlekia(2000); *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* by Dinaw Mengistu (2007), are important works in reflecting how life looked like in the homeland – Ethiopia and in the host land- like USA, with aesthetic and insightful narrations and interpretations for their respective ideal audiences. Since the medium of communication is in English which is a worldwide language, their audience seems to be both domestic and foreign.

It is in these diasporic works that we (the readers) find a lot of signs about some parts of modern Ethiopian history (probably from 1970s onwards). They are vital records of what the authors have seen in their life. Similarly, they are also presenting what they think and feel about Ethiopia and its people. To be specific, the narratives capitalize the social, political, cultural, psychological, economic...and other life aspects of the peoples of Ethiopia that happened mainly during the last two ruling periods. Therefore, the width and breadth of the novels in showcasing the living

conditions of Ethiopians, particularly during the political arena or regime of Haile Sellassie (the imperial rule) and the Derge (the military rule), are excellently portrayed with eye-witness narration-direct involvement in the action.

Except the literatures of the Diaspora that are written in English, other local literatures, relatively have very little capacity in showcasing the various woes and predicaments that Ethiopians have been facing as if it is a life like depiction. However, it is the diasporic literature, as in the cases under study, that plays a pivotal role in bringing together all the horrific events that the people of the country experiences in the passage of time. Here, by *Ethiopian people*, it is to mean those people both in the home land and in the host land who are the targets of the diasporic literary works in general.

Hence, despite some differences in approach and degree of emphasis, these novels reveal similar and /or concurrent themes that are mentioned in the following essay:

As to my close examination, in all the Diaspora literatures, there is almost an air of similarity of the historical background and human environment, to the flora and fauna, the very landscape and climatic conditions. There are also the same patterns of conquest, exploitation, poverty, economic frustration, racial discrimination, home and exile, social and cultural themes of tradition. On top of that, universal questions like- identity, family life, pain, joy, love, mourn ...are cross-textual themes or ideas of the narratives.

The Diaspora literature is a result of the experiences of different geographical, historical, as well as political and economic environments. As a result, it involves heterogeneous themes to deal with it. Therefore, in order to elaborate these many themes of the Diaspora literatures, it seems reasonable and easy going to categorize them into some similar patterns. As a result, in this paper the themes are commented from 'Trisect' time based approaches: "pre-migration themes", "while-migration themes" and "post-migration themes."

2.2.1 "Pre-migration" themes in the Diaspora literature

At a certain time, these diasporic literatures (in the actions and dialogues of the representative characters) are occupied in making an attempt to re-introduce their country of origin in the positive direction in spite of the horrific experiences they faced.

Accordingly, "pre-migration" themes are those themes that reflect the positive aspirations of Ethiopia and its people, tradition, landscape and the like which are concurrent themes in the mentioned novels above. As "a pre-migration" theme, though its coverage is not that much significant in the narrations, the diasporic novels also become a tool for the celebration of the heroic grandeur of Ethiopia in the past. That is, through slight narration, the nature of Ethiopia in the past is described as an ancient country of the world, as a powerful Christian kingdom and as a land of fortune.

In addition, the narratives foreshadow important themes that had existed and experienced by Ethiopians. In other words, there are slight communications about Ethiopia as: it is a country of historic sites, ancient empire, Christian kingdom, glorious past, ancient and historic churches. In the dialogues and actions of the characters in the narratives, themes such as cherishing traditional values, cultural heritages, and family bonds are also addressed. Last but not least, the texts also communicate themes that address Ethiopia as a land of fortune, historical heritages, and land of ancient civilization. And all the above mentioned ideas collectively are supposed to show the positive images of the country and its people; and this all happened before the internal turmoil came up.

2.2.2 While-migration themes in the Diaspora literature

This is when Ethiopians became victims of circumstances and events that have in many instances covered untold and unimaginable misery, pain and trauma in the homeland. "While-migration" themes are direct experiences of Ethiopians, especially the migrants while they are in their homeland and these experiences are recorded in each work.

Therefore, "while -migration" themes are those themes associated with the causes that bring migration. As you may know, forcedly or voluntarily, a significant number of Ethiopian Diasporas displace to the various countries of the world for a better life. For example, the characters of these novels, have left their homeland Ethiopia not by their willingness, it is rather the horrific historical events they got that pushed them to search a host land. So, the themes mentioned in this heading are those challenges the characters have been facing while they were living in Ethiopia.

Political instability, economic crisis, mass execution and civil war are under while- migration themes explicated in these works through the various dialogues of the characters and the actions taken against them. In addition, mal-

administration, turmoil, humiliation, political violence, human rights violation, injustices were the other major events and phenomena in mother land-Ethiopia for the last significant periods. On top of that, recurrent drought and famine, wide spread corruptions, endemic poverty, impoverishment... just to mention a few in the texts are the arduous events they (Ethiopians) face while in their mother land.

In a nutshell, "while-migration" themes include the various political, psychological, social, economic ...woes and predicaments Ethiopians have been facing at large being in their motherland. And some of the subject matters discussed in the narratives are the principal themes in the category.

