Ethiopian Women Under Fire: Exploring Selected Narratives on the Second Italo-Ethiopian War

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

at

Rhodes University

by

Kananelo Tsuene

March 2026

Supervisor: Professor Lynda Gichanda Spencer

Co-Supervisor: Dr Joseph Kwanya

Abstract

This study argues that three contemporary texts about Ethiopia, titled *The Shadow King*, *The Wife's Tale* and *Daughters of Silence* adopt a revisionist approach to foreground the female voice and its growing agency in the context of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935. The study engages with this argument by examining literary representations of women's roles and experiences of war. The scope of this study includes selected primary texts of postcolonial literature with an emphasis on war, women's trauma, Ethiopian women's writing and gendered memory. It begins with an analysis of Maaza Mengiste's representation of women's evolving roles during wartime in *The Shadow King*, theoretically drawing on Florence Stratton's concepts of inversion and appropriation. This work also analyses how Aida Edemariam blends memoir, creative non-fiction and vicarious writing to reinterpret her grandmother's history in *The Wife's Tale*, demonstrating how non-fiction can defy and manipulate rigid conventions to reclaim women's narratives. It further examines how silence and trauma manifest on the female body in Rebecca Fisseha's *Daughters of Silence*. This thesis uses gender, postcolonial, trauma, feminist and narrative theory as guiding frameworks. I draw on the concepts of African theorists including Oike Machiko's contentions about why there is a lack of literary criticism of war narratives authored by women. I engage with Pauline Ada Uwakweh's research about trauma and violence during wartimes, Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay, and Meredith Turshen's theory about the transformative nature of war, and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's research on violence reenactment and inter-generational trauma in post-conflict Africa. This study also draws on Western trauma, feminism and gender theorists. Among them are Irene Visser, whose research focuses on vicarious trauma and writing about war as a secondary victim. I also engage with Philip Dwyer's studies of the memoir, and Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's research on inter-generational trauma. The main question this thesis seeks to answer is: how do the selected texts collectively serve a revisionist purpose, offering new perspectives on women's untold war histories and their enduring political and social impact on Ethiopia.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to East African women and the societies that have shaped them. My writing aims to provide exposure to underrepresented women in Africa. I would like to acknowledge East African writers who have set out to do the same, namely Maaza Mengiste, Aida Edemariam, Rebecca Fisseha, Nadifa Mohamed, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, and Leila Aboulela amongst many more. These writers have written texts that have changed my perspective and sowed the seeds of my general interest in East African literature.

Above all, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the women of Ethiopia. I hope that this thesis reflects even a fraction of your contributions to war and the human rights violations that work against you. I hope that with the surge of new Ethiopian women writers, the literature that we read will progressively offer you the recognition and respect that you deserve.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Professor Lynda Spencer for propelling me into the world of African literature when I had no clue about its extensiveness. So much of your kindness and transparency, since my first year of university have made it easy for me to feel confident in communicating with you and other people. Thank you for encouraging me to have the confidence to take ownership of my own work.

I would also like to extend the same appreciation to Dr Joseph Kwanya, who has played a significant role in introducing me to East African literature and for seeing me through its study. I have gained so much from your advice and from reading your brilliant work. Thank you for your patience and time.

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Urban Connections in African Popular Imaginaries (UCAPI) research project and the Department of Literary Studies in English at Rhodes University. I wish to thank the UCAPI squad, whose reading and writing sessions have bolstered my critical analysis and leadership skills. Lastly, I dedicate this work to my parents and sister. Thank you for your unwavering love and support, and for helping me to stay on course.

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Chapter One: Introduction

"Our women must be taught to nurse the wounded and even to fight. We shall be glad if in Ethiopia, as in some other countries, the women learn the use of military arms and undergo military exercises" (Selassie qtd. in Makin 102)

1.1 Historical Background

The title of this study is adapted from Pauline Ada Uwakweh's *African Women Under Fire* (2017), a book that focuses on armed violence against women and girls in armed conflict areas with a focus on novels, memoirs and films about Africa. Rather than focusing on literature from one country, Uwakweh's text examines women's experiences in literary works from across the African continent. This study borrows Uwakweh's central metaphor of critically examining the literary representations of women's roles and experiences during wartime in selected contemporary prose but narrows the geographical focus to Ethiopia, given its distinct religious tradition and national history.[1] An example of this national history is the excerpt above, extracted from Emperor Haile Selassie's speech on 28 September 1935 in anticipation of the impending Second Italo-Ethiopian War, which occurred between 1935 to 1937 (Adugna 22). In the speech and while awaiting a siege by the Italian army, Selassie issues a mobilisation order to the Ethiopian public. He calls citizens of all genders with rifles to serve their homeland by joining the military service. The speech pertains to the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and is a vital historical record that corroborates women's domestic and political participation during that period. The excerpt reinforces the argument of this thesis because Selassie's decision to issue a mobilisation order gave women in Ethiopia the opportunity to serve domestic and military roles in war and it reveals the existence of the female voice in the chronicles of the armed struggle. The period of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War is significant for the purpose of my analysis because Emperor Haile Selassie's decision to issue a mobilisation order gave women the opportunity to serve as nurses and soldiers. This mobilisation order granted Ethiopian women the opportunity to partake in political and domestic roles in the wars that would follow. Nonetheless, the Second Italo-Ethiopian War was not the first time that women were involved in combat historically because women's active participation in

[1]This thesis recognises that Ethiopia was referred to as Abyssinia during the First Italo-Ethiopian War. However, it will refer to Abyssinia as Ethiopia to ensure clarity and consistency.

war and politics predate 1935 (22). These women include royal courtesans Itege Mentwab and Itege Menen who were involved in the military and political development of Ethiopia during the Zemene Mesafint (Era of the Princes), a period of civil war in Ethiopia from 1769 to 1855 (22). As a result, Selassie's mobilisation order above implies that the Ethiopian governing body recognised the practice of women bearing arms as a socially accepted norm. This thesis centres around three contemporary texts about Ethiopia written in English: *The Shadow King* by Maaza Mengiste, *The Wife's Tale* by Aida Edemariam and *Daughters of Silence* by Rebecca Fisseha. These selected texts foreground the broad spectrum of women's political and domestic wartime roles. Therefore, this thesis argues that the texts employ a revisionist framework to bring the marginalised perspectives of women affected by war to the forefront of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. To put these texts into perspective, I first contextualise the history of Italo-Ethiopian conflicts because those sequences of events introduce an important figure in Ethiopian women's war history, Empress Taytu, whose political contributions affirm the principal argument of this thesis.[2] I propose that women have contributed to the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, and their roles and experiences vary despite their lack of recognition.

Ethiopia has an unconventional colonial history compared with other African countries because it was never fully colonised (except for a brief Italian occupation, 1936–41), unlike most African nations which were colonised for decades. In 1896, the country fought in the First Italo-Ethiopian War, defeating the Italian army at the Battle of Adwa (Berhane-Selassie 236). In 1935, the Italian military succeeded in occupying Ethiopia during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. This occupation led to the exile of Emperor Haile Selassie. Ethiopia later acquired liberation in 1941 with the help of the British (285). Despite its liberation, the country struggled through civil unrest due to political and economic instability. Within a few years, the rise of the Derg regime in 1976 caused internal conflict (Marcus 196).[3] Thousands of citizens who opposed the regime were killed. Since 2020, there has been an armed conflict between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian government as they continue to fight for political power (Jima para. 6). During wartime, women's roles transform in tandem with their country's evolving socio-political

[2]An alternative spelling for Empress Taytu is Empress Taitu. Due to the translation of the name from Amharic, Taitu and Taytu are often used interchangeably. My thesis refers to her as Taytu because it is the spelling used in my sources.

[3] The 'Derg', according to Kjetil Tronvoll, was Ethiopian military officer Mengistu Hailemariam's pro-Soviet military regime which carried out a repression campaign against its opposition known as the Red Terror.

landscape, thus, Ethiopian women's varied perspectives are essential to understanding how the Second Italo-Ethiopian War is perceived and interpreted.

The Battle of Adwa is one of the most crucial events in the First Italo-Ethiopian War. Although this battle is not explicitly mentioned in the three selected texts analysed in this study, it is important to recognise that it was the battle that influenced the expansionist ambitions of Italy in what would later become the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Additionally, the Battle of Adwa provides foundational context that offers insight into what may have prompted Selassie's mobilisation order in 1935. It precipitated the events that led to the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and involved Empress Taytu, whose history as a revolutionary parallels one of the protagonists in *The Shadow King*. The tensions of the Battle of Adwa were induced by the newly established Italian parliament's ambitions to expand the "Italian sphere of influence" (Baer 1). Their ambitions included cementing Italy's role as an international power and seeking African regions that were unoccupied by their European counterparts. To bring these ambitions to fruition, Italy negotiated the Treaty of Wichale in Ethiopia to promote an economic partnership between both countries and to give "preference to Italians in trade and commerce with Ethiopia" (Jonas 73).[4] This treaty, written in Amharic and Italian, was the catalyst for Italo-Ethiopian tensions because it escalated into the Battle of Adwa (90). The Ethiopians misinterpreted its terms, and as a result, the Italians managed to make Ethiopia an Italian protectorate. This treaty is significant to this thesis because Empress Taytu, Emperor Menelik's wife, played a key role in emphasising the disparities between the two translations of the treaty. Fundamentally, the "abrogation of [the] Treaty by Menelik in February 1893 was highly instigated by [Taytu]" (Adugna 16). Regardless of her and Menelik's efforts to protect Ethiopia from annexation, the Italian army attacked Ethiopian troops at Adwa in 1896. The Italians had underestimated Ethiopia and were defeated by Emperor Menelik's soldiers. The defeat is ascribed to the Italian "landscape that was a broad plain in essence yet intricate in detail" (Jonas 173). The Italian defeat can also be credited to Empress Taytu's role as "an unrelenting advocate of total rupture with the Italians" (Bahru 117). She served a highly active political role, disregarded existing gender constraints, and helped the Ethiopians defeat Italian troops. Equally significant were the troops of women who fought

[4]According to Jonas, the treaty was written in Amharic and Italian. The Amharic version of the treaty was called The Treaty of Wichale and the Italian version was called The Treaty of Uccialli.

alongside Empress Taytu and others who served the fighters by supplying them with water, food and munitions (Adugna 7).

Emperor Menelik and Empress Taytu's marriage is pertinent to this thesis because despite their genders, the spouses were political counterparts before and during the period of the First Italo-Ethiopian War. Their marriage is "one of the great political unions of modern times" (Jonas 21), because both parties benefited from the relationship. Taytu's noble bloodline provided Menelik with wealth and political connections, while Taytu viewed their marriage as a "vehicle for her ambitions" (21). As a result, the couple often worked in collaboration to achieve common political goals. Her resourcefulness and Menelik's calculated disposition secured Ethiopia a victory during the Battle of Adwa. The Empress' legacy reveals that Ethiopian women have historically exercised their agency for the benefit of their homeland. Menelik and Taytu's collaborative efforts demonstrate that women are capable of undertaking roles traditionally designated to men. Later in this thesis, I draw parallels between Taytu and Aster, one of the central characters in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, for their shared resourcefulness and valour.

Another event that would later escalate into the Second Italo-Ethiopian War was the rise to power of Prime Minister Benito Mussolini, who took control of Italy in the 1920s. While he was in power, he harboured expansionist desires. He hoped to avenge Italy for its defeat during the Battle of Adwa and to find a "field on which to assert the power and prestige of fascism" (Baer 28). The Disarmament Conference in 1934 prompted numerous countries to build arms to prepare for World War Two (26). On 3 October 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia. Unlike the Italian's first attempt to defeat Ethiopia during the Battle of Adwa, Ethiopian troops were not as advanced as the Italians in their "organisation, military leadership, air power, arms, munitions, numerical strength, supplies and provisions, medical services, transportation and communication" (Adugna 21). After the invasion, Emperor Haile Selassie issued a mobilisation order that gave women the opportunity to serve as nurses and soldiers and partake in political and domestic wartime roles.

It is against this backdrop that I focus specifically on women's participation in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Recognising how women and war have been historically represented in Africa is essential because it will set the groundwork for understanding the subversive writing techniques used in the contemporary African texts to be analysed in this study. Feminist theorist Cynthia Enloe states that nationalisms are rooted in "masculinized memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinized hope" (qtd in McClintock 353). Thus, since war and nationalism

are intertwined, literature about war reinforces patriarchal structures. Mengiste has observed this phenomenon, asserting that in literature, the word 'man' is usually associated with characteristics of strength, wisdom, maturity and aggression (Mengiste "The Forgotten Women" para. 14). At the same time, women are often seen as passive, weak, and not as knowledgeable when it comes to matters of history and politics. War has traditionally been written by men and about men, and the portrayal of war in literature has historically focused "specifically on battle itself; gruesome injury and soldiers themselves" (Maja 8). In Africa, war is narrated to discourage the repetition of the mistakes of the war. These stories are often helpful to society in their tendencies of "mirroring society and criticising its pitfalls" (Nwahunanya 14). Some theorists suggest that war has been written to reveal the state of societies. Chimalum Nwankwo contends that in literature, war can reveal the "foundations of Africa's numerous perennial or still unfolding tragedies" (Nwankwo 13). As a result, assessing what has been written about the Second Italo-Ethiopian War could assist in our understanding of the current state of Ethiopia and the complexities of its more recent wars like the 2020 Tigray conflict.

More recently, a report published in 2023 by Amnesty International revealed that somewomen affected by the Tigray conflict have limited support during and after war. The report raises awareness about the girls and women who are being targeted in the ongoing Tigray conflict of 2020 and presents information that was collected from interviews with survivors of sexual assault. It defines rape as a crime against humanity and shows how wartime rape functions as a weapon intended to serve a broader political purpose. The report calls upon the government to make dedicated efforts to stop sexual violence and to the African Union (AU) to ensure that the matter is presented to its Peace & Security Council (PSC). The women in the Tigray conflict have little to no support to cope with the trauma of the war and there is limited coverage of their wartime experiences. This report presents information about women's experiences seldom documented in literature, therefore reinforcing the importance of the research carried out in this study.

Elsewhere but related, Zambian American writer Namwali Serpell questions how writers of the 21st century ought to write informatively about war. Serpell states that war is often depicted too beautifully, suggesting that it is written with grandeur and grace that feels like a mockery or an offense (Serpell para. 2). I agree with this contention and argue that any attempt to alter the portrayal of war by romanticising it undermines its emotional and historical resonance. Solely writing war with grandeur and grace is not a portrayal of ordinary life. In describing war, the

writer ought to acknowledge its atrocities. Accordingly, Serpell asks a question that this thesis ultimately unpacks. She asks, "and what on earth do you do with the women?" (2) because she recognises the underrepresentation of women in literary accounts of war. As a response, I suggest that while considering the role of women in war, writers should avoid neglecting the domestic roles of wives, nurses, maids and children, and like writers Maaza Mengiste, Aida Edemariam and Rebecca Fisseha, they should recognize that these roles are also important in influencing the outcome of war.

This thesis engages with the concept of agency. Saba Mahmood argues that the definition of agency extends beyond acts of overt resistance and defiance. She argues that "what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view may actually be a form of agency" (Mahmood 15). Using Mahmood's definition as an analytical lens reveals that women who occupy non-military roles as nurses, prostitutes and cooks in the selected texts of this study have agency, which can be defined as the capacity to act on their own behalf towards an intended social, economic or political outcome in war. Thus, the narration of women in diverse roles in my selected texts, whether military or non-military, subverts dominant patriarchal literary depictions of war because passivity and docility can demonstrate agency. I explore some questions relating to these women's agency in *The Shadow King*, I examine the question of bodily autonomy by asking how much of their bodies the women characters of *The Shadow King* control after assuming varying roles in war and how the war transforms a woman's body into a locus of constant negotiation. In light of the war's volatility, I question how desperation and patriotism affect the agency of the protagonist in *The Wife's Tale.* Moreover, the women characters in *Daughters of Silence* experience emotional and physical trauma. I interrogate how much of their suffering is displayed on their bodies and how each woman manages to exercise her agency in her respectively constrained social context.

This thesis explores three selected texts written in English using different literary genres. Although the texts are distinct in terms of literary genre, they all convey shared central themes about the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and the visibility of women. *The Shadow King* is a novel by Ethiopian-American writer Maaza Mengiste. The text centres on a range of powerful female characters including Aster, the dauntless wife of a military officer and her young servant named Hirut. Together, Aster and Hirut recruit and train an army of women to fight alongside their male counterparts in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. The second selected text is *The Wife's Tale; A*

Personal History, a memoir written by Ethiopian-Canadian writer Aida Edemariam. According to G. Thomas Couser, the memoir is a pervasive genre in contemporary literature but it is not well understood by the public and it is not often taught in classrooms (Causer 8). This study will engage critically with the memoir, *The Wife's Tale,* a text that has received limited scholarly engagement. The memoir centres on Edemariam's late grandmother Yetemegnu and chronicles her life from her experiences of childhood marriage and the Second Italo-Ethiopian War to the final years of her life. *Daughters of Silence* by Ethiopian-Canadian writer Rebecca Fisseha is the final selected text. The novel centres on the character Dessie, who upon returning to her homeland of Ethiopia from Canada, grapples with the family trauma perpetuated by her grandfather and patriarch Babbaye, who served as a former commander in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War.

1.2 Rationale of Study

The rationale behind undertaking this research stems from identifying the significant need for women's representation in Ethiopian literature and war-related discourses about Ethiopia. Despite women's participation in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, there is "no statistical data [...] available for women casualties of war even for the modern period of Ethiopian history" (Adugna 33). Although *The Shadow King, The Wife's Tale* and *Daughters of Silence* have distinguished themselves in the broader literary landscape by representing these silenced stories of women in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, *The Shadow King* has elicited more scholarly interest while *The Wife's Tale* and *Daughters of Silence* have yet to be critically explored in depth. Scholars have explored postcolonial memory and counterhistories as areas of scholarly focus concerning *The Shadow King*, but few studies focus on the writing techniques of contemporary Ethiopian women writers and the reconfiguration of wartime roles as a method of subversion. More concerning is that *The Wife's Tale* and *Daughters of Silence*, whose themes of war, trauma and identity match those of *The Shadow King*, have not received much critical attention beyond a few journalistic articles, YouTube videos and podcast episodes.

Literary scholarship examining *The Wife's Tale* is limited, with some articles written about Ethiopian women's history, memory, Ethiopia's Marxist history, Italian occupation, the Orthodox Church, and Edemariam's personal connection with the events of the text. There is also little attention paid to the text's form and how it affects the content. A few journalistic articles have been published about diasporic identity, silence and trauma but theoretical engagement with the

novel is limited. *Daughters of Silence* provides scholars with an opportunity to explore the aftermath of war, narrative style, the Ethiopian diaspora and its impact on an individual's identity.

The three texts I examine were chosen because they each place the experiences of Ethiopian women of different ages and socioeconomic backgrounds at their core. They can be effectively studied in tandem, given their shared focus on the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and their overlapping themes of identity, belonging, memory, family and transformation. As a result, where there is a gap in historical information about the Second Italo-Ethiopian War in one book, there is a mention of it in another. Additionally, the diasporic women writers whose texts are analysed in this study were selected on the basis of the distinctive perspectives they offer in their texts and the varied styles and genres the selected texts are presented. I have chosen to study two novels and a memoir to understand how different literary genres represent women's experiences of war. Furthermore, selecting the Second Italo-Ethiopian War for study allows me to delve deeper into the specifics of that war period. This study will be valuable to literary scholars because it explores underrepresented topics. My theoretical lens aims to highlight these unexplored parts of diasporic women's literature and offer a new perspective about war and women in Ethiopia while using the concepts of Florence Stratton, Oike Machiko, Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay, Meredith Turshen, Pauline Ada Uwakweh and Philip Dwyer.

1.3 Literature Review

There are a significant number of women's narratives about war in Africa as well as academic studies about their writings. This literature review shows that despite the growing popularity of these writings and the scholarly attention they have garnered on the continent, Ethiopian women's writings remain significantly underrepresented. Additionally, this review intends to reveal that the Second Italo-Ethiopian War is not often accounted for in existing literature, with the exception of a few texts, including the three selected texts of this thesis. Some of the most notable African women's novels about war include Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2004) Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda's Hidden War* (2007) and Akachi Adimora-Ezieigbo's *Roses and Bullets* (2011). There has been academic research related to war and written by African women and they include Zoe Norridge's "Sex as Synecdoche: Intimate Languages of Violence in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of Yellow Sun* and Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love*" (2012), Pauline Ada Uwakweh's

"Reconstructing Masculinity and Femininity in African War Narratives: The Youth in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2012) and Gorretti Kyomuhendo's *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War*".

In recent years, there has been an increase in literature written by women about women and war in Ethiopia. These contemporary texts include Mahtem Shiferraw's poetry collection *Your Body is War*, and Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze.* However, the Second Italo-Ethiopian War period remains unexplored in literary studies, and most of the existing literature emerges from disciplines outside of literary studies. The following literature review provides an overview of some of the research conducted in literary studies about women and war in Ethiopia.

As already mentioned above, Pauline Ada Uwakweh's *African Women Under Fire*, published in 2017, is located in the field of literary studies. It is a collection of essays focused on the themes of war and trauma in African literature. Uwakweh discusses the gender dynamics and violence that exist during and after war. It further discusses literary genre and the impact of violence on memory. The book criticises texts written by women writers, like Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* (1996), *Under the Tongue* (2002), *The Stone Virgins* (2003), and Leonora Miano's stories from *The Season of Shadow* (2013). My study is similarly committed to analysing the war stories of women and girls written by women writers.

Minale Adugna's journal article about women and war in Ethiopia explores the roles and experiences of women in the Battle of Adwa and the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Adugna's article is rooted in gender studies, history and literary analysis. In this critique, Adugna provides an empirical review of Ethiopian women's participation in warfare by interviewing elderly people, particularly those who have experienced either one of the Italian occupations of Ethiopia. Adugna found that women have contributed to war from as early as the 17th century by serving as fighters, singers, mediators, cooks, transporters of food, nurses and they have rallied men to enlist in the army. This article touches on the lack of health services for women during and after war. Adugna also indicates that there is a lack of statistical information about female casualties on the battlefields. As a result, Adugna suggests that women have created spaces for themselves in politics. An aspect of Adugna's research that deserves more attention from researchers is the idea

that many women died from air attacks, but their deaths were not recorded. Adugna's research addresses those gaps in recorded history.

Ogbu Chukwuka Nwachukwu, Oyeh O. Otu, and Onyekachi Eni collectively wrote a journal article in 2021 about how women are often marginalised in male-centred war discourses about Africa, particularly in Nigerian Civil War narratives. In this article, they analyse Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982), showing how women who occupy the margins have rejected colonial complicity. The study is located in literary studies, subaltern studies and postcolonial criticism. Like this thesis, Nwachukwu, Otu and Eni challenge androcentric depictions of war by analysing literature written by women and about women.

Nick Mdika Tembo uses postcolonial literary criticism and feminist literary theory in his dissertation to explore civil war narratives from Eastern Africa. Tembo analyses the concept of agency in Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. Drawing on María Pía Lara's theory of the illocutionary power of literature, Tembo suggests that literature provides an avenue for social justice. He contends that Mengiste depicts female characters who exercise their agency while being subjugated to traditional gender roles. He further contends that women's experiences in Eastern African war literature are represented in various ways. Furthermore, his dissertation gives an understanding of the interplay between gender and trauma. Like this thesis, Tembo's research identifies a pattern of female protagonists who yearn to do more for their homeland during conflict.

Francesca Baldwin writes about the legacies of women combatants. She relates women's roles in the 1974 civil war to their participation in the Tigray conflict of 2020. Baldwin suggests that female combatants are still expected to uphold a particular standard of femininity after the war. Those unable to maintain these standards face the risk of social sidelining.

In another journal article, Cressida Marcus presents an ethnographic study of the relationship between the Ethiopian Christian Orthodox Church and the trauma of war. I find this useful for my discussion since some of the protagonists in the texts I have selected identify with the Christian Orthodox Church. Marcus' article proposes that women used spirituality as a wartime tool to defend and seek protection for Ethiopia during wartime. This article suggests that women appeal to the Queen Mary, whom they consider to approximate God. Of significance to my thesis is that women can contribute to Ethiopian nationalism through spiritual means.

Although Marcus' work is based on the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict of 1998, it reveals the same dedication to religion that drives the protagonists of some of my selected texts.

In their research on female victims of war, Yematawork Wondie, Waganesh A Zeleke and Mekides Melesse use the phenomenological qualitative approach to assess wartime rape, which they suggest is often used as a tool of war to serve a much deeper systematic motive. After interviewing participants between the ages of 15 and 56, the article describes the social impact sexual assault has on the community at large. The scholars conclude that incidents of wartime rape create a stigma that alienates the victim and their family. This alienation causes displacement as the victim and her family are forced to relocate away from the shame. I find this article insightful because it includes interviewees of different ages. My thesis is similarly committed to analysing the stories of women and girls of different ages because their trajectories provide nuance to the study. It is also important that I discuss how women's lives can symbolise national events.

An article by Amanuel Gebru Woldearegay proposes that liberation journalism newspapers during the period of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War shared a tendency to cover the impacts of fascism on the rights of women. The article is about the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. It suggests that the struggle against fascism was led by a group of women feminists as torchbearers. These women worked for the *New Times* and *Ethiopia News* and often endeavoured to understand gendered wartime dichotomies like the roles of a victim and a perpetrator. While Marcus' article discusses women's contributions to war through religion, Woldearegar proposes that women defended their nations through journalism and solidarity.

Adem Chanie Ali, Seid Muhie Yimam, Martin Semmann, Abinew Ali Ayele and Chris Biemann are among the scholars who have analysed the participation of Ethiopian women in war. Their discussion focuses on the digital landscape of Ethiopia and how it affected women in Northern Ethiopia during the Tigray conflict that started in 2020. This article implies that there is a hostile online environment in Ethiopia that sidelines women and lacks empowering peacebuilding initiatives to combat the hostility. The article is rooted in computer science as an academic discipline. It emphasises women's participation in peacebuilding. This article questions whether digital literacy in contemporary Ethiopia improves women's wartime experiences and how social media has improved women's activism.

Beza Negewo-Oda interviewed 20 women who were former fighters of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in Addis Ababa. This thesis analyses the experiences of women who

served in the TPLF. Negewo-Oda's findings suggest that some interviewees felt neglected by the Ethiopian government in the aftermath of the civil war between the Derg government and the TPLF. Among the challenges they faced were aggression from soldiers of the Derg regime, hunger, unfavourable living conditions, and lack of healthcare services specific to their gender. Seventy per cent of the interviewees confessed that they had experienced challenges with reintegration as a result of their government's poorly planned reintegration strategies. Former combatants also commonly reported economic issues, such as difficulty in securing employment, and in their psychological well-being. In essence, Negewo-Oda proposes that the Ethiopian government should establish better strategies to ensure the easy integration of women into society. This study is grounded in the civil war instead of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, yet it reveals a common issue of a governing body's influence on women's wartime experience.

Negewo-Oda and Aaronette M. White examine the post-war identity of Ethiopian women fighters of the TPLF. They provide a feminist analysis of women's post-war experiences and the challenges of reintegrating into society after they have adopted gender-defying characteristics and androgynous behavioural patterns. The study uses Victor Turner's definition of liminality, the in-between stage of a rite of passage which signals a transition that results in an ambiguous identity. Of interest in this study is the assertion that the reintegration of an individual into society is complex and it can affect the family members of former fighters. This thesis also considers the experiences of women in the aftermath of conflict. It argues that the violence of war is perpetuated into the aftermath. My thesis does not explore the concept of liminality, although Negewo-Oda and White's research has revealed an area of research for future analysis about liminality and inter-generational trauma.

A book chapter by Margaux Herman focuses on the participation of Ethiopian women in various Ethiopian conflicts. Her study references Adugna's article mentioned above, and she lists a few of the most prominent women who are said to have served vital roles in the military. Herman's findings date back to the tenth century. It acknowledges the wartime contributions of Queen Gudit, Queen Ǝleni, Queen Säblä Wängel, Bati Dəl Wämbära and Empress Taytu. While most of these women are from Ethiopia's governing elite, this chapter will also acknowledge ordinary women who worked alongside them.

In conclusion, most of the critiques mentioned above examine the impact of war on women during the various periods of conflict in Ethiopia. These scholars show that during times of war,

women contributed in different ways by transcending traditional boundaries that often portray them as victims of war. My thesis is in line with some of their research, but I place a greater focus on the literary representations of women in selected narratives during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The primary argument of this study is that *The Shadow King, The Wife's Tale* and *Daughters of Silence* adopt revisionist frameworks to bring marginalised stories of women affected by war to the centre of the narration of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. I further propose that women have varying roles and experiences of war. This research belongs to the field of literary studies with a focus on feminist literary criticism, postcolonial trauma, gender theory, memory studies, and narrative theory as guiding frameworks. I draw on these theories to analyse the revisionist methods used to foreground the female voice and its growing agency in three postcolonial texts.

To begin, *The Shadow King* is analysed through war theory, gender theory and a feminist literary theory lens, specifically through Oike Machiko's gendered theory. In an article Machiko critiques the war narratives on the Biafra War, a civil war in Nigeria which began in the 1960s, for neglecting texts authored by women. Machiko develops the claim further by saying that academic engagement with women's texts is limited, and that women writers are to blame for the neglect of texts related to the Biafra War because "instead of describing terrible battlefields or the dirty politics behind them, [women writers] tend to delineate the home front and familiar everyday life in a plain, down-to-earth style" (60). Machiko's emphasis on narrative style provides this thesis with a framework to analyse how narrative techniques are used in *The Shadow King, The Wife's Tale* and *Daughters of Silence*.

I will also draw on feminist theorist Florence Stratton's concepts of inversion and appropriation, showing that Mengiste creates complex female characters in *The Shadow King* by reversing the characters' gender roles. This thesis draws on gender and feminist theorists Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay and Meredith Turshen's idea that women occupy various roles in war, such as cooks, nurses, soldiers, strategists, advisors, translators, intelligence officers, "labourers for the war effort, national political actors, refugees, and survivors of violence" (Meintjes et al., 64). Their idea is published in their book, *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation* (2001)

and it applies to my research because it acknowledges that war is experienced differently by the women who endure it.

In addition, this study analyses *The Wife's Tale* through the lens of trauma and war theory by drawing from Uwakweh's *African Women Under Fire: Literary Discourses in War and Conflict* (2017). Her research is about trauma, women and war, particularly how the writer's own trauma and choice of literary genre affect the portrayal of history and women's stories. Uwakweh's theory allows for a better understanding of how the history behind *The Wife's Tale* is understood by its reader. In *African Women Under Fire*, Uwakweh argues that there is a stark difference between a narrative written by an author who writes about war through lived experience and an author who writes through journalistic sources. Similarly, Irene Visser's trauma theory suggests that "to experience trauma vicariously is to become a secondary victim" (Visser 272). These two theories operate in tandem to better understand the nature of Edemariam and Yetemegnu's familial relationship in *The Wife's Tale.*

The study also analyses *The Wife's Tale* through the lens of historian Philip Dwyer's narrative theory. In *The War Memoir in History and Literature* (2017), Dwyer argues that "the memoir often falls between two worlds, between truth and fiction, between primary and secondary source, between reality and imagination" (Dwyer 4). Analysing this memoir through Dwyer's narrative theory lens affirms the importance of recognising that the author plays a pivotal role in framing the text. Furthermore, this thesis falls under the domain of war theory and employs Meintjes, Pillay, and Turshen's research on the transformative nature of war in *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation* (2001) to analyse *The Wife's Tale*. These three theorists argue that war offers women an opportunity to transform their lives (Meintjes et al., 7). War theory as a theoretical lens in the context of *The Wife's Tale* allows for a better understanding of how conflict affects Yetemegnu's identity. It also allows for an understanding of the systematic forces that shape women's identities during wartime.

Nick Mdika Tembo's "Trauma in Selected Eastern African Fiction and Life Writing on Civil Wars", published in 2017 argues that in literature, a man's trauma often manifests in the form of violence when his sense of masculinity is threatened (Tembo 134). Although this trauma theory focuses on men, it provides a good foundation to analyse Dessie's grandfather Babbaye's traumatic influence on his female descendants. Tembo's argument sheds light on how silent voices are represented in literature and how the characters experience trauma. The idea of a man's trauma

affecting women's experiences of war parallels Meintjes, Pillay, Turshen's ideas that similarly, "violence against women is a system in itself and has to be seen in its entirety. It permeates every facet of society and is expressed socially, economically, politically, culturally and professionally. Looking at the multiple manifestations of violence, we recognise that there is no aftermath for women" (Meintjes et al., 42). They argue that in the aftermath of war, there is social, political, cultural and work-related violence against women because men often view discipline as a necessary measure to reclaim power lost during the war. In the context of *Daughters of Silence*, trauma theory serves as a lens to understand the patriarchal forces and struggles that act against women during war.

Mary E. Modupe Kolawole argues that a culture of silence has positioned men in the forefront and women's stories at the sidelines in *Womanism and African Consciousness* (1997). Although the thesis offers limited engagement with Kolawole's research, it informs the conceptual framework of this study. Kolawole argues that there is a culture of silence in African literature and that women's visibility is an irregularity and a threat to the status quo. I focus on the many symbolic forms silence can take in *Daughters of Silence*.

Irene d'Almeida is another gender theorist who shaped my analysis of *Daughters of Silence.* D'Almeida analyses the "culture of silence" in women's autobiographical writing through a Francophone lens in *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*, published in 1994. She discusses the different existing systems of oppression of women across generations (d'Almeida 253). The narration of Edemariam's grandmother's life in *The Wife's Tale* reveals the many systems of oppression imposed on her from childhood to adulthood and through different national conflicts in her lifetime. In addition, d'Almeida claims that contemporary women writers use rituals and tradition as a part of the newly imagined societies they have established in their narratives (199). She argues that contemporary women writers tend to defy traditional ways of writing stories as a form of subversion. In my analysis, I argue that writers like Mengiste, Edemariam and Fisseha defy traditional ways of writing about trauma through different literary genres and writing methods such as inversion, appropriation and vicarious writing.

Lastly, the work of trauma theorist Cathy Caruth in the book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* informed my analysis of *Daughters of Silence.* Caruth argues that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in the individual's past" (Caruth, 17), and that it "produces a double paradox in consciousness and language" (4). Caruth implies

that an individual can be affected by trauma without their knowledge, and this can affect the victim's thoughts and expression. Caruth's theory explains the culture of silence that society imposes on women. Women are often negatively affected by the memory of traumatic events in the aftermath of war and find it challenging to express themselves because of it.

1.5 Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One which is the introduction, begins with an outline of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and the events leading up to it. It includes information about the Battle of Adwa and Empress Taytu's impact on Ethiopian history. The chapter reflects on how war and women were previously written in Africa. I address the merits of narrating history through different literary genres, as two texts selected for this thesis are fictional and non-fictional. I also expound on my motivations for studying Ethiopian women during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. The chapter mentions Western and African trauma, gender, and feminist theories to put the topics of women, silence and war into perspective. Among the theorists noted are Meintjes, Pillay, Turshen, d'Almeida and Caruth. I also acknowledge existing scholarly perspectives about Ethiopian women and war.

Chapter Two focuses on*The Shadow King* by Mengiste. This chapter begins with an epigraph by Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay and Meredith Turshen which lays the groundwork for the chapter analysis. The three theorists assert that the relations between men and women shift during war. Their assertion ties into the chapter analysis, which examines how the roles of the female characters in *The Shadow King* shift during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. I also draw on Florence Stratton's concept of inversion to explore these shifting gender roles. It later assesses the appropriation technique used in the novel to challenge traditional gender norms and how women still experience gender inequalities despite their shifting roles.

Chapter Three is based on Edemariam's *The Wife's Tale,* which is a non-fiction text. This chapter analyses how a memoir depicts a woman's wartime experiences. It includes an epigraph by Edemariam, where she states that her process of memoir writing is reliant on a fiction writer's skills. It references Philip Dwyer's argument, which contends that memoir writing often falls between truth and fiction. The chapter details Edemariam's genre-defying writing methods and how these methods affect the reader's interpretation of Edemariam's grandmother's history. I later examine the functionality of Edemariam's vicarious writing in relation to Cathy Caruth and Judith Lewis Herman's trauma theories. They argue that trauma can be experienced vicariously and

across generations. The chapter ends with an in-depth analysis of how war transforms Edemariam's grandmother's life.

Chapter Four is concerned with women's experiences in the aftermath of war. It is based on Fisseha's *Daughters of Silence*. The first part of the chapter proposes that the trauma of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War is carried across generations from the family patriarch, a former commander of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, to his female descendants. It introduces Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen's concept of violence as a system used to uphold discipline in the aftermath of war. This chapter also draws on Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's concept of trauma reenactment, which proposes that recreating wartime violence is common in contemporary African societies. It considers Nick Tembo and Grace Musila's ideas about trauma and masculinity to make sense of the concept of trauma reenactment. The next part of the chapter explores the interplay between collective memory and reconciliation. It questions the possibility of reconciliation when women are afflicted with inter-generational trauma and memories of sexual violence. This chapter briefly mentions the Ethiopian Reconciliation Commission to understand conflict resolution efforts within a smaller family structure. It also considers the consequences of invisible trauma by analysing the symbolic meaning of the protagonists' physical scars.

Chapter Five is the conclusion. It reflects on the reasons I initially set out to conduct this research. The chapter mentions the objectives I had contemplated while planning the thesis. It includes a discussion of these objectives in relation to the outcomes of my exploration. The conclusion revisits the main arguments of each chapter and synthesises each of the key points I have made in the analysis. As a result, I answer the following questions: are women capable of making their own choices when they are subjugated or desperate? What kind of wartime roles do their choices create? How effective is the genre of fiction in the process of narrating a woman's history? What happens to women in the aftermath of war? Do the struggles and benefits of war endure in the post-war period? The chapter ends with an explanation of the limitations of my thesis. I further use what I have synthesised to recommend focus areas for future researchers.

Chapter Two: The Inversion and Appropriation of Women's Roles in Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King*

"As women and men are drawn into war, the relations between them inevitably shift. Women become soldiers, labourers for the war effort, national political actors, refugees, and survivors of violence, assuming roles previously reserved for men" (Sheila Meintjes et al., 64)

2.1.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I outlined the events of the Second-Italo Ethiopian War. The chapter contains a brief overview of the Ethiopian literary landscape and the revisionist women writers emerging from it. I asserted that Ethiopian women's wartime experiences have received limited literary attention. In this chapter, I examine women's shifting roles in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*. The epigraph above is a statement by Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen. They argue that war offers women the opportunity to assume roles traditionally reserved for men. Their contention applies to the women in *The Shadow King* because their roles change to stereotypically male-oriented roles. Equally, men's roles change to stereotypically female-oriented roles. I analyse these shifts through an application of Florence Stratton's theories of inversion and appropriation. This chapter is divided into five sections, the first and last are the introduction and conclusion. The second section explores how the inversion method is applied in the text. The third section investigates how Mengiste uses appropriation to subvert a male-dominated literary tradition. Additionally, the fourth section examines the practicality of the inversion method when women continue to contend with the gender-related challenges after the shift.

Novelist, essayist and photographer Maaza Mengiste was born in "Addis Ababa in 1971, just a few years before the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie" (Wachtel para. 1). She moved out of her country of origin because of the conflict of the 1974 revolution to live in Nigeria, Kenya and ultimately, the United States (para. 1). Incidentally, Mengiste's maternal uncles were "all victims of the revolution" ("A Brief Biography" para. 2). Her great-grandmother was a frontline fighter in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935 (East para. 9). Mengiste has received an MFA in Creative Writing from New York University and she is a Fulbright Scholar. She works in the MFA in Creative Writing & Literary Translation programme at Queens College in New York City (Mengiste, "Website Biography" para. 1). Mengiste was awarded the 2021 Edgar Award for the short story "Dust, Ash, Flight" (para. 2). She has since received fellowships like the Guggenheim

Fellowship, the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) Artists-in-Berlin Fellowship, and the Cullman Centre for Scholars and Writers Fellowship (2).

Her debut novel, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* (2010), was listed as one of *The Guardian*'s 10 best contemporary African books. It explores the themes of history, nationhood, and family. While *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* is a sequel to *The Shadow King,* the novels are standalone stories. *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* is set during the 1974 revolution and centres around Doctor Hailu and his family. Mengiste's two texts feature Hailu as a recurring character. In *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, Hailu's youngest son and college student, Dawit, participates in an underground resistance movement against his family's wishes. The novel touches on the violent rallies of the revolution. It highlights significant moments in Ethiopian history: the end of Haile Selassie's six-decade rule, the Derg, and the Red Terror. [5]

The Shadow King was shortlisted for the 2020 Booker prize and was a finalist for the LA Times Book Prize for Fiction in the same year (Wachtel para. 1). It shares the themes of history, family, nationhood and war with *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. The novel is set in Addis Ababa during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and centres around five female characters of different social standings named Hirut, Aster, Fifi and the cook. Aster is the wife of Kidane, who grieves for her dead son. Her high social standing as the wife of an army leader gives her economic power over many of the female characters and her husband's objections to women's participation in combat often interfere with her ambitions of taking up arms alongside the women she recruits to fight in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Among these women is Hirut, who struggles to establish a good relationship with her employers, Kidane and Aster. This relationship is damaged by three factors: Kidane's sexual misconduct towards Hirut, Aster's resentment towards Hirut, and Aster and Kidane's confiscation of her father's rifle. The rifle is called the Wujigra and was a gift from Hirut's deceased father. Aster searches for her own prized possession, a necklace gifted to her by her husband. Hirut steals it and Aster beats her and further impairs their complicated relationship. Additionally, Hirut is not the only servant in discord with her employers. An unnamed cook longs for emancipation after years of being forcibly kept as a servant in Aster's home. Another female character named Fifi is introduced as Ferres and Faven. She utilises her sway as a prostitute to spy on Italian army leader Colonel Carlo Fucelli. Apart from the cook, Fifi's conspiratorial deeds

[5] The Red Terror of 1918 was a campaign where thousands of citizens and opponents of the Derg were intimidated or killed.

make her one of the most mysterious characters in the novel. On the other hand, male character Ettore is an Italian photographer who takes propagandistic photographs for Italy. Lastly, another male character, Minim is Emperor Haile Selassie's doppelganger and body double. The novel is set in Addis Ababa. Despite taking place in the 1930s, *The Shadow King* begins in 1974 with a prologue titled 'Waiting' and ends with an epilogue set in the same year titled 'Reunions'. It is divided into three books: Book 1 'Invasion', Book 2 'Resistance' and Book 3 'Returns'. Each book is representative of the most significant stages of war.

2.1.2 Literature review

Annie Gagiano has analysed five East African women's novels, all of which she calls modern national epics. The novels include Nadifa Mohamed's *The Orchard of Lost Souls*, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Dust*, Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi's *Kintu*, Serpell's *The Old Drift* and Mengiste's *The Shadow King.* According to Gagiano, each novel's narration of history and current affairs without romanticisation makes it a national epic. She implies that while Mengiste's book is fictional, it represents the values and lives of the Ethiopian public. Secondly, Gagiano contends that Mengiste uses her literary authority to place Africans at the centre of the story. This chapter of my thesis explores the literary authority Gagiano has addressed. However, I interpret Mengiste's literary authority as her adoption of unprecedented writing techniques to give Ethiopian women recognition. In my view, her skilful use of literary authority allows her to capture underrepresented aspects of Ethiopian history.

In a separate study, Gagiano discusses the same novel, stating that Mengiste's duty is to allow women to be heard, remembered and mourned during and after war. Gagiano states that Mengiste undertakes this duty movingly and shockingly, without hiding or limiting the inherent horrors of war and without exclusively aligning the text with male heroism and leadership.

Joseph Kwanya wrote a dissertation about myth and counterfactuality in diasporic African women's novels, including Mengiste's text *The Shadow King*. Kwanya joins the conversation by contesting history told from a colonial perspective. He further suggests that the text challenges history found in dominant, male-authored texts. My thesis similarly suggests that *The Shadow King* challenges masculinist narratives about the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Kwanya states that Mengiste's use of writing techniques presents an alternative version of history. Both Kwanya's

dissertation and my thesis suggest that despite Mengiste's narrative being rooted in fiction, it aims to subvert dominant histories by imagining an alternate reality.

Building on his earlier work in his dissertation, Joseph Kwanya expands his research through a journal article about *The Shadow King* specifically focusing on how contemporary African female writers like Mengiste engage with the genre of counterfactual fiction differently by retelling the events of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Kwanya draws on the theories of counterfactuals and disnarration to suggest that instead of changing historical events, Mengiste offers an alternative version that foregrounds women's various experiences. The article shows how the same history that Mengiste reimagines can often be mythologised and influenced by selective memory.

Mara Mattoscio wrote a comparative analysis of *The Shadow King* and Zoya Barontini's *Chronicles from the Dust.* Mattoscio's critique aligns with an idea that Kwanya's dissertation and my thesis share. This idea is that Mengiste's novel provides a new version of historical events. However, while Kwanya's critique emerges from a feminist counterfactual lens, Mattoscio's critique is written from a decolonial lens and pertains to Italian colonial history. More importantly, Mattoschio's research on Italian history demonstrates that both Italian and Ethiopian history matter in the narration of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. In my thesis introduction, I have outlined the conflicts in Ethiopian history. Mattoscio's research shows that both Ethiopia and Italy have a history of conflicts that have affected women in various ways.