2.2.3 "Post-migration" themes in the Diaspora literature

By "post-migration" themes, it is to mean those themes that reflect life in the host country. There are major themes addressing the sufferings of the Ethiopian Diaspora communities while they exercise life after exile in the host land.

Based on a thorough reading and careful analysis, therefore, "post-migration" themes such as identity and identity crisis, discrimination, culture shock, racial prejudice, disillusionment...are explicated since they are capitalized in the narratives in this regard. Because the Diasporas have been facing a new geography, history, culture, and a new way of life in the host land, through their narrations, they are able to record and showcase these various and complicated issues in brief. In this regard, religious reflections, the loss of tradition, sense of alienation, assimilation and hybridization are additional themes under the post-migration heading. More than anything else, depictions that focus on the Diasporas' nostalgia, loneliness, homesickness, racism, frustration, emptiness, are always prevalent themes in the diasporic novels which can be treated in this heading.

3. COMMONALITIES IN TEXTURE

Literature renders life innate/bare and varnished where necessary; various scholars acknowledge its pertinent functions. Phillip & Waugh Patricia (2001:5) put the task of literature is " *to render life, experience & emotion in a potent way;....*" As per this quotation, it does not just present *life, experience and emotion*, but it presents them in a *potent way*. This implies its use of respective ways and intonations based on the issues to be presented. In this section the ways of story presentation in general in these novels, are to be revealed.

3.1 Narration

The literature of the Ethiopian Diaspora in general reflects an experienced life. The novels are either biographical, or autobiographical. It is not an imagined literature, but a realistic creative one. The authors wrote what they themselves, their family members, and the people of their country have experienced in their real life during the period of the *dictatorial* and *imperial* rules. The stories are created artistically from the challenges of the native people both at home before exile and in the host afterwards.

From the selected novels here, Nega Mezlekia's *Notes from The Hyena's Belly*, and Rebecca Haile's *Held at a Distance :my Rediscovery of Ethiopia*, are purely autobiographical works. On the other hand, Maaza's *Beneath The Lion's Gaze*, and Dinaw's *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, are that of biographical, where imaginative characters are creatively drawn to represent the real people- including the authors themselves. As a result of the stories' closeness for the authors, the novels are able to put their readers back to the real context where their writers were in.

Their (auto) biographical nature seems to determine the point of view, or the narration of the novels. In the narrative aspect the targeted Diasporic novels have several features in common. In their narration, the novels more or less have a straight forward plot. There is just a single major story and that gets told from the very exposition to its denouement/ resolution, and virtually no broken up plot is employed. What is more is the point of view from which the stories are told. In the case of Diasporic novels as a whole, first person and third person point of view are dominantly used. Autobiographical works are narrated by using first person omniscient (I-narrator) point of view as usual whereas third person point of view is employed across the biographical works. But in both biographical and autobiographical works, the readers follow the deeds and thoughts of the characters throughout the development of the stories. And the narration takes place in chronological order. The stories are presented one after the other in the narratives as per their historical occurrence in the real societal context.

3.2 Voice

The works are full of video and audio where people are seen and heard suffering from life, as a result of the internal political disorder. In the case of the Ethiopian Diasporic literature, it is noticed that lack of the entertaining role of literature is present, as a result of the severity of the actions against the innocent people. The presentation of the stories throughout the works, is more of sympathetic and heart breaking. The actions carried out there, are shocking and powerful that enable the characters to be heard and seen mourning. Readers can simply feel that they are taken back to the real context where the stories are set. All the novels talk about the sufferings of people- imprisonment, torture, murder, sobbing, civil war, starvation -not only starvation of food, but also starvation of peace and security, democracy, stability, etc. Readers of these novels can easily be shocked by the measures of the infamous Mengistu Haile Mariam (Major Gudu- in Maaza's terms) and his officials, and that of the imperial regime. The novels are able to put the readers in the realistic settings and feel the actions that the characters face throughout the story. People are heard mourning from the sufferings of poverty and physical political punishment.

The novels are not only audible, but also visible. Readers do not only easily hear people in mourn, worry, torture insecurity and instability (both mentally and physically), but also see them receiving tremendous inhuman measures against their innocent humanities. Generally people are seen and heard shouting from the cruel persecution. The roots of their lamentation again include poverty, loosing family members, torture/insecurity, shooting, inhuman treatments such as punishment even posthumously, (the soldiers used to shoot the corpse and collect money for the bullets- [Maaza, 2010]) etc..

Generally the works show the people's commitment, innocence, sympathy for each other (however they were also suspecting each other while identifying from the brutish officials), patriotic feelings etc., and the administrative officials' cruelty over the guiltless humanity.

3.3 Content

By nature all Diasporic novels including those which are not under target in this paper, are historical. According to Encyclopedia Britannica a historical novel is *"a novel that has as its setting a usually significant period of history and that attempts to convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions, of a past age with realistic detail and fidelity (which is in some cases only apparent fidelity) to historical fact. The work may deal with actual historical personages.....or it may contain a mixture of fictional and historical character."*

The Diasporic works deal with the political history of the country during the imperial period (mainly the last periods beginning from the coup) and the whole of the dictatorial rule- the Dergue. And as mentioned above, some of the novels use purely actual historical personages (mainly the autobiographical novels) from the two consecutive government systems, and their family members, where as some of them mix a number of fictional characters.