Noreen Kane analyses inter-generational trauma theory in a journal article based on *The Shadow King.* Kane examines how Michael Rothberg's theory of 'complex implication' and Mihaela Mihai's notion of 'impure resistance' function in Mengiste's text. This includes an exploration of how responsible a person is in past injustices and how victimhood can be acquired across generations.

Furthermore, Chrispin Mkumba examines the notion of heroism. *The Shadow King* is one of two of Mkumba's texts of analysis. Mkumba refers to Frantz Fanon and Marxian theories of alienation to analyse overlooked characters in Mengiste's text. Mkumba suggests that behind a woman's heroic image are signs of alienation. A key point to highlight in Mkumba's critique is

the relationship between subjugation and alienation, which offers insight into why most of the marginalised women in Mengiste's novel are complex characters.

Additionally, Brandon Breen analyses Mengiste's novel alongside Gabriella Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle*. Breen pays attention to the notion of agency and how it functions in Mengiste's text. The analysis reveals the similarities of texts written by diasporic Ethiopian writers like Mengiste and Ghermandi which include literary themes and culture. Similarly, this thesis uses texts written by diasporic Ethiopian writers on account of their shared themes and cultural practices.

Overall, the existing critique of *The Shadow King* is generally concerned with examining Mengiste's distinctive writing style, her literary authority and the impact of the history she re-imagines. More importantly, there is an evident interest in the analysis of the woman soldier as a literary irregularity. In light of these insights, I propose that scholars and academics should consider the roles of women who are not actively involved on the battlefield as vital parts of the war. More critique like Mattoscio and Breen's research about Italian characters and Italy's colonial past would be valuable because available studies about the novel commonly prioritise the analysis of the novel's Ethiopian characters. These additions to existing research would bolster my argument that women's roles are multifaceted, and it would broaden the scope of my research topic.

2.1.3 Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework draws from Oike Machiko's theorisation about women's war narratives. While Machiko's research focuses on the Biafra War and the Nigerian literature landscape, I am generally drawn to the way she theorises the neglect of war literature authored by women. Machiko found that a limited number of critics have examined the Biafra War through a feminist perspective. She holds critics and women writers responsible for the neglect stating that "the reason why few 'authentic' works about war are written by women is that instead of describing terrible battlefields or the dirty politics behind them, they tend to delineate the home front and familiar everyday life in a plain, down-to-earth style, using their own experiences, as exemplified in *Never Again* by Flora Nwapa" (Machiko 60). Since the publication of Machiko's research in 2008, waves of new African writers and critics have written about war from a woman's perspective. As a result, I consider the applicability of Machiko's claims in an Ethiopian literature

context. While Machiko has raised questions about textual authenticity in the above quote, this study exclusively focuses on elements of women's literature Machiko identifies as responsible for the scholarly neglect. Machiko's theory is important because the neglect of critiques of female-authored war literature and the assumption that women war writers use a down-to-earth writing style implies that women lack depth and that their roles, experiences and perceptions of war are not multifaceted.

I propose that contemporary Ethiopian women writers exercise their literary authority to narrate war without a modesty in writing style. I also argue that their work is not limited to women characters' domestic lives. Rather, the women in *The Shadow King* have varied roles and experiences of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. I further examine the application of the inversion and appropriation technique to refute claims that women writers' narration of war lacks depth. While Mengiste's *The Shadow King* partly aligns with the claim that women's literature focuses on familiar everyday life, the novel goes further to depict women characters as integral parts of Ethiopian politics. Mengiste's inversion of male and female character roles portrays women's wartime roles as multifaceted, versatile and pertinent to Ethiopian national history. In the following analysis of *The Shadow King*, I draw from Stratton's ideas of the inversion and appropriation techniques as theoretical modes to reveal women's varied wartime roles. I also explore how Mengiste's unique writing style challenges and subverts dominant patriarchal war ideologies.

2.2 Inversion of Character Roles

This section of the chapter examines the reversal of gender roles as a subversive technique. Theorist Florence Stratton defines inversion as a "subversive manoeuvre" that switches the gender roles of characters with the intention of disrupting an already-established patriarchal order (Stratton 62). I use Stratton's definition of inversion to analyse the roles of characters Hirut, Aster, Fifi and the cook. According to Stratton, an author's inversion of gender roles "exposes the sexist bias of the male literary tradition and creates space for the female subject" (62). It involves an overturning "which brings low what was high" (Dollimore 190) and is applied by repositioning two binaries. These binaries are not limited to gender, since the contradictory qualities of good and evil and subject and object are also subject to inversion (Stratton 62). In *The Shadow King*, the inversion of character roles is apparent because the female characters are first introduced in

stereotypically domestic and feminine roles and later step into stereotypically male-oriented roles. I argue that *The Shadow King* places women, who traditionally occupy the peripheries, at the forefront of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. The central argument of this section upholds Stratton's claim that the reversal of roles exposes gender bias in the literary tradition. In contrast, Stratton addresses the limitations of the inversion technique and states that placing a male character in a marginalised role, for example, perpetuates oppressive structures the writer attempts to eradicate (Dollimore 190). The intention for analysing this technique is not to exalt stereotypically male-oriented roles and disparage stereotypically female-oriented roles. Rather, I claim that women can occupy any kind of role regardless of gender stereotypes.

The first example of inversion I discuss is one where Aster is assigned the role of a skilled fighter while her husband and army leader Kidane is portrayed as her subordinate. Kidane is portrayed as a less skilled fighter who is less acquainted with violence while Aster is portrayed as someone who has understood violence during her lifetime (Mengiste 122). This inversion is revealed when Kidane's army prepares for war. In a conversation with Aster, Kidane grows displeased with her army of women, stating that they are encroaching upon male affairs by asking to fight on the front lines. Kidane's army criticise Aster's ambitions and state that "his wife has come in and changed the way things have always been done when men go to war" (122). What Kidane says to Aster thereafter exposes an underlying reality about Aster's knowledge of violence and her ability to withstand and confront it. Kidane defends his army and tells Aster that she cannot fight in the battle, as she has never done so before, nor was she ever trained for it. He tells her that she knows nothing of what it takes to withstand violence on the human body. As a result, he thinks to himself:

> He wants to remind her she has never been in a war. She was not raised to anticipate assaults. She was not taught from an early age about the body's ability to withstand force. She did not learn how to manoeuvre in the dark, through hills and rough mountains, all in the guise of boyhood games. She was instructed on how to shoot, yes, but what does she know about what to do if attacked? (122)

Above is a statement made by Kidane. It is ironic because it conjures up the image of a younger Aster being sexually assaulted by a much older Kidane (48). As a child, Aster is trained by the

cook to withstand the sexual violence inflicted on her body by Kidane. He assumes that Aster was not raised to anticipate assaults, but the cook would tell her to "lie down on the bed and open [her] legs and close her eyes" in anticipation of Kidane's assault. While preparing Aster for the assault, the cook would repeatedly inform her that "there is no way out but through it" (48). The irony is that Aster knows violence and pain, although she understands it in the context of sexual assault. The key difference is that Kidane's gender affords him the title of a fighter. There is a reversal of a gender order because although Kidane is a man introduced as a much superior army leader, the title of a fighter seems misplaced, and he does not hold power over Aster.

Moreover, there is an inversion of Aster, who assumes the stereotypically male-oriented role of an aggressive warrior and Kidane who occupies the role of a passive observer. Bethke Elshtain argues that war literature depicts men as aviators of the nation's violence, while women are stereotypically portrayed as the victim in hiding, pacifist, nurturer, and the collective "other" to the male warrior" (Elshtain 25). In contrast, Mengiste challenges this established gender order by making Aster the instigator of violence in her home. When Aster finds her hidden possessions buried under the soil in her yard, she unhooks Kidane's rarely used horsewhip hanging "on a crooked nail on the side of the building" (Mengiste 44) and severely assaults Hirut with it. In this description, there is an indication that the horse whip belongs to Kidane and that it is rarely used. This implies that Kidane is a bystander in the dispute and Aster is the central participant in an act of violence. Moreover, the idea that Aster opts to whip Hirut with a horsewhip suggests that she views her servants as animals. It is important to mention this imagery because the text often uses horses and horse-related objects to highlight Aster's role as a warrior. Later in this analysis, I discuss the image of Aster who mounts a horse and embodies the image of a warrior because of it. Historically, Ethiopia had a wartime culture of using horses to transport people and goods. I view this motif to emphasise Aster's warrior spirit and aggression. Her warrior spirit and aggression are stereotypically assigned to male characters.

On a different occasion, Aster inherits her father's role of an instigator of violence. An adult Aster inflicts violence on Hirut in the same way her father had unleashed violence on the cook for attempting to escape from their home years before. During the early years of her life, Aster and the cook formulate a plan to escape Aster's family home. This escape plan is established to free Aster from a potential marriage to Kidane and to free the cook from servitude. When Aster's father catches the cook fleeing, he beats her in the same way an adult Aster beats Hirut.

He drags the cook "by her hair down the road in the night" (98). A young Aster hears the cook crying out for help and chooses to ignore her. Later in her life, Aster beats Hirut until Hirut begs for mercy. While searching for a necklace she received as a gift from Kidane, Aster storms into the servants' quarters and learns that Hirut has buried her possessions in the backyard. Enraged, Aster "grabs Hirut by her hair and slaps her hard across the face" (43) in the same way her father dragged the cook by her hair. Hirut's body lies on the soil, and she slumps in the same way the cook's body had previously folded into the soil. Aster takes on the role of the disciplinarian to match her father by mimicking the way he inflicts violence on a woman's body. She enforces discipline in the same way her father used to, and she waits for a cry for mercy to match the cook's beating. The inversion of Aster and her father's gender roles challenges the notion that women are always victims of violence. It reveals that the role of an instigator of violence is not restricted to a particular gender. Furthermore, the confrontation between Aster and Hirut demonstrates how behavioural patterns can be mimicked by someone of different gender through social conditioning. After examining the depiction of Aster as an instigator of violence, I can infer that women are capable of perpetuating violent and patriarchal ideologies in the same way that men can.

In addition, characters of all genders say the phrase "there is no way out but through it" (48) at different points in the novel. The repetition of the saying by both men and women implies that the role of victimhood is not limited to women and can be occupied by men. The phrase signifies victimhood because it is uttered when each character is faced with adversity. It is said with the intention of encouraging acceptance and endurance in difficult circumstances. It is first used by a young Aster when Kidane sexually assaults her. Before the assault, a young Aster and the cook wait outside Kidane's bedroom door. In that moment, Aster thinks that "there is no way but through it, because there is nothing else to do, because there has never been anything left to do but walk where she is supposed to walk" (47). The same phrase is used to describe Italian-Jewish photographer Etorre's sentiments when he receives a telegram from Italy. Ettore is in fear of the potential consequences of his insubordination and tells himself that "there is no way but forward" (374). Similarly, before battle with Ethiopia, Colonel Fucelli encourages his army and tells them that "there is no way but through it. There is no escape but forward" (392). Furthermore, Hirut says it to herself on the battlefield as Beniam falls to his knees before her. Hirut sees the blood-soaked soil and the several dying women around her and comforts herself by saying that there is "no way but through it, there is no escape but to run toward battle, run toward the men, run toward

those planes without thought" (161). The idea that the phrase is used in the same way by Aster, Colonel Fucelli, Etorre and Hirut implies that victimhood is not a female-oriented role. Both genders can find themselves in the position of a victim at any given time. In the examples I have provided, each character rewords the phrase to suit their context, but the sentiment of resilience and the role of victim is unchanged. The fundamental idea from this inversion is that despite the characters' differences of gender and nationality they all yearn for security in the face of conflict and are all capable of the same feelings.

Similarly, there is inversion concerning the role of a person affected by sexual assault. During the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, "more than 90% of the Italian soldiers in Ethiopia had no families, and the shortage of Italian women had in turn led to uncontrolled sexual relations with Ethiopian women in the form of concubinage, rape and prostitution" (Sbacci 171-72). As a result, many women have historically been associated with the wartime role of victims of rape and violation. In Mengiste's text, the roles are reversed. There is an incident of assault inflicted on Italian army leader Fucelli, when the Ethiopian army attacks the Italians at camp. Seifu violates Fucelli with a knife. Fucelli's "belt is loosened, his trousers unbuttoned, his undershorts yanked down" (Mengiste 250). The knife "glides down the tender crease of his pubis…toward his anus" (250). A key factor in this incident is that Fucelli is described in a manner that is uncharacteristic to his typically commanding and unperturbed front. Firstly, Fucelli trembles and begs "Please. Please. Aiutami (help me)" (250). Moreover, his skin is described as "soft meat" (250) to emphasise his vulnerability. I view this inversion as a subversive method because the reversal reveals that both men and women are susceptible to wartime sexual assault and violation. After the incident, Fucelli's army spreads a rumour that he wears two belts, and he hardly sleeps at night due to paranoia (266). This incident also demonstrates how abruptly wartime roles can shift.

To expand upon the previous point, I discuss a similar case of inversion which occurs when Hirut is sexually assaulted by Kidane. Amid the attack, Hirut embodies the composure that Kidane lacks. Rather than panicking, she yawns and:

> It is both absurd and luxurious. A shock and a relief. It is a fist recoiling and expanding inside her body, a long-extended breath singed and shaped by hate. He gasps as if stumbling. As if he has just broken and is now buckling in half. As if that open mouth and that bubble of air have begun to undo him. Hirut sees his

> surprise. Sees the way it traces a path across his eyes. He is so startled that his mouth sags open and his breathing stops until all he can do is gasp again […] she shuts her mouth and opens it again. It is a loaded gun that she waves in front of him. He cannot escape the indifference stamped across her face, and Hirut refuses to look away. (225)

In the quote above, Hirut occupies the position of a victim of sexual assault, yet she wields the composure and control that her abuser Kidane is meant to embody as a perpetrator. The situation is described to be both "absurd and luxurious, a shock and a relief" (225) to show the two contradictory reactions her indifference induces. When Hirut shows indifference during the assault, Kidane reacts with a gasp. He is shocked, disoriented and plays the victim despite being the perpetrator. Inversely, Hirut plays the role of the perpetrator. This is emphasised in the use of a metaphor likening her indifference to a loaded gun she waves around to taunt a startled Kidane. The loaded gun symbolises Hirut's freedom to switch roles to improve her adverse experiences of war. When Hirut yawns, Kidane stumbles "as if that open mouth and that bubble of air have begun to undo him" (225). The use of the verb 'undo' indicates a reversal and undoing of his usual role of aggressor. This inversion is subversive because Hirut has demonstrated the ease with which she can switch roles as a coping mechanism. Her ability to gain dominance in circumstances meant to subjugate her demonstrates that a woman's agency can be cultivated in the course of a conflict.

Along with this is the inversion of Hirut and Minim's roles, Minim is introduced as a slightly built military recruit whose modesty and delicacy contrast Hirut's assertiveness and physical prowess. At the sight of Minim, Kidane states that the recruit was never built for war but is a good musician. Nonetheless, Kidane and Hirut consider making him Emperor Haile Selassie's body double, but Aster disapproves and points out Minim's inadequacies. She asks, "what does he know? He's not even a soldier [...] And you won't let the women fight?" (232). Aster's reaction to Minim as a potential choice for a body double suggests that she considers Minim to be unfit to stand in for the emperor. Minim's delicacy is further emphasised by the diction used to describe his physical appearance, his actions and his disposition. The words used are delicate, cradles, whisper, soft-spoken, slender, bony elegance, fragile (235). When Minim stands in front of a crowd of the emperor's supporters, he is "uncomfortable, embarrassed, his head down" (240). In contrast, Hirut's disposition is described as disciplined with "a military rigidity that could rival

any soldier's" (340). When she notices Minim's discomfort, she encourages him and tells him: "You're ok" (231), "Up. Head up" (240), "We have to follow orders. We are soldiers" (236). Minim is Hirut's foil and his delicacy highlights Hirut's strength. The stark differences of the two characters' dispositions bring depth to Hirut's role as a disciplined and competent guard. This counts as inversion because a woman is stereotypically described as delicate and fragile, while a man is often attributed the qualities of rigidity and discipline.

Furthermore, the title *The Shadow King* can be interpreted as an inversion, particularly in the process of ascertaining which character in the novel may serve as the real shadow king. It is no secret that the male character Minim is created to serve as the replacement of Emperor Haile Selassie who fled into exile after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. For this reason, Minim may be considered the real shadow king because he appears to be the emperor in the eyes of the enemy. When Hirut first realises Minim's likeness to the emperor, she suggests that "he is someone she knows. Known and unknown" (230). She informs Ethiopian soldier Aklilu that Minim looks like "Jan Hoy, like the emperor" and Minim becomes the emperor's body double thereafter (231). Similarly, the title alludes to Emperor Selassie himself, who Mengiste describes to be deserving of the name, as "he is also in a darker sense a king who lives in the shadows" because he fled into exile (Mhute 6). In contrast, it is reasonable to assert that the role of the real shadow king is occupied by the women of the novel, who have joined together to fight against Italian occupation but have remained in the shadows of history. The word 'shadow' in the title alludes to that which is hidden or out of plain sight. When an individual is in another person's shadow, they are often said to be less notable and secondary. During the invasion of Ethiopia in the text, close to 50 women travel through the hills and follow Kidane's army to "carry the wounded, bury the dead and feed Kidane's army" (Mengiste 95). Essentially, these women keep Kidane's army functional and serve as reinforcements later in the fight against Italian soldiers. Although the title is open-ended, the etymology of the word 'king' points to its as gendered undertone. The acknowledgement of women as the true shadow kings of the Second Italo-Ethiopian war is an inversion of roles because it disrupts an already-established patriarchal order that considers the word 'king' to be exclusive to men.

Inversion occurs before Hirut is captured by the Italian army when Hirut and the Italian male soldiers' roles are reversed. While on the battlefield, a lone Hirut approaches Ettore, but before she is captured, her approaching figure is described as elevated and dominant over her male

counterparts. Firstly, "a pool of light heralds her descent" (309). It is an indication that the image of Hirut advancing on her opposition looks like that of a deity who presides over her subordinates as she descends. It is reminiscent of the biblical image of the three wise men, who are guided by the light of a star on their way to Bethlehem. This reference is gendered because the three wise men are men of high authority in the Bible. The scene highlights her dominance and desire to overpower her opposition. Similarly, Etorre looks up at Hirut's approaching figure so fast that his helmet tips backward. Another soldier, Fofi also drops his gun and presses both his hands on his helmet when he sees her. This scene demonstrates the impact of Hirut's commanding presence because both men are intimidated to a point of disorientation. The tipping of Etorre's hat and the dropping of Fofi's gun upon seeing Hirut symbolises a stripping away of power from the male soldiers who have traditionally held more power and influence on the frontlines. Hirut's adornment of the stereotypically 'male' military uniform is also an indication that she has stepped into the role of a fighter. The Italians describe her as a "delicate-featured girl in uniform: a solitary Abyssinian floating above grass, moving effortlessly between horsemen, captivating and surreal" (309). Describing Hirut as 'delicate-featured girl in uniform' is an oxymoron. It emphasises that she has occupied a role she would not be stereotypically assigned by society. She embodies the power and confidence the Italian men lack.

Lastly, an example of inversion takes effect in the last chapter between Hirut and Emperor Haile Selassie. In it, Hirut assumes the emperor's role of a superior and Emperor Selassie is her adherent. The scene transpires in 1974. In it, a much older Hirut travels to Bahir Dar from Addis Ababa to meet Ettore. There, she sees Emperor Haile Selassie and orders him to banish the Italian photographer from Ethiopia. When Ettore pleads for permission to retrieve his father's letter from the old box Hirut carries, she tells Emperor Selassie that Ettore is an invader and orders the emperor to banish Ettore. She tells the emperor to "tell him to leave, if [he] is really the emperor" (421). She does so in an instructive and forceful tone. In this interaction, Mengiste places Hirut in a position of dominance over one of the most powerful men in Ethiopian history. She commands him like a monarch would an obedient subject. Her instructive tone indicates her confidence that she is fit to occupy a leadership position. When Hirut orders Emperor Selassie around, he questions who she is, and she tells him she was the shadow king's guard. The emperor nods his head in passivity when informed of her role. Typically, the function of an emperor is to make final significant decisions in matters related to the empire they preside over. What stands out the most

in this interaction is that Hirut usurps the emperor's authority and momentarily commands him. She also takes initiative by informing him that she will walk him home and protect him from protesters. Here, Hirut steers the conversation and offers the emperor the same kind of services of protection and leadership the Ethiopian public expects from their emperor.

2.3 Appropriation and Authorship

In this section, I examine how Mengiste uses appropriation to challenge dominant discourses and assume control over a male-dominated literary tradition. In the previous section, I focused on the reversal of character roles in Mengiste's text. This section examines how Mengiste takes control over dominant discourses by changing elements of existing stories and texts. This use of appropriation creates space for herself and her female characters in a male-dominated literary landscape. Mengiste transforms elements of different texts and stories, including literary form to place herself in a literary landscape historically and traditionally dominated by male writers. This thesis draws the term 'appropriation' from Stratton's analysis of inversion in Grace Ogot's collections of short stories titled *Land Without Thunder, The Island of Tears and The Other Woman*. Stratton describes appropriation as a technique that operates in conjunction with inversion, as they both serve as subversive literary tools in Ogot's texts. She defines appropriation as a technique characteristic of postcolonial literature, where writers seek to undertake literary decolonisation by merging or replacing negative images in a dominant discourse with positive images (Stratton 173). I would like to build upon Stratton's definition by quoting post-modern artist Barbara Kruger, who suggests that appropriation is a subversive manoeuvre, and it involves "coupling the ingratiation of wishful thinking with the criticality of knowing better. To use the device to get people to look at the picture, and then to displace the conventional meaning that an image usually carries with perhaps a number of different readings" (Kruger 1). Kruger and Stratton's definitions both suggest that the writer assigns themselves the responsibility of displacing the conventional with the progressive. Additionally, Stratton's use of the term 'literary colonisation' to describe this process brings about ideas of reclaiming that which has historically been misplaced. It is my view that Mengiste replaces androcentric writing with writing that centralises women's stories as a way to reclaim a power taken away from women writers. For example, she hands herself the pen of the historian and modifies a story's androcentric nature with a female-centred storyline. My intention is best described by Deirdre Lashgari who suggests that

the shifting of the vantage point, which in this case is the dominant masculinist discourse, is carried out to expose forms of violence that were previously unseen (3).

Appropriation in literature is achieved through allusion and intertextuality. It occurs when a writer takes an existing story or text and reimagines it (Rowe 1). By changing elements of an already existing text or story and subverting a dominant discourse, the writer makes a powerful statement (1). The novel uses appropriation by referencing elements of Greek mythology. First, it references the story of Penthesilea. In Greek Mythology, Penthesilea is a woman who fought Achilles (Diefenthaeler 275). In Mengiste's novel, Ettore is summoned to Colonel Fucelli's office. Upon arrival, Ettore warns Fucelli of the rumoured threat of women fighters. Ettore tells Fucelli that Italian fighters suspect that Aster and Hirut, who are imprisoned by the Italians, are Ethiopian fighters. Ettore tells Fucelli that the Italian army believes that "Haile Selassie even has female bodyguards […] They call them Amazons […] they think they've come to seduce and kill us and the ascari" (Mengiste 334). Upon hearing of these rumours, Fucelli informs Ettore that the only way towards an Italian victory is if they imagine themselves as Achilles in the story of Penthesilea. In the myth, Achilles fights Penthesilea and kills her (Diefenthaeler 275). According to Fucelli, Penthesilea is no equal to her superior male counterpart. By calling the Italians a symbol of Achilles in Penthesilea's story, Fucelli implies that regardless of a woman's prowess, they do not have the capacity to reach the level of a male fighter. Additionally, Penthesilea is described to embody a beauty that even after death, had captured the attention of her opponent Achilles (277). By calling the Ethiopian women fighters the symbolic representations of Penthesilea, Fucelli suggests that Ethiopian women's one purpose lies in their beauty and the way they present themselves to men. Mengiste takes Penthesilea's story and changes elements of it by depicting her own characters as metaphors of renowned figures like Achilles and Penthesilea. She manipulates Penthesilea's story to expose Fucelli's feelings towards Ethiopian women, and to educate the reader about the adversarial relationship between the Italian army and the Ethiopians.

Appropriation includes borrowing or reusing elements of existing literature (Rowe 1). Mengiste appropriates the male literary tradition by borrowing from one of the most influential, authoritative texts and manipulates it to serve a feminist cause. She reuses elements of The Bible to place women at the centre of a narrative. The Bible is inherently patriarchal in its display of male leadership and distinct gender roles. The *Book of Ruth* and the *Book of Esther* are exceptions because they are two of the only books in the Bible that are named after women. The "Geez name

Hirut, meaning goodness, has been identified with the name Ruth" (Amharic Personal Names 9) and Aster sounds like the name Esther from the Bible. Mengiste assigns her protagonists the same names and characteristics as two influential biblical figures. In the Bible, Ruth accompanies her late husband's mother Naomi on a journey from Moab to Bethlehem (Hubbard 118). Despite being a foreigner in her husband's homeland, she becomes Naomi's companion instead of returning to her country of origin. Like Ruth, Hirut ultimately becomes Aster's trusted companion in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Hirut is a stranger in Kidane and Aster's home, but she remains because she is loyal to Ethiopia. Thus, Ruth and Hirut's shared interest in serving others rather than forsaking them demonstrates their willingness to work towards the greater good. Similarly, Aster is similar to the biblical figure Esther. Aster and Esther are both courageous and dedicated to serving the public. In the Bible, Esther becomes the Queen of Persia through marriage. She "is the beautiful queen who knows how to use her charms effectively and does not shrink from exacting a heartless vengeance" (Anderson 38-39). In serving as the queen, she uses her influence as the king's wife to protect the identity of the Jewish people (35). Like Esther, Aster is married off to nobleman Kidane and she uses her privileges to defend Ethiopia against Italian invaders. Mengiste challenges gender bias by manipulating aspects of a canonical and authoritative religious text and placing women at the centre of it.

The following examples of appropriation are not achieved through borrowing from existing books or texts. Rather, I demonstrate how Mengiste borrows and uses elements of different literary forms and transforms them. According to Katherine Cooper and Emma Short, "much contemporary historical fiction by both male and female authors engages with such diverse genres or modes as the fairytale, the crime thriller, and the gothic novel to both represent certain elements of the historical past and highlight particular concerns of the present" (Cooper and Short 12). Mengiste's novel engages with the modes of an epic novel and war fiction. It also uses lyrics and choruses as an addition to prose. Cooper and Short further state that contemporary historical fiction written by women often functions to "revive and reappropriate lost genres and modes of storytelling in order to explore the links between gender and genre" (12). Mengiste includes an extract from an epic poem titled "The Iliad" by Homer in the novel's epigraph. The quote states that "hereafter we shall be made into things of song for the men of the future" (Mengiste xi). This quote implies that women's songs will be immortalised for future generations of men. Mengiste further includes interludes and choruses to arrange the novel like a song. The inclusion of poetry

and lyrics in the novel's form is significant because during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, one of women's wartime roles was to encourage Ethiopian men to join the military through "songs performed every night in villages following the mobilisation order" (Adugna 4). Mengiste's choice to draw from a lyrical form of writing and prose highlights the significance of songs in Ethiopian women's history. Furthermore, Cooper and Short state that women reappropriate lost literary forms and genres. The use of the term 'reappropriation' instead of 'appropriation' suggests that women writers are modifying and reclaiming literary genres that are male dominated and exclusionary.

Another example of appropriation is achieved through Mengiste's insertion of a map and a real photograph from the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. By using a map and a photograph, Mengiste has borrowed from photographic novels and fantasy fiction to narrate history in an unconventional manner. The visual elements give the reader a glimpse into Mengiste's research process which included reviewing photographs and studying Ethiopian culture and its landscape. There is a photograph at the beginning of the novel of a noble woman in a sumptuous cape. There are no captions and descriptions, and it is placed without context. The absence of a caption or description incites curiosity about Ethiopian women's roles and experiences in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. The map provided similarly incites curiosity because the reader is persuaded to trace the movements of the characters as they read the story. For this reason, the reader steps into the shoes of Mengiste by sharing in her curiosity and her interest in history and the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. In a way, Mengiste appropriates the occupations of detective and historian. She presents her findings in various forms and makes them available to writers and scholars for further analysis. This section of the chapter has explored how appropriation achieved using Mengiste's unconventional writing methods allows for women to be perceived on an equal footing as their male counterparts.

2.4 The Inversion Paradox

In this section, I question the practicality of the inversion technique in elevating women. I do so by introducing its efficiency and a point of concern. I start by acknowledging its merit in shaping complex female characters. Then, I question the usefulness of this inversion when the same challenges women experienced before the shift of roles remain fixed. Mengiste argues that even when women are acknowledged as integral parts of narratives of war, the irony is that they are

"always already at war with the men who attempt to control them, the nation that enjoins them to remain chaste and pure, and institutions that lay down the boundaries within which their lives are to be lived" (Sarkar para. 5). According to Mengiste, there are three key factors that burden women regardless of their assigned roles: men, the nation and institutions. I term Mengiste's observation a paradox because in *The Shadow King*, women's roles, experiences, identities, and skills are all subject to change during war yet women's challenges with men, the nation and other institutions remain fixed. This section of the chapter will attempt to make sense of this paradox by analysing the varied experiences of Hirut, Aster, Fifi and the cook.

Aster is a complex character likened to historical figure Empress Taytu. As indicated in the introduction of this thesis, Empress Taytu played a significant role in the outcome of the Battle of Adwa by recruiting women to fight alongside male soldiers on the frontlines. Aster exhibits many of Empress Taytu's complex characteristics. Her transition into the role of an army recruiter and fighter matches Empress Taytu's own shift. Furthermore, each woman switches gender roles with her husband by sharing in the responsibilities of defending Ethiopia's honour. Firstly, the novel describes Aster as an embodiment of the empress. When Aster mounts a wild horse in search of new recruits for her army, she is described as "Empress Taytu, resurrected to fight these ferenjoch. She is an unnamed ghost thrown down by the almighty, come to curse our foreign enemies" (Mengiste 66). Taytu is described as cunning, resourceful, strategic and brave, and served a significant role in the fight against the Italian army. Aster matches Taytu's resourcefulness when she races through the hills of her village on a horse, encouraging women to fight. Additionally, Aster bears the empress' "visceral distrust" (Jonas 21) for Italians. This distrust is evident in her reaction to seeing Italy's declaration of war in the newspaper. When Aster sits in Kidane's office at his desk, she sees a proclamation in a newspaper and a photograph of an Italian woman called Maria Uva. Aster "stares at the photo, at the arrogant woman's open-mouthed glee, at that flag whipping freely in the wind, and by the time she lifts her head, Aster knows she must make herself anew and meet this proclamation with one of her own" (Mengiste 62). Aster's impression of Maria as arrogant reveals her negative perception of the Italians. Her indignation when she sees the flag whipping freely means that she is displeased with their patriotism. When Aster decides to meet the proclamation with one of her own, her swift reaction to Italian aggression mirrors Empress Taytu's own when she historically attempted to swiftly eradicate the threat of the Treaty of Wichale. Overall, Aster's various wartime roles parallel

Empress Taytu's own roles. Although the two women are involved in wars that occur in different time periods, their roles are strikingly similar. The depiction of a woman who mirrors Empress Taytu's complexity in the context of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War is significant for women's elevation because it provides representation for women whose contributions were not recognised during that war period.

Hirut's occupation of traditionally male-oriented roles transforms her into a complex character. Her complexity is evident in her mantra, which lists all the roles she has assumed. It is a representation of her constantly changing identity. In the prologue, Hirut repeats this mantra and it serves as a source of strength throughout the novel. Whenever she feels fearful, Hirut repeats the mantra "I am Hirut, daughter of Getey and Fasil, born in a blessed year of harvest" (55). While waiting for Ettore years later, a much older Hirut feels "threads of a familiar fear" (5) and by habit, repeats the same words, although this time around, there are additions to her mantra. She reminds herself that she is "Hirut […] daughter of Getey and Fasil, born in a blessed day of harvest, beloved wife, and loving mother, a soldier" (5). The idea that Hirut constantly adds a role to her mantra demonstrates her constant negotiation of self. Although the roles she lists of mother, wife and soldier are traditionally contradictory, she joins them together as if to undermine an established gender order. In this case, the inversion of gender roles has exposed Hirut to her own freedom and agency because she is at liberty to occupy more roles and add them to her mantra.

Hirut's transition into markedly distinct roles like a nurse, a thief and a fighter, exposes the nuances of her personality. Her occupation of varied roles reveals her capacity to embody feelings of aggression, wrath and sensitivity. As a nurse, Hirut heals the injured. As a fighter, she inflicts pain and injury. As a thief, Hirut inflicts harm and feels wrathful. In a flashback, Hirut's father gives her lessons on how to use a rifle. He warns her to avoid touching the trigger unless she is prepared to become something she is not (27). The significance of his statement is that Hirut later reveals that she possesses a depth that goes beyond the youthful innocence her father knows. Similarly, her mother advises her to avoid operating a rifle with her left hand, because it "is the hand the devil uses, it is the hand a thief uses, and you are not a leyba" (27) but Hirut later becomes a thief by stealing Aster's belongings and burying them in the garden. Stuart Hall suggests that "there is no fixed, essential, permanent identity" (Hall 287) and that "the fully unified completed secure and coherent identity is a fantasy" (277). This theory of identification applies to Hirut because her idea of self is subject to constant change and negotiation. It is therefore my view that

the idea of a fully unified complete identity as it relates to Hirut is a fantasy because she constantly reinvents herself. There are instances where Hirut opts to disobey Aster and Kidane, yet she also remains loyal and obedient to the couple by assisting them in war effort. Hirut's capacity to shift into different roles portray her as a woman of multiple complex characteristics because she changes her character to suit her circumstances.

Fifi is a peasant girl who occupies various wartime roles. The book introduces her as "the young woman who fled to Asmara to remake herself into a shermuta, a wishima, a whore: Fifi, the stunningly beautiful madam loved by some of the smartest, bravest, Italian officers Italy has ever known" (Mengiste 217). Despite assuming the role of a peasant, Fifi becomes a prostitute. While serving as a prostitute, she spies on the Italian army. Although she is a prostitute and spy, she is likened to a soldier to emphasise her contribution to war effort despite not being on the battleground. While in a confrontation with Fucelli, Fifi "stands upright, tall, and when Hirut looks at her, Fifi salutes, holding the stance of an Ethiopian soldier" (350). Fifi stands upright because she is as commanding as a fighter. Similarly, her complexity is in her multiple names. She is introduced as Ferres, yet she is also called Faven and Fifi. Fifi adopts various roles in her life depending on her circumstances. At the same time, Ferres must rely on internal repetition of her name to remind her of her original role of a peasant girl. Her constant transformation is an important area of analysis because the depiction of a woman who participates in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War without physically occupying the battleground recognises women as complex and prostitution and espionage as wartime roles as significant as those on the frontline.

Aster is a complex character because she occupies the roles of a wife, an army recruiter, and a soldier in the course of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Her descriptions shift from a pampered noble wife to a feral hyena. When Aster intrudes into Hirut's servants' quarters in search of her necklace, Hirut is perturbed by her imposition, registering that Aster's anger contradicts the behaviour of a noble wife. Hirut thinks that "Aster should be drinking her coffee in bed, tucked inside a soft blanket, perhaps looking out her window and gazing at her flowers" (11), instead of shouting with so much exertion that "even the tree outside the gate seems to catch the breeze to hold itself still" (11). The description of Aster drinking coffee in bed significantly contrasts with her aggression. This aggression is emphasised further when she occupies the role of an army recruiter and becomes a "nun shifting into a hyena" (66). The use of the words 'nun' and 'hyena' provides a paradox that brings into focus the stark differences between a nun, who symbolises

Aster's decorum and a hyena, a cunning and undisciplined creature. The use of the word 'shifting' also displays the switch from one role to another. In this part of the novel, Kidane has left his household for days without informing his wife of his whereabouts. As a result, Aster's newly assumed role as the head of the household prompts her to exercise her agency as a fighter by collecting weapons and searching for new recruits. The depiction of Aster's drastic shift into a role of aggression is significant for women's representation because it recognises that women are adaptable.

Despite the freedoms that arise from the reversal of her wartime roles, Hirut grapples with the constant burden of traumatic memory. She is burdened with the reminder of her orphanhood within her roles as a servant, nurse, guard and soldier. While bearing witness to the heavy casualties of war, the trauma of her parents' death still plagues her. The old French rifle her father gave her, called the wujigra, is a symbol of this trauma. It is one of the conduits through which she accesses the memories of her life with her parents. The gun, necklace and a dress she wore when she moved into Kidane and Aster's household are confiscated despite being the "the only objects that are hers in this world" (12). During wartime, Hirut nurses an Ethiopian soldier called Dawit back to health after an injury on the battlefield. She sees the confiscated rifle "leaning against the wall, tucked into the cave's dark shadows like a thief" (137). The text describes the gun placed against a wall like a thief to indicate how her memories resurface unexpectedly. Additionally, the Wujigra looks like a thief because a thief typically stands out unfavourably in various settings. When Hirut meets Ettore at a train station in 1974, she thinks of her rifle and the precise lines etched on it. She thinks of "the evenness of the row with the five marks, the symmetry of it all" (417). The even and symmetrical marks on the rifle suggest that her trauma will remain stable and unchanged. The five permanent marks on the object represent the lasting impact left by her parents. The idea that she still polishes the gun everyday reveals the attention she gives to the memory of her parents and its freshness in her mind.

Hirut undergoes violence despite the freedoms of her newly acquired military role. Initially, she experiences violence inflicted by Aster in her former role as a servant. For example, Aster finds the possessions Hirut stole and buried in the yard. She "slaps [Hirut] hard across the face" (43) and beats her with a horse whip. Hirut later becomes a soldier, and her newly acquired role leads to the establishment of a self-determined identity. However, she later experiences violence inflicted by Kidane who attempts to counteract the switching of Hirut's role into a fighter.

For example, after Dawit's injury, Hirut sees her confiscated rifle leaning against the cave wall. Hirut takes the gun and is filled with a sense of boldness and impulsivity. Upon seeing her with the rifle, Kidane sexually assaults her. Amartya Sen argues that a multiplicity of identities is often a cause of violence and conflict (Sen 19). Kidane reveals his discomfort with Hirut's shifting identity because her boldness disrupts societal gender standards. Rather than abandoning the idea of retrieving her gun, she acts on her impulses and seizes it. As a result, Hirut serves as an integral aspect of war as a fighter but her newly acquired role is constantly undermined by the challenges of her gender. She is regularly subjected to Kidane's sexual advances but must perform the tasks of a soldier. It is easy to regard the inversion of gender roles as progressive, however, the persistent cases of sexual assault discredit ideas of progress.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I first explored Mengiste's application of the inversion technique as a method of subverting an established gender order. Next, I investigated how Mengiste appropriates different texts, stories and literary forms to challenge dominant discourses. I discussed the practicality of the inversion technique in disrupting patriarchal structures by first acknowledging the technique's effectiveness in shaping complex female characters. I highlighted a point of concern that despite the freedoms that arise from the reversal of her wartime roles, Hirut grapples with the constant burden of traumatic memory, indicating that regardless of women 's changing wartime roles, they still experience challenges that existed before their newly acquired roles, I questioned the technique's practicality when it comes to women's elevation in society.

My analysis has demonstrated that women's roles are multifaceted. By first exploring the application of the inversion technique, I argued that the reversal of gender roles provides women with liberties that were previously reserved for men. Due to the urgency of war in the novel, the roles of soldier, aggressor, perpetrator, army leader, army recruiter and politician are not exclusively assigned to men. My analysis has revealed that all of the female protagonists of *The Shadow King* make significant wartime contributions to their homeland. Hirut, Aster, Fifi and the cook take on roles of great significance in the Ethiopian public sphere, particularly as a servant, soldier, guard, spy and a nurse. I further discovered that characters like Hirut have the capacity to switch roles to their advantage. Hirut exercises her agency by stepping out of her role of a victim and into the role of a perpetrator. Upon analysing Kidane's reactions to Hirut and Aster's shared

desire to become fighters, I have shown that the men in the novel attempt to counteract the reversal process. They often counteract the inversion process through violence. I also found that *The Shadow King* is a culmination of various texts, stories and forms to subvert dominant gender discourses. Mengiste has appropriated aspects of authoritative texts like The Bible to expose the subjugation of women and create space for herself and her characters in a male-dominated literary landscape. The reversal of gender roles places the male characters in stereotypically female-assigned roles. In the end, I showed how the reversal of gender roles does not exalt one gender over the other. Rather, the technique demonstrates that women have the same wartime capabilities as men.

Chapter Three: Vicarious Writing and the Craft of Creative Non-Fiction in Aida Edemariam's *The Wife's Tale*

"It turns out that the process [of memoir writing] demands all the fiction writer's skills, of voice, point of view, withholding, delay – with the added frisson/challenge of it all being true" (Aida Edemariam, "A Stab at Truth" para. 13)

3.1.1 Introduction

While Mengiste fictionalises the history of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War in *The Shadow King*, Aida Edemariam uses non-fiction, a memoir, to reimagine it. In the epigraph above, Edemariam describes her use of a fiction writer's skills to write her memoir *The Wife's Tale*. She does not directly use the term 'creative non-fiction' in the description, but it is implied. According to G. Thomas Couser, the memoir "rivals fiction in popularity and critical esteem" (Couser 3). He claims that although the memoir is dependent on truth claims while the novel relies on fiction, the two genres of memoir and fiction are siblings who "grew up together, often borrowing each other's clothes" (8). Couser argues that the two genres are similar because the "modern novel emerged as an imitation of lifewriting" (10), therefore Couser reinforces Edemariam's argument that elements of fiction will inevitably appear in memoir writing. The memoir is a subgenre of creative non-fiction. Caroline Forché and Philip Gerard describe creative non-fiction as factual writing that is "infused with the stylistic devices of the best fiction and the most lyrical of narrative poetry" (Forché and Gerard 1). According to Forché and Gerard, some of the many stylistic devices used in creative non-fiction include the subtle braiding of themes, rhythms, resonance, precise and original language and a distinctive narrative stance (1). Edemariam uses fictional stylistic devices of voice, point of view, withholding and delay to write the memoir set in the same period as Mengiste's *The Shadow King*. Moreover, Edemariam represents the story of her grandmother vicariously. The word 'vicarious' is defined as acting on behalf of another or imaginatively experiencing an event someone else has undergone. This usually happens when the experience is inaccessible to the person acting vicariously. Thus, 'vicarious writing' is the process of representing the experiences of another. The term 'vicarious writing' is drawn from Pauline Ada Uwakweh's assessment of Grace Akallo's *Girl Soldier* and Susan Minot's *Thirty Girls*. By narrating history through vicarious writing, Edemariam fills the gaps left in history. In the previous chapter, I discussed how Mengiste's inversion of character roles subverts a traditionally

established gender order. The chapter discussed Mengiste's use of appropriation to challenge male-dominated discourses. In this chapter, I focus on the impact of literary genre on the way a woman's experiences are told. I do so by analysing how Edemariam narrates another woman's story through vicarious writing and the genre of creative non-fiction in *The Wife's Tale.* The argument of this study is that the three selected texts effectively foreground women's stories. This analysis of the memoir genre contributes to the broader argument of the study because the memoir not only centralises the protagonist, Yetemegnu, but it immortalises and memorialises her and her story (Couser 14).

This chapter is divided into six sections. The first and last are the introduction and conclusion. The second section discusses how history can be understood through the genre of creative non-fiction. The third section focuses on the complexities of memoir-writing. It grapples with the challenges surrounding Edemariam's use of fictional elements in non-fiction and what that means for the history she represents in *The Wife's Tale.* The fourth section discusses the functionality of writing vicariously. It focuses on trauma and how it affects the protagonist and the author. The fifth section investigates the transformative nature of war. In this section, I analyse the protagonist's wartime transformation.