3.4 Language

The Diasporic Ethiopian Literature is a newly emerging Literature in English language, which addresses the historic political, cultural, economic, and social affairs of the country to the international community since it is written in a global medium of communication-English. Some of the works have the power to erase the bad image of the country, which is about the foreigners' attachment of the country only with poverty. Particularly *Rebecca's Held at a Distance: My Rediscovery of Ethiopia*, since it is a memoir and a travelogue, makes any of its readers to distantly visit the country's treasures, and ancient civilization. Nega Mezlekia's *Notes from the Hyena's Belly*, also presents the realities of societal relations beyond cultural ethnic and linguistic boundaries, the Ethio-Somali war, societal relations between the people of the south -the native Muslims, and the north -the Christian-Amharas of Jigjiga town. He also tries to depict the physical and geographical facets of the town. Had these works been produced in local languages, they would be inaccessible for those foreigners.

However English is used as the major tongue in these novels, vocabularies from the vernacular- Amharic, are used occasionally. The use of this local color again can be seen from two major perspectives: Firstly writers might have used these terminologies intentionally for cherishing the local traditions such as religious practices, feasts, etc., and to show what the country uniquely possesses to the wider international audience (its tradition of written literature).

The second perspective is related with language politics. This is reflected in the struggle of the writers to bring the real vigor the vernacular vocabularies carry. Regarding language use in African literature, many scholars have been arguing - particularly on using indigenous and foreign languages. They have been debating the choice of language in

to two major stand points making groups: *Appropriation* and *Abrogation*: the groups led by Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi Wa Thiongo respectively.

In the case of *Appropriation* the scholars argue that English can be used as a medium in African literature, but it should be Africanized and Africa should have its own version of English language just like other countries such as Australia, Switzerland and America. In relation with this, Chinua Achebe claims that English however, is a foreign language can carry the weight of African experience, "*but it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings*" Ngugi (1981:8).

On the other hand, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, explaining the dual character of any language : serving as a *means of communication*, and *carrying culture* (*Ibid* :14), argues that a foreign language cannot carry a culture (the African culture in this case) since it is hardly possible to take the indigenous African vigor with it (*Ibid*: 14-20). Thus scholars of this idea (*abrogation*), believe that African writers cannot transmit African experience by using foreign languages such as English. They argue that the foreign languages can play their first role (means of communication), but they lack the capacity in the second one-which is carrying the culture of African people.

When we come to the case of the Ethiopian Diaspora literature, some sort of deviation is seen in language use as (*Dereje 2012:52*) says "*Deviation in language use occurs as one torn between her/his parent's culture and the majority or host culture of course it is one of the features of Diasporic Literature*". Virtually in all the novels terminologies in the indigenous language -Amharic, are used in some cases throughout the story. And most of the subjects represented by the terms of Amharic are of home-grown. But the parallel English translation for most, is given in brackets in the following ways: '*enjera*' (Ethiopian flat bread), '*esksta*' (local dancing) etc.. Thus here it seems that the writers are struggling to bring the original concept of the words in the native language to the foreign language. And the inability of the foreign language (English) to express the local terminologies with their rituals, is reflected through this struggle. Therefore it could be concluded that the use of this local color and the parallel translation are of the pin pointers for foreign languages to have poor capacity to carry the local culture.

More over most of the words that are put in Amharic, are of local origin, and their parallel English translation serves to introduce the local culture to the foreign readers. These local terminologies tell us that the things represented are the country's indigenous products and rituals. This in general helps to introduce the unique products and customs that the country own.

Moreover it would also seem advisable to comment on the degree of the language used. The language version used in these writings, is by nature journalistic. In almost all the Diasporic novels, highly simplistic, explanatory, reporting and powerful language is employed. And this helps for the stories to be seen and heard simply.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper an attempt has been made to show the common sensibilities in the Ethiopian diasporic literature in English as reflected in four selected narratives through document analysis research method. The presentation is supported by some background information about the nature of diasporic literature in general and the Ethiopian Literature in brief including diasporic writings.

The common diasporic sensibilities and literary elements across the works are discussed. The findings revolve around setting, narration, voice, content, way of presentation, & thematic commonalities. Generally the novels share various characteristics in terms of the areas mentioned above.

By content they vividly show the political tyranny of the dictatorial and imperial regimes, and their impacts on the citizens' and the country's existence. They are documents where political violence (injustice, tyranny and suppression), identity crisis, financial crisis, dedication for change, history, local traditions, and psychological fatalism among others are depicted brilliantly.

Moreover, biographical/auto biographical narration, the use of local color/ code mixing, point of view, audibly mourning voice, colorful/visual representation, etc. are among the common features that the targeted Diasporic novels comprise in their presentation.

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