Edemariam is an Ethiopian Canadian journalist and writer based in Oxford (Goodreads 1). Her father, Edemariam Tsega, is an Ethiopian medical doctor who met her Canadian mother in Montreal where they both studied medicine (Edemariam, "Aida Edemariam's Vivid Portrait" 3). When her parents moved to Addis Ababa for work, a young Edemariam developed a close bond with her paternal grandmother Yetemegnu Mekonnen (Bayley n.p). At the age of 15, Edemariam left Addis Ababa to pursue her studies. She received a scholarship to a boarding school in East Sussex in England (n.p). On completion, she went to study English literature at Oxford University. Her desire to access romantic literature at Victoria College was what convinced her to attend the University of Toronto (Gibson 3). She started her writing career with book reviews and mini biographies of writers like Alice Munro, Edward Albee, Mavis Gallant and Paula Fox (The Arts Foundation 1). Edemariam has worked as a journalist at *Harper's Magazine* in New York and as an editor for the Canadian publication, National Post. She has also worked in Toronto, and London (1). She currently serves as a senior feature writer and editor for *The Guardian*, and her work has been chosen to feature in the *Best American Essays*. She has been nominated for a National Magazine Award and Amnesty Media Award. She was awarded the Royal Society of Literature

Jerwood Prize for non-fiction and the Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize (Goodreads 1). Edemariam's most notable work is *The Wife's Tale: A Personal History* (2018). It is the life story of Edemariam's grandmother Yetemegnu Mekonnen, which roughly begins in 1916 in the northern imperial Ethiopian city of Gondar and ends when she dies in 2013 (Edemariam 300).[6] This story does not only focus on Yetemegnu's personal history as the title suggests, but it tells the story of Ethiopian imperial history. Yetemegnu is the daughter of a socially prominent man named Makonnen Yilma and mother, Setechign. She is coerced into a marriage to an adult priest and student, Tsega Teshale at eight years old. Her interactions with her husband are initially fraught with conflict and violence, but they ultimately develop respect for one another. When Tsega later faces trouble and is arrested by the imperial court, Yetemegnu's role during the war changes from that of a young wife to the head of her family. She gradually becomes exposed to a world of politics and resistance. For a while, she endeavours to clear Tsega's name during his imprisonment. She also fights for her right to her family's fortune and goes as far as to insert herself into the world of law and advocacy even though she is illiterate. In the wake of the second Italo-Ethiopian war, particularly the period between 1931 and 1941, Yetemegnu gives birth to her first child, an unnamed baby girl and the first of many children who die in their infancy. Yetemegnu learns of the impending war after Ethiopian military commander Ras Gugsa Wule's death in 1930. This is followed by the appointment of Emperor Selassie's cousin Ras Kassa as governor of Begemdir and Semien (301). The Italian invasion that comes after leads to political unrest that results in her family's evacuation from Gondar to a safe haven. She witnesses Emperor Selassie's return from exile, the Ethiopian revolution, and the rise of the Derg. After her husband's death, she is no longer treated with the same respect she commanded as the wife of a clergyman. The memoir is divided into four books and each book represents a specific time period. The chapters are named after the months of the Ethiopian calendar (Giorgis para. 3). In this chapter, I

[6]In a podcast episode titled 'A Reading Life, A Writing Life in Conversation with Sally Bayley', Edemariam states that Yetemegnu remembered details of her history, particularly birth times, dates, months, but never the exact years. Formal birth certificates were not used in Ethiopia at the time. Yetemegnu died on the 21 December 2013, 16 years after Edemariam started writing her book and five years before the memoir's publication.

use the terms 'advocate' and 'activist' loosely to describe Yetemegnu's efforts to help free her husband from prison at the imperial court regardless of her illiteracy.

3.1.2 Literature Review

Despite having won various awards, there is very little scholarly attention given to *The Wife's Tale*. The text has become the subject of a few magazine articles, book reviews, video interviews and podcast episodes. In a podcast interview, Edemariam shares details about how the memoir came about. She mentions the many phone calls she shared with her grandmother, and the doubts she had about the details of the ongoing book (Bayley n.p). In the episode, Edemariam states that she would often "just stick a tape recorder in front of [Yetemegnu] and chat. Memory and oral history are a funny thing. It's not standard history. It's looping. People remember things in funny shapes" (n.p). Upon her death, Edemariam lost the freedom to question Yetemegnu about these doubts. Given that the history of Yetemegnu's life was told in a non-linear fashion, it is clear that elements of fiction were necessary in filling the gaps that she left.

An article by Elizabeth W. Giorgis for *Africa is a Country* states that Edemariam's interpretation of Yetemegnu's story is largely based on the matriarch's own comments. Giorgis observes that upon reading the text, it appears as if Edemariam and Yetemegnu's "two voices have merged" (Giorgis para. 11). Giorgis further states that Yetemegnu's experience with the zar in the memoir is meant to be a ritual only captured by Yetemegnu's own lived experience, yet Edemariam describes it vividly.[7] She contends that:

> With a vividly cinematic narrative, the author takes us through Yetemegnu's recurring trance as if she felt and sensed the zar through her own imagination of Ethiopian myths and ancestral spirits. In other words, Edemariam locates the past in such a way that seems to converge with her own memory and identity. (para. 12)

This assertion adds to the conversation about how effective Edemariam's vicarious writing is in enlightening the reader about cultural and historical practices. Giorgis contends that Edemariam's

[7] A zar is described as a spirit; a possession cult or therapeutic society in the memoir.

use of vicarious writing adds a vividly cinematic element to the text. This type of writing makes the reader understand unfamiliar concepts like the zar.

Like Giorgis, Gaiutra Bahadur's book review for *The New York Times* claims that reading *The Wife's Tale* is as if there are no seams between the author and her subject. Bahadur also states that Edemariam successfully channels Yetemegnu's spirit through her interpretation of her life.

In contrast, a magazine article by Michela Wrong for *The Spectator* points out that Edemariam's text is not entirely comprehensible. According to Wrong, *The Wife's Tale* prioritises Ethiopian cultural authenticity over familiar terminology, and this may confuse Western readers (Wrong para. 9). This observation is significant because the text's cultural authenticity alongside Wrong's expectation of accessibility suggests that there are significant criticisms from readers about historical writing.

In her review for *The Guardian*, Somali-British writer Nadifa Mohamed applauds Edemariam's ability to add her own touch of fiction to the events of Yetemegnu's history. She praises the text by proposing that "Edemariam takes the facts of Yetemegnu's life – her illiteracy, her isolation, her submission to her husband and to Selassie – and goes beyond them" (Mohamed para. 7). The review acknowledges Edemariam's efforts to fill in the historical gaps in Yetemegnu's story. Her review is a testament that history can be learned through the genre of fiction. She further adds that Yetemegnu's story is "undiminished by the distances between the author and her subject" (para. 7). Later on in this chapter I examine the process of vicarious writing and will factor in Edemariam's own comments about her choice to put distance between herself and Yetemegnu.

In a review, Arifa Akbar applauds Edemariam for her skill of distancing herself. She states that unlike other biographies, Edemariam "barely inserts herself into the story" (Akbar para. 8). There are ways Edemariam admits to having attempted to enact this authorial discipline. I will return them later in this chapter.

Overall, the existing critique of *The Wife's Tale* is generally concerned with Edemariam's vicarious writing although these scholars do not directly use the term. Despite mentioning Edemariam's vicarious writing in their articles, these scholars do not go into detail about Edemariam's stylistic choices and how they affect the reader's reception of Yetemegu's story.

Additionally, most of these critiques are concerned with Yetemegnu's rich history and the role she plays in Ethiopian national history.

3.1.3 Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework is situated within feminist postcolonial and narrative theory lenses. It draws from Uwakweh's research about the writer's trauma, their choice of literary genre and its impact on the narration of women's history to show how literary genre affects the representation of Yetemegnu's trauma. Uwakweh analyses literary genre and its relationship with trauma and characterises a fiction writer, Susan Minot, as a non-victim in her portrayal of the history and trauma of the Lord's Resistance Army's (LRA) abduction of schoolgirls in Uganda in novel *Thirty Girls*. She highlights that Minot, being American, is unfamiliar with the history she narrates about the experiences of women in the insurgency. She analyses Minot's fiction in comparison to Akallo's memoir titled *Girl Soldier* and argues that Minot gathers historical information from journalistic sources instead of relying on personal experiences like Akallo, who recounts her own lived experiences as a former child soldier through non-fiction. Uwakweh's analysis of *Girl Soldier* is significant for my thesis because although *Girl Soldier* and *The Wife's Tale* are texts of two different plots and settings, their impact on women's history is comparable. In analysing *Girl Soldier*, Uwakweh asserts that "genre might impact literary representations of traumatic experience" (Uwakweh 126). My analysis of Edemariam's use of creative non-fiction and the memoir is intended to explore this notion. By analysing *The Wife's Tale* and relating it to Uwakweh's conceptual framework, this study will show how genre effectively shapes the meaning of the text.

Irene Visser's trauma theory suggests that "to experience trauma vicariously is to become a secondary victim" (Visser 272). Visser's assertions can be applied to Edemariam's writing process because her bond with Yetemegnu is what leads to the creation of *The Wife's Tale.* Thus, vicarious writing allows Edemariam to illustrate her understanding of Yetemegnu's experiences and to interpret them in her own way. Despite this authorial freedom, Edemariam does not fully embrace her role of a secondary victim. Instead, she employs a third-person narrative perspective

to describe Yetemegnu's experiences and removes herself from the timeline. This deliberate distancing she creates between herself and the story places Yetemegnu at the forefront.

In order to assess the impact of history narrated through creative non-fiction, I consider Edemariam's own observations about her writing process alongside Philip Dwyer's argument that "the memoir often falls between two worlds, between truth and fiction, between primary and secondary source, between reality and imagination" (Dwyer 4). Moreover, Meintjes, Pillay, and Turshen's research on the transformative nature of war argues that war burdens women but it also offers them an opportunity to transform their lives (Meintjes et al., 7). Thus, the last part of this chapter examines Yetemegnu's experiences of war and how she undergoes a gradual transformation.

3.2 Understanding History through Non-fiction

In the previous chapter I focused on how fiction gives the reader a glimpse of history. In this chapter, I will explore the value of learning history through non-fiction, particularly in the memoir *The Wife's Tale*. My analysis does not compare the genres of fiction and memoir, nor does it suggest that the memoir is more effective in narrating history. Rather, it recognises that the memoir offers valuable historical insights that add to the reader's perception of Yetemegnu's wartime experiences. According to Couser, a memoir is a form of life writing and the "literary face of a very common and fundamental human activity: the narration of our lives in our own terms" (Couser 9). Couser defines a memoir as a method for people to tell stories about themselves and about history. There is a complexity in finding the differentiating factors of a biography, an autobiography and a memoir. I have decided to use Philip Dwyer's definition of a war memoir as a starting point because Edemariam's text incorporates elements of a war memoir. Dwyer best describes these elements in the quote below. He defines the war memoir as:

> A very different animal from history and even from the traditional military autobiography in which generals wrote self-justificatory accounts of campaigns and battles. At its most basic level, the story is told from an entirely different perspective–that of the common soldier or civilian who has little or no control over the events they are caught up in. It is more personal, it is about the experience of

> war, as well as experiences beyond the battlefield, and can sometimes include accounts of people whose lives are peripheral to, but touched by war. (Dwyer 6)

In line with Dwyer's definition above, I question what the war memoir adds to existing historical accounts of women's roles during the second Italo-Ethiopian War. As Dwyer has stated above, a war memoir can include the experiences of a civilian who has little control over their circumstances. Edemariam's memoir is a narration of the protagonist, Yetemegnu, who goes into war in an incidental way. Yetemegnu is a mother and a wife. She participates in the politics of war through association with her husband and her homeland. Unlike the stories of male soldiers, the stories of civilian women's experiences of war are not traditionally glorified or centred. Edemariam uses the genre of a war memoir to provide a unique and intimate perspective that challenges androcentric and self-justificatory war accounts. More importantly, Edemariam's war memoir centralises an ordinary Ethiopian woman, who battles her way out of the peripheries to the centre of national politics. Yetemegnu occupies the roles of friend, grandmother, advocate, Christian, landowner and breadwinner. Her personal life is placed against the backdrop of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, and this provides a deeper understanding of war as conflict that goes beyond politics and physical violence. Dwyer's description of this sub-genre as a 'very different animal' is appropriate for Edemariam's book because it is a non-fictional text that uniquely incorporates elements of fiction to impart the story of Yetemegnu's history.

In *Memoir: A History*, Ben Yagoda argued that "memoir has become the central form of the culture: not only the way stories are told, but the way arguments are put forth, products and properties marketed, ideas floated, acts justified, reputations constructed or salvaged" (8). Yagoda claims that the memoir allows writers to tell stories, make arguments, market products and ideas, justify their past actions and shape the way that other people view them. As a result, memoirs offer valuable historical insights. However, they often present history solely through the writer's individual perspective. In *The Wife's Tale*, Yetemegnu contributed to the way her story was told by recounting her experiences to Edemariam. The reader gains a better understanding of history because a memoir adds meaning and interpretation to events. *The Wife's Tale* narrates the events of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and adds meaning to context. For example, the memoir discusses the infrastructural divisions in the city of Gondar as a result of Italian occupation. There are "whites here, locals there, a school and a hospital and a courthouse each, no locals allowed in

cinemas at all" (67), but instead of just giving this context, the memoir includes Yetemegnu's thoughts and feelings, stating that these divisions "made little impression on her" (67). As a result, the reader is provided an in-depth understanding of history that interprets factual information and highlights why that information matters. Another benefit of learning Yetemegnu's history through the memoir is that the reader gains a detailed understanding of Ethiopian history while situating her individual story in context.

Yetemegnu experiences various national conflicts in her lifetime, including the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, the revolution, the famine, and the violence of the Derg.[8] The memoir *The Wife's Tale* is based on Yetemegnu's personal memory and experiences which overlap with Ethiopian historical events. By reading the text, the reader learns intimate details about historical events. *The Wife's Tale* personalises Ethiopian history and gives the reader a glimpse of what a wartime crisis is like for a civilian woman by narrating it through Yetemegnu's life. For example, the Second Italo-Ethiopian War left casualties resulting from epidemics of cholera, typhoid and dysentery at camps. These were the main results of "poor sanitation, lack of proper food and clean water" (Adugna 33). Many of the issues mentioned above drove civilians to flee their homes during and after the war. Notably, the war caused the displacement of many Ethiopian families because of "air raids with planes that dropped bombs and sprayed poison gas against troops and civilians" (33). Edemariam's text allows the reader to cultivate an in-depth understanding of this displacement. It narrates the moment Yetemegnu, and her family fled to safety because of air raids. She says that:

> The town had emptied of people as abruptly as it had filled. And for a few weeks had felt quiet but stretched out of shape, waiting, but uncertain what it was waiting for. And then one day an answer: six specks in the sky, specks moving faster and straighter than any bird, growing bigger and bigger, until she could hear them roar. Oh, mother of God, what is this? Snatching up her daughter, the baby, looking frantic about for somewhere to hide. Oh, mother of David, save us. Closer and closer the specks came. They looked like crosses now, stubby dark crosses, trailing

[8]The revolution refers to the revolt against Emperor Haile Selassie's rule. It led to the civil war. The Ethiopian famine of 1880s was a period of food scarcity in Ethiopia. It came after the civil war and was brought about by severe drought.

> smoke. The streets ran with women, children, clergy, the infirm−anyone able-bodied had marched away with Ras Kassa or quietly disappeared. As the thundering drew near, they threw themselves into ditches, huddled against walls, behind trees. Oh, Queen of Heaven, save us". (Edemariam 62)

The extract above shows the impact of war on an Ethiopian town. Edemariam's text demonstrates suffering through Yetemegnu's lamentation after the town of Gondar is devastated. Yetemegnu, expressing helplessness and sorrow, asks the Virgin Mary the question: "what is this?" (62). Her instinctive decision to grab her child reveals the indiscriminate nature of the war. The text's description of the bombs as specks increasing in size is another way of illustrating that the Italian armed forces dropped bombs on unknowing civilians. Edemariam's text refers to these civilians and troops as anyone able-bodied. This emphasises the indiscriminate nature of the violence of the air raids and it further implies that the overall wellness of civilians was not always guaranteed. Lastly, the civilians' desperate attempts to survive the air attacks by gathering around trees and buildings suggests that wartime devastation is a personal experience because it affects an individual's body and their senses. Edemariam's narration of these war scenes immerses the reader more deeply into the events of history. It shows that memoirs are informative and they promote learning. *The Wife's Tale* is largely rooted in real-life experiences, therefore, it educates readers about the impermanence of women's struggle during wartime because as Yetemegnu's wartime roles and experiences change, her adversities are short-lived.

The memoir also emphasises the value of resilience and hope in the face of conflict. For example, when Yetemegnu returns to Gondar, the city has been occupied by the Italians, who have confiscated Ethiopian land and houses after their victory. Despite initially being sorrowful when she fled the city, Yetemegnu is more hopeful when she returns. She states that:

> Now that they were back in the city everything for her remained as it had always been, sweet water available from her well, the market outside healthy and bustling and equal to her needs. Even the talk of deliberate division- whites here, locals there, a school and a hospital and a courthouse each, no locals allowed in cinemas at all- made little impression on her. Gondar had always been a divided city, between Muslim, Christian and Jewish quarters, between aristocracy, gentry,

> artisans and peasants, and who wanted anything to do with these foreigners anyway? It was they who often insisted on crossing over, chasing women, living with them, defying orders from their superiors. (67)

The extract above describes Yetemegnu's sense of freedom in a place that is intended to restrict the liberty of Ethiopian civilians. The city she loves is inhabited by strangers, yet due to her traumatic wartime experiences, she chooses to view the situation positively. Yetemegnu says that the city remained as it had always been despite Italian occupation. This statement is a double entendre because Yetemegnu recognises that there is a place for herself in Gondar despite the political changes they have experienced. Secondly, Yetemegnu implies that she has remained herself despite wartime devastation and she still feels secure in Gondar. She uses the words sweet, bustling and healthy to describe the well and the market-place. These words emphasise her positive outlook. In essence, the text narrates the history of Italian integration into Ethiopia to educate the reader about Ethiopia's socio-political landscape during that period and it also shares the inspirational history of a woman who holds an optimistic outlook on life despite her negative circumstances. Yetemegnu's positive outlook implies that despite being made into victims of war, civilian women were content despite the devastation.

Reading about Yetemegnu's marriage at the age of eight years old sparks meaningful gender-related conversations. When the text begins, an eight-year-old Yetemegnu weds Tsega, a man who is more than two decades her senior. The event would be unusual for those who do not understand the cultural complexities of the village where she grew up. In essence, the aspects of her culture that one person may find unusual are a common practice for others. As a result, a young Yetemegnu is the only person among her friends and family who recognises the issues with underage marriage. One of the first interactions between Yetemegnu and Tsega reveals the issues of child marriage through a fable he shares with her. The fable he shares is a story of a cat and a mouse. On their wedding day, he tells Yetemegnu that:

> A cat and a mouse were getting married. On the day of the wedding, the cat's groomsmen gathered and together they made for the bride's house, dancing and singing in anticipation of a feast. The mouse, like all brides, waited amongst her kinsfolk to be taken away to her new life. Then one of the other mice piped up-

> "you know, cats can't be trusted. Let's dig holes in the ground, just in case." So, they set to it, scrabbling out deep tunnels with hidden entrances. Finally, the cats came into view, chanting "Ho- pick one up here, ho, pick one up there, ho" When the mice saw them approaching, they turned as one and plopped into their holes. And the cats, who'd thought they'd been so clever, didn't catch a single mouse ' His laugh wilted into the silence. (18)

The events of the fable convey a deeper meaning about Yetemegnu and Tsega's interactions, wedding and culture. Fables are often called cautionary tales, and they are used to discipline children. There are similarities in the circumstances of the wedding in the fable Tsega narrates and his actual wedding to Yetemegnu. These similarities suggest that their union is unusual. First, the fable says that the cats and the mice dance and sing in celebration and they have a feast, and Yetemegnu and Tsega's wedding is just as festive. Just like the mouse in the fable, Yetemegnu is taken away to start a new life with a new spouse. The difference between the wedding in the fable and Yetemegnu's real wedding is that despite her "confusion of pride and worry" (15), Yetemegnu is silent unless she is spoken to. Conversely, the mouse from the fable disrupts the silence between the cats and the mice by voicing her concerns. The mouse reveals that cats cannot be trusted, and her statement saves the mice from the cats' attack. Fundamentally, Yetemegnu is not able to challenge her culture because she is too young to understand the severity of marriage. Therefore, using the story of the cat and the mouse as a reference that parallels Yetemegnu's marriage in the memoir serves as an embedded warning to women readers and reinforces the themes of lost innocence and gender inequality. It highlights the risks of child-marriages and shows that an incompatible union may potentially place women at a disadvantage. Like I have mentioned above, Edemariam's text's mention of Tsega's story prompts sensitive gender-related conversations that are necessary for women from traditional or conservative communities.

In addition, the unfiltered way Yetemegnu's wedding is described gives the reader insight into what her role and life during the war will be like. The wedding that occurs at the beginning of the book is a prelude that gives readers an idea of her wartime role as a wife and mother. I examine the term Yetemegnu uses to describe her unusual circumstances. Eight-year-old Yetemegnu describes her wedding day as an "inversion of her usual state!" (15). She calls it an inversion because she is treated like an adult for the first time at her wedding. There is an

exclamation mark at the end of her exclamatory sentence, and it indicates her excitement and her childhood innocence. The sentence is significant because it can be used to describe the circumstances of a much older Yetemengnu whose whole life is inverted when her husband dies. Thus, she finds herself in many more "inverted states" (15) because of the war. I examine the quote because it hints at her imminent personal transformation as an adult. I propose that Yetemengu will find herself in more situations where she will feel a "confusion of pride and worry" (15). She states that:

> She was used to eating separately from the adults, to being silent unless spoken to. Silent she was still, but in a confusion of pride and worry. Here was all the attention she had ever wanted - but in such an inversion of her usual state!" Everyone made a fuss of her, kissed her, hugged her; even her aunt coaxed her to take sips of mead or, collecting together a little heap of the best pieces of meat, the whitest injera, fed her. She opened her mouth politely, tried not to gag. (15)

While Yetemegnu enjoys the attention, her community gives her on her wedding day, she feels worried and uncomfortable. The description above illustrates that there is an undercurrent of fear and discomfort in her words. There is ambivalence in the words "pride and worry" (15). The next time Yetemegnu is in an inversion of her usual state is after Tsega dies. She is immediately challenged to exist without the comfort and security that they had collectively established. Moreover, the women in her community spread rumours about her family, and she no longer feels respected. She questions: "why this itchy, itchy private sense of loss? The beer hits its mark. It wasn't about the death of her husband exactly, though that was the cause of it. What she missed was the camaraderie and the gossip, the flamboyant complaint and laughter […]" (210). She is also in a state of ambivalence because she finally gains the freedom to live without a husband. She first considers marriage, but she decides not to remarry. She later considers joining the nunnery to attain a "kind of licence" (169) to her freedom. In essence, the reader is shown how a woman's ambitions change in accordance with her circumstances.

Another benefit of the memoir form is that it describes the personal history of characters like political figureRus Gugsa to help the reader understand Yetemegnu's history better. By humanising Rus, the text does not consider Ethiopian national history to be more important than

personal history. Rather than simply acknowledging his political ambitions and status, the personal aspects of his life are highlighted. Yetemengu is fascinated by him and describes him in detail. She calls him her distant cousin, a poet, a determined drinker and theempress'former husband. She says that:

> From her father she knew she was distantly related to him […] He was pious, as required, a poet and a fair administrator, but somewhat hidebound, too and a melancholy and determined drinker. He had been married to the empress, who, it was said, still loved him, but they had been forced to separate when she was crowned. (30)

The quote above makes it clear that political figures are minor characters in someone else's story. This is evident because Yetemegnu starts the statement by saying that she is related to him through her father. Although she is interested in what others have said about him, he is an inconsequential figure in her life. The quote also indicates that despite the substantial influence political figures have on national politics, they are ordinary members of the community. After revealing his personal information, she acknowledges his political achievements and failures. She says that, "he blamed his loss of power on the regent. Just over a year later he would be tricked into battle against Ras Tafari and die on the fields of Anchem" (30). Edemariam's text pays equal attention to Ethiopian national history and Yetemegnu's history. As a result, the reader gains a deeper understanding of war. The benefit of learning Yetemegnu's history through *The Wife's Tale* is that the memoir is a written historical record, therefore the reader can revisit it for its documented evidence about her life. According to Edemariam, Yetemegnu did not have a birth certificate because formal birth certificates were not available for Ethiopians of her generation (Bayley n.p). Despite not having access to documentation, Yetemegnu managed to remember details of her history by memorising her birth times, dates and months (n.p). She was also able to narrate her experience of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War from memory during their interview sessions. Since there is no written formal proof of Yetemegnu's life, Edemariam's text functions as her identification document for those who are interested in learning her history.

In *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin argue that writers of a postcolonial text often embed their own languages, calendar systems, cultural

references and religious symbols in postcolonial texts as a way to "abrogate" colonial norms and assert their own cultural sovereignty (Ashcroft et al., 37). Non-Ethiopian readers of *The Wife's Tale* are less likely to gain a comprehensive understanding of parts of Yetemegnu's history at first glance. This is not a limitation, but a narrative technique because it foregrounds Ethiopian culture by encouraging readers to engage with the unfamiliar. For example, the text includes legends of the Lady Mary attached to the chapters and the chapters are named after the months of the Ethiopian calendar. As a result, the differences in language and culture complicate the reading process and cultivate the reader's intrigue about Ethiopian history. Thus, there is value in learning history through *The Wife's Tale* because the text shows that learning history extends beyond the western lens and contests the view that literary texts must always be subsumed under Western norms.

In his research on literary narratives of pain, Nick Tembo proposes that memoirs such as Rupert Bazambanza's *Smile Through the Tears* serve "to excavate the racial and ethnic tensions that have existed in the country since the colonial times" (Tembo 32) therefore effectuating a significant outcome. Similarly, I argue that *The Wife's Tale* inspires the excavation of Ethiopian women's stories from the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Moreover, akin to Mengiste's novel, Edemariam's memoir illustrates the theme of women forced into action by a war outside of their control. Edemariam's text adds to Mengiste's by providing more details of war that enhance the reader's comprehension of Yetemegnu's life and history.

Edemariam's account is based on her grandmother's lived experience. Given that the text is non-fictional, the reader acquires knowledge about the Second Italo-Ethiopian War from witnessing Yetemegnu's progression from her early adolescence to her late adulthood. Yetemegnu's progression further provides the reader with an indication of how far the Ethiopian society has developed since the Second Italo-Ethiopian war. Unfortunately, Yetemegnu lives through various other national conflicts, namely the revolution, the famine, and the violence of the Derg. Her exposure to various conflicts enlightens the reader about the political instability in Ethiopian history and the conflicts that continue to exist in the present day.

Dwyer proposes that traditional military autobiographies are typically self-justificatory. Edemariam's memoir does not position women's experiences over men's experiences, but rather sees both men and women's experiences of war as equally important. The text portrays a reality where men and women are not always at odds. It considers the wartime experiences of the man in

Yetemegnu's life, Tsega and the trauma he shares with Yetemegnu. Although his wedding to Yetemegnu at the beginning of the novel leaves a negative impression because of their age difference, the text portrays him as a significant part of Yetemegnu's history. Tembo's study on trauma suggests that it is just as important to consider the trauma men experience in war. He argues that "ambiguous and less visible trauma men experience is essential in understanding how war shapes relations between men and women" (24). After their son Yohannes dies, Tsega is deeply affected by grief and locks himself in their bedroom because he wants to cry away from Yetemegnu's company. In response, Yetemegnu's brother advises her to come to terms with her child's death so as to lift her husband's spirit. He tells her that "this man is going to die on you. I saw my father die of grief like this. You need to stop grieving yourself and take him in hand" (Edemariam 108). Tsega's emotional display of grief shows the intricacies of a marriage afflicted by war. It provides an unfiltered depiction of the impact of grief and how it leads to the reconfiguration of gender roles within families where a husband and breadwinner does not know a way ahead. The text reveals that in real-life war-torn Ethiopia, grief brings about disruptions that challenge the reader's traditional perceptions of gender and human behaviour during times of desperation and suffering.

The Wife's Tale effectively sheds light on the history of the second Italo-Ethiopian war. By interweaving private details from Yetemegnu's personal history with the political aspects of the war, readers are able to comprehend war as an experience that transcends politics and physical violence. In the same way, Edemariam's text adds to historical knowledge by making the reader aware of ongoing events in Ethiopian politics and the country's efforts towards peace-building. By depicting Tsega's grief alongside Yetemegnu's, the text highlights the gender dynamics of real-life Ethiopia, even though the dynamics between Yetemegnu and Tsega are confined to their household.

3.3 The Elaborate Art of Memoir Writing

An understanding of a woman's wartime experience can be achieved by examining the mode that the text is written in. This section of the chapter argues that the process of memoir writing often requires the use of fictional elements. It details Edemariam's attempts at cultivating an authorial objectivity and the usefulness of her choices in narrating Yetemegnu's experiences of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. She claims that the authorial objectivity she had planned to adopt was

ultimately affected by "fiction writer's skills, of voice, point of view, withholding, delay" (Edemariam "Stab at Truth" 13). I refer to memoir writing as an elaborate art because it is a complex genre and serves an important function in contemporary Ethiopian war literature. Books like Mesfin Tadesse's *Lucy's People: An Ethiopian Memoir*, Tesfaye Habtemariam's *On The Battlefield: A memoir of an Ethiopian Airborne Soldier*, Richard Reid's *Shallow Graves: A Memoir of the Ethiopia-Eritrea War* and Edemariam's *The Wife's Tale* highlight some of the most important periods in Ethiopian history through the memoir genre. Despite being categorised as non-fiction, some of these memoirs are susceptible to the use of fiction (Fussel 36). According to Dwyer, fiction writing in a memoir is not always deliberate and can simply be the "tricks that time and memory can play on the individual attempting to recount those events" (Dwyer vii). In this discussion, I explore Edemariam's own reflections about her pursuit of authorial subjectivity while writing *The Wife's Tale*. I propose that the tricks of memory and time are beyond her control and that they function to enhance Yetemegnu's story. It is also inevitable that her non-fictional writing includes elements of fiction, such as detailed descriptions of Yetemegnu's thoughts and feelings.

Carey Baraka's controversial essay offers valuable support to substantiate my argument. The essay which sparked controversy in 2023 is based on the life of Kenyan literary giant Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and was intended to be a reflective essay written with "journalistic objectivity" (Baraka 6). However, Baraka uses his authorial freedom to write about the events of Ngũgĩ's life for *The Guardian*, employing an intimate sit-down interview to paint a picture of Ngũgĩ's story, including his writing journey starting at Makerere University in Uganda. He also touches on the novelist's thoughts on language and, more contentiously, mentions Ngũgĩ's personal struggles as a resident of the US and his medical and marital history. The article has attracted negative attention from those who viewed it as exploitative, unethical, overly earnest and containing cultural translation issues (*Brittle Paper* 8). However, Baraka also sparked positive reactions, with readers calling his work luminous and a joy to read (4). Ngũgĩ, responded in support of the piece in an article for the Kenyan newspaper, *The Standard*, dismissing the criticism and stating that he has "read *The Guardian* story several times […] Baraka's story, indeed, was a very truthful capture of the mood at the time" (Thiong'o 12). The article differs from Edemariam's memoir because Baraka includes himself in the article while Edemariam removes herself from Yetemegnu's story. Despite this omission, both pieces show how the writer's perspective influences a narrative and the readers' reception of someone else's experiences. These are the underlying politics that exist

within the genre of contemporary life writing. The article reveals that the work of the memoirist is subject to external criticism.

After the publication of *The Wife's Tale*, Edemariam addressed questions about voice and ownership. In a piece written for *The Guardian,* she starts by quoting Michael Ondaatje, who justifies his own use of fiction in non-fiction. He insists that Sri Lankans consider a well-told lie worth a thousand facts (Ondaatje 176).[9] By stating that a well told lie is worth a thousand truths, Ondaatje implies that the use of fiction in a memoir produces a more impactful and well-rounded story in contrast to a fragmented presentation of history. Edemariam defends Ondaatje's statement by saying that "it feels like a bit of a last-minute rearguard self-defence – but also a serious acceptance that writing about family is a complicated thing" (Edemariam "A Stab at Truth" 1). Edemariam is susceptible to the tricks of selective memory because the story she writes intertwines with her own life. Thus, Yetemegnu's story ultimately includes fictional elements like Ondaatje uses in his text. Edemariam's memoir raises many questions. They include: "Who is doing the telling and how? and should the narrator of a family biography remove themselves altogether or is that a kind of avoidance of responsibility?" (13). Since the narrative voice is in the third-person perspective, Edemariam does not claim ownership of the story but simply endeavours to tell it.

Furthermore, like fiction, memoir writing is "fuelled and inspired by human imagination" (Uwakweh 119). Edemariam describes her writing of the memoir by using the title 'A Stab at the Truth' for an article she wrote for *The Guardian*. The phrase 'a stab at the truth' indicates giving something you do not know a try. It means trying to look for something when you are not sure what it looks like or if it is even there. This title choice is significant because it reflects Edemariam's writing process. She presents her own version of the truth without knowing what the truth looks like. The text simply prompts a conversation about historical omissions in Ethiopian women's history. The use of the word 'stab' shows Edemariam's failed attempt to uncover Yetemegnu's complete life story. The value in the memoir's use of fictional elements is that it provides the missing details of Yetemegnu's life during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War.

The pursuit of authorial objectivity is not easily achievable when there are aspects of history hidden. A memoir may contain a level of creativity and inventiveness as a result of the inaccessibility of historical data. It is no secret that the identities and histories of Italian and

[9]Michael Ondaatje makes this assertion in relation to his 1982 memoir titled *Running in the Family*.

Ethiopian nationals are woven together because of the two Italo-Ethiopian wars. While carrying out some research at flea markets in Rome for her novel on the second Italio-Ethiopian war, Mengiste experienced rejection from Italian vendors who would not let her purchase Italian fascist material for her work (Peterson 2). Mengiste discusses the topic of erasure and states that she encountered struggles pertaining to access. She states that "when you're researching in the archives, it's not just research-its detective work that you have to do. It's complicated by so many erasures that if you don't know what's missing, you don't know what to ask" (Mhute para. 19). Ethiopian researchers of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War are confronted with the threat of erasure of their own history. As a result, writers like Mengiste and Edemariam have filled in the gaps created by the Italians. *The Wife's Tale* relies on historical data Edemariam obtained from Yetemegnu, her travels by horseback to a hamlet outside of Gondar, and the British Library (Koeverden 6; Lee 2). Edemariam transcribed what Yetemegnu told her and decided she would be "as literal as [she] possibly can" (para. 5). A majority of Edemariam's interpretation is based on Yetemegnu's own words therefore it is true to Yetemegnu's interpretation of her own story. Mengiste also stated that when studying Ethiopian history, she does not know what is missing and that complicates her process because she does not know what to ask.

Additionally, in writing the memoir, Edemariam anticipates questions about the limitations of writing someone else's story. Most of the concerns and observations she reveals are concerned with the reader's expectation for her to ground her writing in complete facts and accuracy. Although Edemariam justifies her efforts to attain authorial objectivity, her text is informative. It is through studying it that the reader learns that it is possible to tell another individual's story without claiming ownership over it. The use of fictional elements is often necessary in the process of subversion and filling in the gaps. Another way to do this is through vicarious writing, which will be discussed at length in the next section of this chapter.

3. 4 The Functionality of Vicarious Writing

The key to understanding the story of a woman's wartime experiences lies in examining the shared trauma between the subject of the text and the writer. As a direct descendant, the writer's inherited trauma gives rise to vicarious writing. In addition to assessing the value of reading Yetemegnu's experiences of war through a memoir, this chapter discusses Edemariam's role of writing on behalf of Yetemegnu. I explore the usefulness of having a relative of the subject narrate the subject's

story by association. According to Irene Visser, "to experience trauma vicariously is to become a secondary victim" (Visser 272). Edemariam is a secondary victim of Yetemegnu's trauma, meaning that her role as the author makes her share in Yetemegnu's trauma indirectly. I propose that Edemariam's vicarious writing is effective in representing Yetemegnu's story because it helps amplify Yetemegnu's voice and captures her legacy, as Yetemegnu's illiteracy and old age render her unable to write her story herself. According to Caruth, a writer's recounting of historical events is no longer simple and straightforward due to the complexities of trauma. She argues that "in the encounter with trauma, history is reconfigured; it is no longer "straightforwardly referential" (Caruth 11). Caruth's assertion implies that trauma is transmissible and can affect secondary victims or witnesses. Edemariam is a secondary victim because of her proximity to Yetemegnu and the generational impact of her struggles that have shaped their family identity (11). Judith Lewis Herman's research about trauma and empowerment similarly applies to my analysis because it raises questions about trauma and vicarious writing. She claims that the direct victim needs help in the narration of their trauma. Edemariam helps Yetemegnu narrate the "horrifying truth of her past – to speak of the unspeakable" (Herman 179) as a form of empowerment. As a result, Edemariam's vicarious writing reveals that women's trauma is experienced collectively and, in this context, across generations. Writer Tim O'Brien has studied a different genre of autobiography and in his exploration, he poses the question "Can the foot soldier teach anything important about war, merely for having been there?" (O'Brien 18). O'Brien questions whether an individual with a singular perspective and a partial grasp of war can teach anything valuable about the overall nature of war. I pose a similar question: can Edemariam inform the reader about Yetemegnu's experiences of war, merely for her association with her grandmother?

Firstly, I assert that Edemariam's vicarious writing is important because it assists in the transcription of history. This transcription is necessary when the subject is either too old to write it down themselves or incapable. When Edemariam began recording Yetemegnu's story, she did so out of journalistic interest, not quite knowing what she would do with the recordings of Yetemegnu recounting her past. She expressed that "[she didn't] think [she] knew exactly what [she] was going to do with [the recordings]" (Denny n.p), but because she is a journalist, she immediately knew the information she had learned would make a good story (Denny n.p). Hence, she sat with the information for years because she believed she was not knowledgeable enough to turn the recordings into a book. Yetemegnu died in 2013 and Edemariam eventually wrote and

published *The Wife's Tale,* in 2018. If Edemariam had decided against writing the book, Yetemgnu's experiences would have been erased from historical memory. Edemariam's vicarious writing is necessary in turning the transcription of Yetemegnu's words into a documented historical record. Therefore, Edemariam's transcription of Yetemegnu's story is a demonstration of a writer taking the initiative to add to Ethiopian history.

Edemariam's vicarious writing is effective in representing Yetemegnu's personal history because the text provides a comprehensive overview of inter-generational trauma and how it occurs and develops. As such, Edemariam's decision to write Yetemegnu's story through her own interpretative lens provides an understanding of the complexities of their family's shared trauma. The text provides an idea of where Yetemegnu's trauma may have begun. For example, the text reveals her mother Setechign's desires for Yetemegnu's betrothal at eight years old. Setechign tells Makonnen Yilma that if he does not marry Yetemengu off to Tsega, she will "hate [him] forever. As Mary is [her] witness, [she] will never visit [his] graveside. And [he] will never stand at [hers]" (Edemariam 16). That desire contributes to transmission of trauma from Setechign to Yetemegnu. After her husband's death, Yetemegnu contemplates marrying another man but decides against it. Her reluctance to remarry shows her trauma when it comes to marriage. When her son and Edemariam's father named Edemariam, asks her why she refuses to remarry, she thinks of "how to tell him that finally she had a choice when it came to men, and she chose no?" (Edemariam 191). If Yetemegnu's mother's bitter grudge against Makonnen Yilma had not been revealed, the reader would not understand Yetemegnu's marital trauma.

In a book about the complexities of writing a biography, Michael Holroyd suggests that writing someone else's story is a complex process. He uses an analogy to compare writing about someone else's life to his grandfather's tea making. He states that the process includes "learning how to hold the cup correctly, how to boil the water to an exact temperature, and then how to engage the small spoons of tea with water at the right moment" (Holroyd 2). Diasporic writers struggle with complaints about their unfamiliarity with history and lived experiences. While Edemariam left Ethiopia at the age of 15 and lived apart from Yetemegnu (Bayley n.p). Edemariam's position as an Ethiopian woman allows her to effectively represent Yetemegnu's experiences. In other words, Edemariam understands what it is like to be a woman in their specific familial household. This is a justifiable argument to counter any claims that Edemariam's status as an Ethiopian Canadian deems her unfit to relate to the Ethiopian lived experience. Furthermore,

Edemariam has written Yetemegnu's story with care. She describes her research process as time consuming because it included efforts to condense 50 to 60 hours Amharic into one English memoir (Bayley n.p). She admits to recording the first tape in Newfoundland in 1997 where Yetemegnu went to Canada for medical treatment (Koeverden 4). She further reveals that she spent time referring to the Amharic dictionary, learning religious details and fact-checking information with the help of Yetemegnu and the British Library (Lee 2). Holroyd's analogy of making tea to describe the care put into vicarious writing fosters an understanding of Edemariam's own writing process.

Moreover, Yetemegnu was illiterate, therefore her inability to write her own story necessitates Edemariam's undertaking of vicarious writing. Early in the novel, Yetemegnu is described as someone who takes orders from her husband without question. She is described to act "willingly enough in the play that had been written for her. Not that she necessarily knew the words, or her exits and her entrances" (Edemariam 31). This description is symbolic because the play is a representation of the memoir that Edemariam has written. Even though this quote describes Yetemegnu's lack of autonomy in her marriage, it is self-referential because it acknowledges her lack of control over the way her story is written. Yetemegnu lacks knowledge about the complexities of writing a memoir. Even though vicarious writing does not allow Yetemegnu full control over her own story, it exposes Yetemegnu's powerlessness and gives a voice to her story.

This analysis has shown that Yetemegnu's history is shaped by Edemariam's vicarious writing. Despite Yetemegnu's inability to fully control the way her story is written; the text is a collaborative effort between subject and writer. The analysis has revealed that recounting women's history is a collaborative process. The next section of this chapter analyses the result of this vicarious writing. It explores Yetemegnu's role in the second Italo-Ethiopian war and how her experiences of war transformed her life.

3. 5 The Transformative Quality of War

In this section of the chapter, I propose that war is transformative because it contributes to Yetemegnu's personal growth. The institution of war creates lasting changes on a national scale and within an individual's life. According to Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, women experience loss during the war. Their research on women from varied war situations has displayed a common

feature of unexpectedly gaining from their wartime experiences (Meintjes et al.,7). While conducting research about the aftermath of war and women's roles in post-conflict transformation, they revealed that "across these diverse groups of women in varied situations [they] noticed a common feature. Whereas most women experience loss in war, some unexpectedly make gains" (7). While this thesis recognises women's harrowing wartime experiences, this section focuses on the positive transformation the Second Italo-Ethiopian War has brought to Yetemegnu's life. This 'gaining' from war, in the words of Meintjes, Pillay, and Turshen, signifies the way war offers "opportunities for women to transform their lives in terms of their image of themselves, their behaviour towards men and towards their elders, and their ability to live independently" (7). The transformation of Yetemegnu manifests in her sense of agency. In this chapter, I define Yetemegnu's agency as her ability to act on her own behalf towards her own intended social, economic or political outcomes. In some respects, Yetemegnu's own experience of war reveals the social, economic and political reality of Ethiopia (7). This section begins by exploring how Yetemegnu's experience of war changes her and what those changes mean for Ethiopia on a much larger scale. As a child, Yetemegnu moves into Tsega's house, and she is deprived of female solidarity. Later in her life, the war provides her with the opportunity to connect with women who share her objectives. The memoir begins with a young Yetemegnu, who weds Tsega and grows distant from her mother Setechign. The absence of a proper female figure in her life leaves her without any notable female confidants. This is first seen in her father Makonnen Yilma's refusal to marry Yetemegnu off to Tsega. Makonnen expresses that he is not comfortable sending his daughter to wed a man of 30 years, who "has no women in his household, no mother in evidence, no nurse to care for her" (Edemariam 16). Yetemegnu struggles to settle into her marital home because she does not have women to serve as her role models. Furthermore, after her son Nega's death, Yetemegnu's mother Setechign weakens and dies, leaving Yetemegnu motherless. This death affects Yetemegnu to an extent that "decades later, [she] would remember and weep as if it had just happened" (18). The absence of a female figure in her life is so evident that her husband Tsega resorts to occupying that role himself. After Setechign's death, he tells Yetemegnu that "[he] will be like a mother to [her]" (33). Despite losing Setechign, Yetemegnu also finds motherly support from other women. Later in the text, she reaches out to the empress for help to free Tsega from prison. Yetemegnu establishes a good relationship with the empress, and she no longer queues outside the palace like everyone else. More importantly, the empress offers support and

informs her daughter that Yetemegnu is "a relation in trouble and alone in the world. Look out for her" (181). Thereafter, the empress regularly asks after Yetemegnu, asks after Yetemegnu's children and the progress of Tsega's case. When Yetemegnu experiences support from the empress for the first time, she feels dignified and treads carefully into the palace out of fear of abusing the privileges she had been given. The relationship between Yetemengu and the empress shows the development of Yetemegnu's self-confidence. In essence, Yetemegnu's journey implies that Ethiopian war history is built on female solidarity. This solidarity is similarly present in the history of Empress Taytu, who recruits women and motivates them to fight in the Battle of Adwa. These women use female solidarity as a method to achieve goals that alleviate the suffering of the men in their lives, who are either in prison or facing the Italian opposition in combat.

Moreover, Yetemegnu struggles with the title of mistress in her childhood, but as she develops into a young adult, the war affords her the responsibilities that come with the title and she grows to accept it. While Tsega is away, she is assigned the responsibility of welcoming his visitors into their household and soon, she begins to embrace the title. She states that "by the time she was twelve, she was becoming accustomed to being called woizero. Lady. Enjoying it even" (37).[10] As a young girl, Yetemegnu is not suited for the role of the lady of the house. When Tsega's visitors come by and are surprised to find that she is the lady of the house. They ask her "where is your father? oh, you're mistress here!" initially uninformed of her status of mistress in that household (31). As a response, Yetemegnu would laugh (31). This moment addresses the reality that Yetemegnu is too young to be a wife, and the humour with which she responds to it implies her intention to mature into the role with time. Yetemegnu becomes accustomed to the title of 'woizero' at the age of 12 because of the expectations that come with her role as a wife. The idea that Yetemegnu has been forced to develop into the role of a wife is not a positive gain for Yetemengu. However, later grows to enjoy the role and gains from the role by mastering the skill of cooking and "provid[ing] handsomely for the priests, the merchants, the visiting dignitaries her husband brought to the house almost daily" (31). Yetemegnu is forced to accommodate her husband's visitors, and in the words of Meintjes, Pillay, and Turshen, her life is transformed because of war, specifically in terms of her image of herself, because with time, she starts to see herself as the mistress of the house and her fear of her husband gradually turns into trust and

[10]The memoir describes a "woizero", as "a respectful title for a woman: Madam, lady, Mrs".

respect. More importantly, after her husband dies, she gets accustomed to living independently. Thus, her ability to make the most of her marriage and her ultimate enjoyment of her role in it adds to her transformation.

Moreover, Yetemegnu's growth is evident in her knowledge of war survival strategies. Her cultivation of survival strategies implies that she has contributed to Ethiopian politics and advocacy. One of the earliest instances of Yetemegnu exercising her agency is when she acts decisively in threatening situations. For example, a woman visits Yetemegnu's home and warns her about a gun hidden in the church vault below the holy of holies (80). The woman tells Yetemegnu that Italian informers are on their way to search her home for guns. She warns Yetemegnu that her family will be in danger if the informers find firearms in her and Tsega's shared home. Thereafter, the two women search for the guns while under the pressure of the informers' arrival. Although Yetemegnu shakes throughout the ordeal, with "fear lick[ing] through her like a flame" (80), she manages to prevent her family's incrimination by shoving a gun she finds out of the informers' sight. When her husband arrives home later that day, she instructs him to flee and suggests that he should "go now to Gonderoch Mariam […] there are patriots there, fighting for Haile Selassie. Join them" (81). The authoritative tone that Yetemegnu employs is akin to someone else's and her desperation to avoid conflict drives her to develop into a new version of herself. This moment forces her to react decisively by devising a plan to protect Tsega, and it also sows the first seeds of her personal agency because she learns how to command family matters without her husband's permission or prompt. Yetemegnu's story shows that women's voices and actions have contributed to the progression of historical events. If the woman at Yetemegnu's door had decided not to warn her, then, her family's future would have been bleak. This is one of the many instances where she exercises her agency and her authoritative voice, strategic thinking and newfound conviction shines through.

In addition, the war and Yetemegnu's own personal maturity provide her with a newfound tolerance of pain. Yetemegnu gives birth for the first time and in the midst of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Elderly women inform her that childbirth will "feel something like it did when she went to the grove behind the house at dawn and squatted to relieve herself, so she thought of it as that painless and that quick" (35). She later realises that the process is not as painless when the baby crowns. During the delivery, she feels a sensation "beyond pain, beyond comprehension" (37). Yetemegnu is so hysterical, she feels as if she is departing from the world (37). Her maturity

over the years renders her less hysterical. This is evident in the descriptions of her pain. Yetemegnu experiences her first miscarriage when her husband is imprisoned. This time, the text describes her pain as that which "gathered itself, focused" (152). This description is symbolic of her own development into an adult who no longer views her physical and emotional pain as important in critical wartime conflict. This suggests that Yetemegnu matures and is not desensitised, but tolerant of pain. Moreover, she carries on with her daily tasks after she faints and wakes up. Instead of seeking medical attention, she rushes to the courthouse to fight for her husband's freedom (153). Thus, her transformation is in her ability to control her reactions towards agony and discomfort because she has other pressing issues to deal with. Her story suggests that women in war are compelled to persevere in their newfound roles as breadwinners when their husbands are either at war, missing, dead, or imprisoned. Pushing through an unfavourable situation, in Yetemegnu's case, does not always imply avoiding pain entirely; rather, it involves finding various ways to control her reactions. Due to this wartime transformation, women overcome physical injuries such as miscarriages, combat wounds, grief-induced illnesses like Setechign, sexual assault and hunger from the great famine. Yetemegnu's tolerance for pain is parallel to Ethiopia's acclamation to suffering because of the country's conflict cycle.

Similarly, Yetemegnu's first birthing experience represents Ethiopia's impending pain. It also foreshadows her personal growth because she later becomes accustomed to feeling pain. The moment is significant because it marks her first experience of severe pain. The moment also coincides with Ethiopia's own introduction to pain because the delivery occurs during the early period of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War when political tensions were escalating. While awaiting the birth of her first child, she sees a man riding in the direction of Ba'ata. This man is revealed to be the regional governor Ras Gugsa, who has already separated from his wife, Empress Zewditu, at this point (30). Her sighting of Ras Gugsa is a good indicator that the delivery of her child occurs during the early stages of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Yetemegnu would sit:

> At the window, craning for glimpses of life […] Once she saw a great lord riding in the direction of Ba'ata. His mule clashed and jingled with embellishments and the sun lit the dull barrel of a rifle. […] Ras Gugsa, Their governor! […] Just over a year later he would be tricked into battle against Ras Tafari and die on the fields

> of Anchem, his soldiers having scattered in fear of the regent's most recent toy, the aeroplane. But for now, he carried all the sheen of high office. (30)

The description above is of Ras Gugsa, an army commander who had prepared to raise a rebel army in the 1930s before the Second Italo-Ethiopian War began. Ras Gugsa's formation of this rebellion against imperial expansion "became the political symbol of the larger pattern of violence" (McCann 601) in Ethiopia. Ras Gugsa's battle is, therefore, indicative of impending pain and violence that will be endured in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. His establishment of a rebel army that causes conflict in Ethiopia is symbolic of Yetemegnu's own impending suffering. In the description, Gugsa 's fancy clothing indicates that he is regal and dignified, therefore he is still in office. After his battle with Ras Tafari, he is not as dignified, and he later dies. Similarly, Yetemegnu's labour pains occur at the same time as the rebellion. The alignment of her labour pains with the establishment of Ras Gugsa's rebel army indicates that there is further suffering and growth ahead. The various other kinds of pain she experiences in the memoir are the grief of losing her children, her husband's death and the Ethiopian famine.

Additionally, Yetemegnu's agency is inexorably tied to Tsega's encouragement. His support facilitates her personal development. For example, he builds her rental rooms to guarantee her financial security in the event of his death. Through managing these rental rooms, she learns about profit and land ownership. When Tsega mysteriously dies, she begins to grapple with the complexities of financial planning firsthand. She gains an income from the rental units Tsega built. She also discovers that the monks from a remote northern monastery had taken her land at Bisnit. In her disbelief, Yetemegnu calls herself a "defenceless woman, sheltered and easy to take advantage of" (Edemariam 165). Calling herself a defenceless and sheltered woman at that point in the memoir is inappropriate because she had been fending for her family like a breadwinner. Moreover, Yetemegnu is quick to realise that the monks have swindled her even though she is illiterate. Thereafter, Yetemegnu takes initiative and attempts to regain her land. Therefore, although Tsega encourages her independence, her discernment and courage are entirely her own. Her transformation reaffirms the idea that women occupy traditionally male-oriented roles and become breadwinners during the war and after.

Moreover, Yetemegnu's development is in her decision to clear her husband's name even after he dies (168). As a result, she realises her significance in the socio-political spaces in which

she exists. At the start of her journey as Tsega's wife, there is a repetition of the word 'fed', to emphasise her role as one that merely serves a domestic purpose. Yetemegnu "fed all the Ethiopian labourers, fed the four servants who helped her, fed her family. Fed any guests her husband saw fit to bring home […] fed any relatives who walked in from the countryside" (79). Early in the memoir, Yetemegnu is unaware of her importance in her husband's political and religious affairs. She caters to his guests, but she is prohibited from conversing with them. As the memoir progresses, her role evolves, and she begins to engage in discussions with Tsega's guests. It is through these interactions and the bribes they offer her, that she comprehends the vital role she occupies in her household and in Tsega's political career. Similarly, she asserts herself after Tsega dies a mysterious and unjust death. Yetemegnu becomes confident in her capabilities, and she endeavours to avenge his death by asking the emperor for the blood of his imprisoner and killer, Asratè Kassa. She tells people in her community that she wants "not just the land, but the clearing of her husband's name for his sake and hers but above all for the sake of her children; she wanted blood, and as the blood she wanted was Asratè Kassa's, she intended to ask the emperor for it" (168). In essence, Yetemegnu starts to realise her power to control her present and future. Moreover, Tsega no longer encourages her into political action. Rather, she grows to believe in her own judgement. Her transformation suggests that ordinary women have the capacity to play a significant role in politics and history.

Yetemegnu's development is revealed when she realises her newfound freedom as a widow. While reflecting on her vows to her late husband, she considers what freedom truly entails. She muses over her envy towards nuns because their unmarried status affords them the freedom she has always yearned for. She sits:

> Thinking of how their yellow skullcaps signified virtue and removal from the world, but also a kind of license. And after the years of domestic labour, of privacies denied and advances inescapable, of the bearing of children, the suckling and the carrying and the worry, that seemed like light and freedom to her. (169)

In the quote above, Yetemegnu fantasises about nuns because they are symbols of the freedom she has always wanted for herself. The nunnery is a community of women; therefore, it represents the female solidarity she lacked in her childhood. Her desire to become a member of the nunnery

suggests that she is in search of the same kind of license that will transform her life even further. Thus, Tsega's death provides her with the potential to transform into the person she has always wanted to be. Yetemegnu also thinks of priests' wives who had later become nuns. She considers how calm and beautiful their houses become when they transform into mistresses of their own homes (170). Eventually, she decides not to remarry, stating that because of her "self-sufficiencies" in the form of inheritances, land and house, she will "leave it be" (170). Additionally, Yetemegnu does not become a nun after a father of the monastery asks her to dismiss the idea that "a bit of cloth on her head" (174) will offer her freedom. He broadens her understanding of freedom by informing her that the gospel she seeks in the monastery can also be found in regular church mass on Sunday (174). The interaction implies that Yetemegnu's idea of complete freedom for herself as a woman does not exist in a monastery.

Ethiopia houses one of the world's oldest Christian churches and it "preserves many practices and beliefs dating back to ancient times" (Jenkins 1). Naturally, Yetemegnu's growth is linked to her religious faith. Her adherence to her Christian and traditionalist values are constant throughout the war. Her personal growth occurs in her gradual understanding of the inner workings of the Ethiopian Christian Orthodox Church and the complexities of traditional Ethiopian practices. In a podcast episode, Edemariam states that she structured Yetemegnu's story around her religious faith. She observes that "the rhythms of [an Ethiopian's] life" (Denny n.p) were largely governed by religion, and that this religion and the agricultural year are what gave the story structure. In the same episode, Edemariam states that although there existed a language of the area, Amharic, there was a language termed the Ge'ez, which was often spoken by priests (n.p). As a result, Yetemegnu's Amharic included complex references to Ethiopian myths and the Bible because of her association with Tsega. As the wife of a priest, whose daily language is inundated with religious references, Yetemegnu's own language grows in complexity and richness.

This part of this section assesses the outcomes of Yetemegnu's wartime transformation. Now that she has experienced these transformations, how secure are her roles as an advocate, an activist and a respected wife? This analysis has raised questions about the security of women's roles in Ethiopian society when their ties to a man have been broken. Yetemegnu occupies a respectable position in the Christian church as the priest's wife. When her husband is imprisoned, she occupies the roles of advocate and activist in the imperial court, and she fights for his release. However, her role as activist is not easily maintained after she regains possession of her land in

the Bisnit land case. Most of her children are married or they move abroad, therefore Yetemegnu grows lonely and idle. More importantly, she stops taking part in Ethiopian politics (Edemariam 247). Despite embracing a family-oriented lifestyle, she often thinks about her time moving between the courthouse and the empress's home (215).

In addition, years after Yetemegnu experiences the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, she shows that she has extensive knowledge about wartime survival. Many people were killed by the Derg during the period of the Red Terror. Two men with guns find Yetemegnu buttering her hair and braiding it for Epiphany and they tell her of her son in law's death. When two men from the government stand in her living room and point a gun at her, she shows no fear. She tells them to "kill [her] if [they] want, but really, isn't it enough? Isn't it enough that [her] son-in-law is dead?" (264). This incident mirrors Yetemegnu's encounter with Italian informers who searched for firearms in their family home early in the memoir. Due to her boldness to defend her family, Yetemegnu deters them, and they leave her house. When she was younger, Yetemegnu was fearful, but years later, the sight of a gun no longer scares her. The Red Terror comes with challenges of its own and Yetemegnu learns how to react to threats from armed officers.

Yetemegnu also proves to be discerning in matters related to war as a result of her experience of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. She worries for the safety of her children during the Red Terror and warns them about it. However, they counter her warning by claiming that they live in a dawn of the new age, and that "parents knew nothing" (266). Despite this, Yetemegnu tries to keep her grandchildren safe. The morning after a mass killing, Yetemegnu keeps "her grandchildren home from school because she knew the bodies would be thrown out on the roadsides for parents to retrieve, and she did not want them to see" (266). The idea that she knows where the bodies are suggests that Yetemegnu understands war related trends and patterns. In a way, her children's comment that "parents know nothing" about war is ironic because Yetemegnu has experienced conflicts before the Red Terror that allow her to be cautious and act in resistance when necessary. Her ability to learn from the conflicts that came before demonstrates how similar wars are regardless of the time they happen and the place they occur.

Lastly, in the years leading up to Yetemegnu's death in 2013, she is not active in political matters because of her old age. She no longer serves as an activist in court and the ending of the memoir focuses on her domestic life while taking care of her grandchildren. Most of her time is spent gardening, going to church, and worrying about her children scattered around Ethiopia,

Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Canada (280). Although her life is uneventful, Yetemegnu still manages to embrace her life fully. For instance, the period of the famine results in various regulations by the government such as relief efforts, curfews, and increased labour. Yetemegnu's world is already small, and yet it still shrinks further (277). Within the confines of her own home, Yetemegnu manages to work on her garden, and she makes it bloom. The use of the word 'bloom' is symbolic and suggests that although she is no longer serving a political role, she still manages to integrate into a transformed society. The aftermath of war is significant in the analysis of the lives of women in war because women often struggle to reintegrate into society. Yetemegnu's story suggests that a war leaves a long-lasting effect, but women like Yetemegnu are adaptable and they utilise the skills they gained from the war in other aspects of their lives.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter first explored the value of the memoir in narrating Yetemegnu's story. It assessed how the genre affects the reader's reception of Yetemegnu's history. I further examined Edemariam's use of vicarious writing to narrate Yetemegnu's experiences of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Lastly, the chapter investigated Yetemegnu's wartime transformation and her life in the aftermath of the war. In my analysis I proposed that an understanding of a woman's wartime experiences can be achieved by examining the mode the text is written in. The text fundamentally relies on factual information, but it rejects the traditional memoir genre and aligns more closely with the sub-genre of creative non-fiction. Yetemegnu's story demonstrates that history can be informative despite the writer's use of the elements of fiction.

In my analysis I demonstrated that *The Wife's Tale* includes elements of a war memoir. As a result, it differs from a more traditional memoir because it is not self-justificatory, and it does not idealise stories of the battlefield over the stories of ordinary Ethiopian people. As a work of creative non-fiction, the memoir pays attention to a singular woman's experiences. In my exploration of Edemariam's use of vicarious writing, I proposed that the key to understanding the story of a woman's wartime experiences lies in examining the shared trauma between the subject and the writer. Lastly, Yetemegnu's wartime transformation revealed that women were integral to the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Yetemegnu dedicated her life to catering to the needs of her family and her community during the war. My analysis of her personal growth underscores her

impact on Ethiopian history. The next chapter explores how silence, memory and trauma function in the lives of the women in Fisseha's *Daughters of Silence.*

Chapter Four: Trauma, Memory and the Body in the Aftermath of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War

"Violence against women is a system in itself and has to be seen in its entirety. It permeates every facet of society and is expressed socially, economically, politically, culturally and professionally. Looking at the multiple manifestations of violence, we recognise that there is no aftermath for women" (Meintjes et al., 42)

4.1.1 Introduction

In the last section of the previous chapter, I examined the transformative quality of war through an analysis of Edemariam's grandmother Yetemegnu's character development. Edemariam vicariously represents the story of Yetemegnu's life during and after the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Like *The Shadow King* in the second chapter, this chapter focuses on a book of fiction titled *Daughters of Silence* by Fisseha. It investigates the way trauma, memory and the body function after the war. In the epigraph above, taken from a book co-authored by Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, I will unpack the subject of violence perpetrated against women. They argue that African women's experience of the aftermath of war is imbued with violence. In the book, they argue that this violence is perpetuated by male soldiers with the intention of maintaining discipline over women (40). The political repression men experienced during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War has caused their traumatisation (Motsi, Masango 3). Those affected by war feel an inclination to exert violence in its aftermath and out of their familiarity with prolonged conflict (3). In essence, the need to exert violence spills into familial affairs. The men who held power during the war attempt to maintain a level of violence against women who have gained power from a changed post-war power structure (3). In the epigraph above, Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen suggest that violence permeates every facet of society, and it is maintained in the aftermath of war. They imply that violence can be covert; therefore, it can be uncovered through an analysis of the inter-generational and collective trauma through which it precipitates. For this reason, I propose that violence against the women in *Daughters of Silence* functions in different ways. Moreover, women's experiences with violence are never-ending because the violence inflicted against women exists during and after the end of the war (Meintjes, et al., 42). This chapter is made up of five sections. The first and the last sections are the introduction and the conclusion. The second section of the chapter assesses how the violence of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War is reenacted in the present day. It

discusses how a patriarch attempts to maintain control of the women within his familial household and how inter-generational trauma affects the women in the novel. This section makes use of Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay and Meredith Turshen's research about violence. It references Nick Tembo and Grace Musila's research on men's trauma, and how it affects women in the aftermath of war. The second section of the chapter focuses on a woman and her relationship with collective memory and reconciliation. The third section of the chapter is concerned with the depiction of the woman's body in a trauma story and the various visible manifestations of trauma on the bodies of the female characters. Overall, this chapter is going to examine how the violence of the second Italo-Ethiopian war is perpetuated in the aftermath through an analysis of how violence manifests on the bodies of the women in *Daughters of Silence.*

Rebecca Fisseha is an Ethiopian Canadian writer, born and raised in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia where she lived until she was 12 years old (*Adebabay Media* n.p). Afterwards, Fisseha lived in Austria and Switzerland then she settled in Canada at 17 years old. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Theatre, a Master of Arts in Communications and Culture from York University, a Diploma in Writing for Film and Television from the Vancouver Film School, and a Certificate in Creative Writing from the Humber School for Writers ("About Rebecca" 1). She worked as an English teacher in China for a year. Fisseha's writing is largely inspired by matters pertaining to the Ethiopian diaspora. She published her debut novel, *Daughters of Silence,* in 2019 and is currently working on the screenplay adaptation of the novel. *Quill & Quire Magazine* named the novel one of the Breakout Debuts of 2019. It was also selected by Margaret Atwood for the gritLIT Festival Spotlight Series ("About Rebecca" 1). Her ongoing second novel is titled *Only Because It's You*. She has written short stories, personal essays, and articles for *Selamta, Room Magazine, The Maple Tree Literary Supplement, The Rusty Toque, Joyland, Flock Magazine* and many others (1). She has been awarded a Chalmers Arts Fellowship from the Ontario Arts Council and served on the juries for the Writers' Trust Atwood-Gibson Fiction Prize.

Daughters of Silence is a contemporary novel that explores the themes of belonging, identity, family, death, forgiveness, courage, sexual abuse, war, human nature and recovery (*Adebabay Media* n.p). It focuses on the experiences of Ethiopian Canadian protagonist Dessie Mesfin Endale, named after the town of Dessie in Ethiopia. Dessie is where her mother, a university professor and diplomat named Zimita Tessema (Ema), was exiled as a result of the Red Terror. After Ema dies from skin cancer, Dessie, a flight attendant, finds herself on a turbulent

transcontinental flight to Addis Ababa. There, she visits her 87-year-old grandfather and the patriarch of the family, Babbaye. Babbaye is otherwise referred to by the military title 'the Shaleqa'. He is a respected man, who retired from the Ethiopian army where he served as an arbegna and commander against foreign interference. As the granddaughter of a patriot, Dessie describes the Second Italo-Ethiopian War through Babbaye's experiences and uses Babbaye's term 'talyans' to describe his Italian enemy. Despite not having seen Dessie in a long time, Babbaye fixates on his late daughter Ema's decision to be buried on foreign land in Toronto, Canada. He exerts his cultural beliefs on Dessie who has long been influenced by the Western world. In addition, the grieving process and the cultural expectations that come with mourning Ema force Dessie into an uncomfortable proximity with her adopted brother Le'ul. Le'ul is an active member of the family despite having sexually assaulted her as a child. Her parents Aba and Ema encourage Dessie to forgive Le'ul for his violation. Dessie terms their efforts as a 'forgiveness project'. In this thesis, the 'forgiveness project' is a symbolic reflection of a national reconciliation commission. The term 'forgiveness project' was drawn from the novel, where Dessie refers to Ema and Aba's efforts to encourage her to forgive her adopted brother for his sexual misconduct. Dessie states that while visiting Ema and Aba, Ema was already ready with her latest tactic in what she calls a forgiveness project. She later discovers that Babbaye's maid is her long-lost half-sister Gela. The narrative is set in Babbaye's household in Addis Ababa but also contains flashbacks of her family's life in Toronto, Canada and Vienna, Austria. The title *Daughters of Silence* refers to the inter-generational trauma of silence that functions within Dessie's family, affecting the daughter and granddaughters of Babbaye; Ema, Dessie and Gela.

4.1.2 Literature Review

There are a few studies carried out about Fisseha's novel. *Babay Media* published a video interview of Fisseha on YouTube in 2021. In the interview, Fisseha discusses her motivations for writing her debut novel and how sexual abuse shapes an individual's perspective on life. She also stresses the importance of raising awareness about children's abuse and trauma and how this trauma forms a part of Ethiopia's collective story. This shared trauma is significant in my analysis of inter-generational and collective trauma passed down from parent to child. Moreover, Chigbo Arthur Anyaduba briefly mentions Fisseha's novel in a book chapter titled "The Unresolved Crisis of Belonging in African Literature: A Reflection". In it, Anyaduba points out a trend where

Africans write about a subject's experience of a traumatic childhood in an African country and their newfound life in Canada. He suggests that many of the subjects seeking a sense of belonging in Western countries fail to do so in the modern world. Anyaduba's work is relevant because women in war-torn societies often struggle to find a sense of belonging. For example, Dessie never felt a sense of security in Ethiopia due to the sexual assault that happened in her past She moves away from her family and takes a job as a flight attendant. Dessie later returns to Ethiopia and seeks a sense of belonging. This occurs when she visits Babbaye's house and tries to take part in traditional women's kitchen tasks. Furthermore, in an article with Ryan B. Patrick, Fisseha discusses the permanence of death, the various types of silence, and learning to process unprocessed feelings. Fisseha mentions the silences identified by her mentor in the *Daughters of Silence* manuscript. What stands out is her claim that silence has a sound. She confesses that "[her] mentor also detected a lot of silences in the manuscript, which forced [her] to look at [herself] and [her] culture: what [is she] silent and vocal about? What is [her] culture silent and vocal about?" (Patrick para. 9).

An article by Piali Roy for *TheToronto Star* describes Babbaye as an imposing grandfather. Roy's discussion of Babbaye's meddling in the lives of his child and grandchild provides a unique perspective on gender dynamics and how they affect a patriarch who loses his influence with age. Overall, the articles and book chapters based on Fisseha's novel focus on the topic of inter-generational trauma and belonging. Many of these critiques recognise that a woman's trauma manifests in various ways.

4.1.3 Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework draws from Tembo who argues that the analysis of men's trauma is significant in fostering a deeper understanding of the relationship between men and women (Tembo 24). Tembo applies Musila's concept of gender trauma to his work. Musila suggests that a man's trauma can manifest in the form of violence when his sense of masculinity is threatened (134). Tembo suggests that this threat to masculinity drives men to attempt to reclaim the power lost after the war, and women are often adversely affected in the process. This chapter upholds this view by analysing the experiences of the women in *Daughters of Silence,* Ema, and Dessie, through their respective relationships with former commander and patriarch, Babbaye. As a commander during the years of resistance against Italian occupation in the 1930s, Babbaye is a

patriot with a "bloodthirsty, come-what-may defiance toward foreign interference" (Fisseha 13). His valour is maintained in the aftermath of the war. Babbaye becomes "a very lonely, bereaved man" who deals with his trauma by attempting to maintain the authority of his youth by disciplining his female descendants (111). According to Meintjes, Pillay, and Turshen, soldiers in the aftermath of war often use violence against women to extend this idea of discipline. She writes that:

> Violence against women is socially sanctioned as a form of discipline in peacetime and legitimatises the use of violence during war afterwards […] This allows marauding soldiers in wartime to extend the idea of discipline through acts of uncontrolled violence and degradation that discipline the women and all who are connected to them […] (Meintjes et al., 40)

Meintjes, Pillay, Turshen argue that men in a war-torn society often view discipline as a necessary measure during peacetime to reclaim a power lost during the war. This discipline may come about in the form of physical violence, intimidation, and in Babbaye's case, degradation. Described as the last of Babbaye's bloodline, his daughter Ema and granddaughter Dessie are how he attempts to maintain this command (Fisseha 15). Although Babbaye is not a marauding soldier in the aftermath of war, he disciplines Ema and Dessie to maintain his role as the patriarch. His discipline is a response to the threat of these women's newfound socio-political power and sovereignty in modern Ethiopia. Thus, the study of inter-generational trauma theory provides a framework through which Babbaye's influence on Ema and Dessie can be understood. According to Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, inter-generational trauma is a trauma which has "effects on the descendants of something that had inflicted narcissistic injury or even catastrophe on the parents" (Abraham and Torok 174). Ema and Dessie experience the Second Italo-Ethiopian War second-hand through Babbaye. In this case, the trauma of losing the war to the Italians is what provokes Babbaye's trauma and its transmission to Ema and Dessie. Moreover, Italian troops seized Addis Ababa during the end of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and this seizure brought cultural, political,

and economic changes to Ethiopia. These changes inflicted trauma on Ethiopians, specifically patriots like Babbaye.

4.2 Inter-generational Trauma and Discipline in Rebecca Fisseha's *Daughters of Silence*

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela argues that inter-generational trauma in post-apartheid South Africa manifests through the re-enactment of the violence that existed during the apartheid period. According to Madikizela, some behavioural responses to trauma are an individual's desire to control their surroundings through subconscious trauma reenactment (Gobodo-Madikizela 1). She states that "trauma is passed on intergenerationally in subtle ways through stories or silences, through unarticulated fears and the psychological scars that are often left unacknowledged" (3). As a former commander, Babbaye experienced Ethiopia's defeat during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. He passes his trauma from the defeat through unarticulated fears he has not acknowledged and reenacts the violence of the war by disciplining his female descendants Ema and Dessie. Therefore, Babbaye's role as a patriarch in his personal life, reflects his former role as soldier and army commander in his political life. In this section of the chapter, discipline is viewed as the trauma and violence that Babbaye reenacts. I argue that although Babbaye is well-respected by his community as a former commander, the same level of authority and discipline is not reflected in his personal life due to Ema and Dessie's growing agency.

Firstly, I compare Babbaye's influence as a patriarch to Emperor Haile Selassie's reign and his ultimate downfall in 1974 Ethiopia. Born Tafari Makonnen, a young Selassie took part in palace affairs and proved to be strong-willed at the early age of 14, just like how Babbaye began serving as a resistance fighter at the early age of 16 (Erlich 1). Selassie "sought to outdo [his father's] legacy. He would prove most manipulative at political combinations at home and in international affairs" (1-2). Babbaye on the other hand was a "sixteen-year-old resistance fighter" (Fisseha 74). He became a patriot with a "bloodthirsty, come-what-may defiance toward foreign interference" (14). It is evident that Selassie and Babbaye are patriots. However, their authority is later threatened by modernity. Babbaye is threatened by Ema's non-conformism towards his values because she expressed a desire to be buried in Canada against his wishes (96). Similarly, Haile Selassie was a traditionalist who tried to implement modern reforms but faced opposition

from university students for his censorship and authoritative influence on political institutions (Erlich 3). As a result, Selassie became a "humiliated refugee" (2) when Benito Mussolini's army invaded Ethiopia during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. In Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, Selassie is portrayed as a complex character who, like Babbaye, loses a daughter. Ema dies from cancer while Princess Tsehai, Selassie's daughter, dies during childbirth. In a way, both men deal with the grief of losing their daughters while still attempting to maintain a respectable public image. Whereas Selassie is forced to stand down by the Derg through an arrest and imprisonment, Babbaye's guilt regarding Ema is what makes him abandon his attempts to discipline Dessie. Overall, Selassie and Babbaye's patriotism, their power and their downfall are similar. They are complex powerful figures who have been traumatised by personal tragedy and political failure. It seems that Babbaye's desire to cement his role as a disciplinarian is destined to fail from the start, because his fondness for Ema and Dessie and his guilt outweigh his need to discipline them.

The first person Babbaye disciplines is Ema. He sends young Ema to an Ethiopian town called Dessie to avoid talking about her pregnancy and to hide her, therefore maintaining a good public image. As a result, he passes his trauma to Ema in the form of silence. This same silence is transmitted to Dessie years later. He justifies his decision of sending Ema away by stating that he sent her to Dessie to "withhold a life of shame from her" (103). However, Babbaye sends Ema to Dessie to save his own reputation as a respected former army commander. After leaving Ema's newborn baby, Gela in Dessie, Babbaye changes Ema's name to Zimita which translates to silence. Ema is also referred to as "Tobya, the name she was given at birth. [Babbaye] changed it to Zimita, silence, after the end of the terror, when she was a young woman" (30). In this description, Dessie states that Ema's name was changed after the Red Terror. However, the use of the word 'terror' in this context implies that the name Zimita was meant to mark the end of Babbaye's shame and fears concerning Ema's pregnancy. Moreover, Babbaye's decision making has a negative influence on Ema. It is clear when she is described as "the last seed of the Shaleqa" who was "destined for excellence [and] not to be a single mother of an unplanned child" (125). Thereafter, Ema spends her life with the pain of having disappointed Babbaye. She inherits silence from him and keeps Gela a secret from her children (125). This silence is eventually passed down to Dessie, whose name is inspired by the place where Ema's silence was established. Moreover, Dessie learns about the inspiration behind her name in her adulthood. Her obliviousness ties in with Abraham and Torok's theory of the phantom as an analogy for inter-generational trauma. The

theory of the phantom is defined as "an undisclosed family secret handed down to an unwitting descendant" (Abraham and Torok 16). It is trauma that affects Dessie without her knowledge. The silence Dessie inherits from Babbaye and Ema is revealed in her relationship with her partner Isak, whom she often finds herself unable to confide in. This silence is further revealed in her uncommunicative relationship with her adopted brother Le'ul. In essence, the trauma that Ema and Dessie inherit arises from Babbaye's need to safeguard his public image, which he established during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War.

Similarly, Babbaye attempts to maintain discipline in his household through the desire for repatriation. His desire for the repatriation of Ema's dead body from Canada matches his political desire for the return of a lost Ethiopian artefact. The Ethiopian Axum Obelisk rock was taken by Italy after their victory in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. When Ema is given a job in Italy, Babbaye resents her job as a diplomat. He later adopts the false belief that she only got the job in Rome to repatriate the Ethiopian Axum Obelisk rock back to its rightful home country of Ethiopia (Fisseha 74). During this time, Babbaye joined the cause towards the rock's repatriation by signing a petition of repatriation in 2008. He is described to have been desperate "as if the stone itself was looted from his own backyard" (74). His efforts are successful, and the tall rock is successfully repatriated from Rome and reinstalled in its original place of Axum (74). In the years following Ethiopia's success of repatriation, Ema dies and Babbaye seeks to repatriate Ema's body from Toronto. Babbaye strives to convince Dessie to return Ema's body back to Ethiopia for burial as if she is the stolen rock personified. In this context, Babbaye likens Ema to a prized object stolen from him by his Italian enemy. After Ema's death, Babbaye mourns her absence and refers to her as Tobya. Dessie later reveals that it is his folk way of saying 'Ethiopia' (22). The name Tobya reveals Babbaye's patriotism, his possessiveness towards Ema and his expectations that the successes of the Axum Obelisk will reflect in his personal life. Dessie later compares the size of the boulder Babbaye uses to sit in his backyard to Ema's headstone. This is to illustrate the pressure and weight of Babbaye's demands concerning Ema even after her death. In a way, the boulder's likeness to Ema's headstone suggests that even death cannot escape Babbaye's discipline. In the end, Dessie convinces Babbaye to consider travelling to Toronto to see Ema's

grave instead of having her body repatriated. His consideration of Dessie's demands displays his loss of power as a disciplinarian.

The second person Babbaye attempts to discipline is Dessie. Babbaye tries to impart his patriotism on his eight-year-old granddaughter at her family's farewell party. Gobodo-Madikizela argues that inter-generational trauma can be transmitted covertly, and through "unarticulated fears and the psychological scars that are often left unacknowledged" (Madikizela 3). Madikizela provides an analogy of a group of children who unknowingly reenact the atrocity of a necklace killing common in South Africa in the 1980s despite not having been born at the time. She claims that "none of the girls [she] saw re-enacting the necklace game that morning had actually witnessed a necklace murder. The unspoken events of the past, however – the silence of Mlungisi's lambs – had become imprinted on their minds" (2). By describing this re-enactment, Gobodo-Madikizela demonstrates how trauma is transferred to an unknowing descendant. In Fisseha's novel, Babbaye interrogates Dessie and tries to convince her to stay in Ethiopia instead of relocating with her family. Babbaye "interrogated [her] about this land at the farewell party for [her] family, the day before [they] left Ethiopia. [She] was eight years old" (Fisseha 12). The word 'interrogate' is imbued with an intensity evocative of a legal cross-examination. Babbaye summons Dessie and "pins her arms at her sides so that she stood as rigid as a proper little patriot" (14). He also calls her "his little arbegna" which translates into "his little patriot" (14). Like the children who re-enact the necklace killings of apartheid, Babbaye guides Dessie through a re-enactment of the drill commands of his time as a soldier. The idea that he compels her to maintain a rigid posture insinuates Babbaye's attempt to render her malleable to his principles. Trauma is transferred to an adult Dessie and this is evident in her sense of dread when she visits Babbaye's house after years of being away. For example, when she returns to Addis Ababa years later, Dessie finds Babbaye sitting in the same spot he had sat when he interrogated her as a child. She has to gather herself to meet him, and she has to "feign crying in an attempt to momentarily avoid his questions about Ema's burial" (13). Sitting in the same spot indicates Babbaye's intractable spirit regarding his loyalty to Ethiopia. However, a rock is naturally subject to transposition, therefore, his position of power as a disciplinarian is precarious.

In addition, Babbaye exerts his discipline by drafting a poem of lament for his late daughter Ema on Dessie's behalf and without Dessie's permission. The poem is not quoted in the novel; however, it is clear that it is in remembrance of Ema and it is written in "heightened Amharic"

(27). His use of heightened Amharic represents his efforts to keep the Ethiopian tradition intact. Dessie is surprised to see the short poem, asking herself "I wrote this?" (26). She realises that if she had grown up in Ethiopia, she would have been able to write poems using the same heightened Amharic. Babbaye's complex language reveals the traditional values he tries to coercively impart to Dessie. As a patriot, Babbaye yearns for a return of the Ethiopian tradition that existed before the interference of the Western world in Ethiopia. In this case, he attempts to attain discipline by maintaining a traditionalist public image. Moreover, history is entirely dependent on the person who writes it. Babbaye's use of heightened Amharic on behalf of Dessie is an attempt to exert firm control over his life after losing command during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War.

The layout of Babbaye's house and garden are symbols of his imposing presence in Dessie's life. The house is made up of high ground and low ground. It has a row of attached homes on the lower ground and a single main house, belonging to Babbaye overlooking the others (19). This image clearly maps out the family's hierarchy. Compared to the other houses on the property, Babbaye's house lies on a high stone foundation to symbolise his power to preside over his surroundings from a place of advantage (19). Moreover, the road leading up to the house is dilapidated and outdated. When Dessie is first driven to Babbaye's home, she describes the road as rocky, unpaved, and muddy to foreshadow Babbaye's conservative way of thinking (17). She and her driver Wondu struggle along the road, and this represents the impending disagreements between her and Babbaye. Babbaye's passion, stubbornness and close-mindedness are also represented by his red metal gate and the pedestrian door built in on its side. The door is closed when Dessie arrives, and this represents Babbaye's impending rejection of her Western ideology. In addition, when Gela first ushers her through Babbaye's garden, her walk alongside Wondu and Gela in "a single file down a flagstone pathway" is reminiscent of marching troops under the instruction of Babbaye as a commander (19). Contrastingly, the pathway "splits into two" (19) and this indicates her inevitable abandonment of a path Babbaye has established for her. Also as important is her impression of Babbaye's cinderblock wall topped by broken glass and embedded in cement. She describes its peeling paint as a map of "some unknown planet with red continents and metallic grey oceans" (17) to illustrate the incongruity of Babbaye's patriotic belief system in modern Ethiopia. The descriptions of the house as dilapidated suggests that his way of thinking is no longer practical. Later in the novel, Dessie reveals the fragility of Babbaye's authority and her own growing agency when she stands in Ema's room overlooking Babbaye's garden of imposition.

Ema's room "overlooks the courtyard and Babbaye's garden directly beneath" (28). This suggests that Dessie has an advantage over him. Her choice to avoid repatriating Ema's body gives her authority over the disciplinarian (28).

The circumstances of Babbaye's home are akin to the occurrences of the Garden of Eden. In both cases, subordinates contravene the rules of the presiding figure. In the story of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are entrusted with the garden but are warned not to consume the forbidden fruit of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2-3). Although Adam and Eve are initially afraid to eat the forbidden fruit, they give into temptation through the serpent's encouragement. The Mefakiya twigs sanctify Babbaye's garden. Mefakiya, otherwise known as salvadora persica L, is significant in the African oral hygiene tradition (Gupta et al., 71). The tree "has been scientifically proven to be very useful in the prevention of tooth decay, even when used without any other tooth cleaning methods […] S. persica is widely distributed in India, Africa, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel and Pakistan" (71). The Mefakiya garden therefore symbolises the tradition that Babbaye values. As a child, Dessie asks for permission to swallow the Mefakiya juice after Babbaye makes her a toothbrush out of it. Babbaye first tricks her to believe that the plant is poisonous, and her panic makes her accidentally swallow the juice. Out of fear, she "squeeze[s] her eyes shut, hoping for death" (Fisseha 53). When Babbaye advises Dessie to avoid swallowing the juice, she swallows it anyway and her defiance is reminiscent of Adam and Eve's consumption of the forbidden fruit. Years later and in the absence of Babbaye, an adult Dessie exercises her agency when she uses the Mefakiya plant. When she holds the plant, it "surrender[s]" with "a shiver" and she uses it to brush her teeth "vigorously" (53). While Adam and Eve are banished from the garden for their conduct, Dessie uses it again and seizes power over the Mefikiya garden by brushing her teeth without Babbaye's permission.

A crucial point to consider is that Babbaye's attempt to trick Dessie into thinking the Mefakiya is poisoned is a metaphor told through war-related language. Babbaye's language reveals his trauma, and it also demonstrates his efforts to insert politics into his personal life. After a young Dessie asks to swallow the Mefakiya juice left over from brushing her teeth, Babbaye states that "only by experience can one know what kills" (53). In this statement, it is clear that Babbaye sees the violence of war in mundane aspects of his life. In this metaphor, he justifies his desire for control by stating that his experience as a soldier makes him knowledgeable enough to make commands. This relates to Meintjes, Pillay, Turshen's claim that violence is socially

sanctioned and that soldiers can extend the violence of war into peacetime because their experiences of war make them believe they are more well-adapted in society. Although Babbaye tries to discipline Ema and Dessie, his discipline is not well founded because he does not rightfully own the land on which he exerts this discipline. The land now known to be Babbaye's home was brought into marriage by Dessie's great-great-grandmother who was "blood related to some royal" (52). Dessie's great-great-grandmother had plans to pass the home down to her daughter, Babbaye's wife, who was expected to pass it down to Ema (52). However, Ema does not live to inherit the homes and Babbaye instead rents them out to tenants. The land rightfully belongs to a line of women but has instead fallen into the hands of a man. Babbaye's misappropriation of this land shows the fragility of his power because he tries to exert discipline in a place that is not rightfully his own. He also rejects young Dessie's requests to move into the property when part of the property rightfully belongs to her. His exertion of power in someone else's land reveals the fragility of his power.

Towards the end of the novel, Babbaye realises that he has inflicted trauma on his descendants, and he relinquishes his power. His resignation is demonstrated when he accepts that Ema's body will not be repatriated. Throughout the novel, Dessie holds power over Babbaye because she is the only person with the capacity to bring his wishes to fruition. Although Babbaye plans to repatriate Ema's body, Dessie's disapproval is what halts his plan in its tracks. While at the 'Servant of God Funeral Service,' Babbaye and the funeral director Teka, dial Teka's colleague in Canada to negotiate a repatriation (146). Teka hands Dessie the phone and Stanley states that Dessie has "decided to repatriate after all" (147). This moment makes it clear that the fate of Ema's body and the family hinges on Dessie's word and action. This gives Dessie the title of head of family because she makes important decisions on behalf of her family. Later in the novel, Babbaye yields to Dessie's growing power and puts her in charge of directing the labourers at his home. Babbaye tells Dessie to pay the labourers and leaves her to arrange the living room the way she would have wanted when she arrived in Addis Ababa (192). She arranges "Babbaye's long sofa, three single seaters, coffee table, dining table for eight, television and stand, sideboard, and shelves" (192) to symbolically illustrate her gradual influence on his thinking and his compromise on the fate of Ema's burial. Her decision to arrange the living room to her taste is reminiscent of the ancient Chinese practice of 'feng shui' where a house's interior is rearranged to allow for

harmony and balance to the people who live in it. [11] Dessie's actions remove the air of imposition the house symbolised when she first arrived in Addis Ababa. In the end, Dessie's relationship with Babbaye begins to improve.

Although Ema and Dessie's lives are complicated by Babbaye's discipline, their adulthood allows them to gain agency to the extent that they no longer need Babbaye's protection. For instance, Ema's exposure to the Western world while working as a diplomat provides her with enough agency to oppose Babbaye. Ema keeps in contact with Gela for years through exchanging letters. Their relationship was initially encumbered by Babbaye who demanded for Gela to be left to her paternal family's care in Dessie. Ema initially feels shame for disappointing Babbaye when she gets pregnant, but she gains the courage to leave Ethiopia and make a life for herself as a respected diplomat. Dessie also manages to make a life for herself despite Babbaye's initial refusal to provide a haven for her as a child. When Le'ul sexually assaults her at their childhood home, she asks for Babbaye's permission to move back to Ethiopia, and he denies her the opportunity. In the end, Dessie gains agency by telling Le'ul to stay away from her instead of avoiding him or relying on Babbaye's protection.

Overall, Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen's argument about a former soldier's desire to extend discipline works in harmony with Abraham and Torok's phantom theory because the trauma that Babbaye transmits to his descendants is hidden under the mask of patriotism and obligation. It is not clear to Ema and Dessie that Babbaye's constant pressure for them to become patriots is 'phantom' trauma passed down in a manner that is socially sanctioned under the pretence of patriotism.

4.3 Ema and Aba's 'Forgiveness Project': The Interplay Between Collective Memory and Reconciliation

In the previous section of this chapter, I demonstrated how Babbaye attempts to discipline his descendants, Ema and Dessie, by re-enacting the violence of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. I argued that although Babbaye is well-respected by his community as a former commander, the level of authority he attained from the military is not reflected in his personal life due to Ema and

[11] Although 'feng shui' is a Chinese practice, it has been applied to an African context. In an article for *CNN Style* titled 'How African Feng Shui Can Shape the Continent's Cities of the Future,' it is stated that application of the Chinese practice in an African context requires an understanding of the environment and the community.

Dessie's growing agency. This section focuses on familial imposition by analysing Aba and Ema's attempts to convince Dessie to grant Le'ul absolution for sexually assaulting her. It argues that Ema and Aba's intervention in Dessie's life, which I refer to as their 'forgiveness project' is undermined by its own impracticality and flaws. When Dessie visits Ema, she describes Ema's attempt to resolve the conflict between Dessie and Le'ul a "latest tactic in her forgiveness project" (65). To begin, there is a shared memory of Le'ul's sexual misconduct in Dessie's family. Thus, the trauma of Le'ul's misconduct dominates their family identity and interactions. Aba and Ema undertake the responsibility of endorsing the two siblings' reconciliation. I compare this to a reconciliation commission, a system often established by national governments or international bodies to resolve human rights violations and help victims come to terms with the collective memory of violence. In this case, Aba and Ema are commissioners, while Dessie and Le'ul play the roles of victim and perpetrator respectively. This section draws from the strengths and weaknesses of the real-life mandate of the Ethiopian National Reconciliation Commission (ERC) of 2019 and how its ultimate dissolution reflects the collapse of Aba and Ema's forgiveness project. As a diplomat in the late nineties, a younger Ema travels across continents to broker peace between countries. Dessie describes this political endeavour to have "held about as well as the bond between two incompatibly damaged people" (40). Dessie suggests that there are parallels between Ema's political peace-building efforts and her personal attempts to repair Dessie's strained relationship with Le'ul. Dessie describes Ema as having "temper[ed] with the carefully drawn borders between her children," (40) highlighting the parallels between familial reconciliation and Ema's attempts at political, cross-national reconciliation. Similarly, it becomes evident that Aba is in alliance with Ema when he invites both Le'ul and Dessie over to their house without Dessie's knowledge. Dessie decides that "either Ema had won Aba over to her quest for some kind of spontaneous reconciliation…or Aba had made himself her deputy" (49). I would like to argue that Aba and Ema's forgiveness project is flawed and makes Dessie's experiences of healing difficult in the aftermath of violence. I suggest that the project should not have existed at all, as Dessie never expressed a desire for reconciliation in the first place.

According to Solomon Ayele Dersso, there has been a lack of systematic transitional justice processes in Ethiopia since the Red Terror Trials. The trials brought former officials of the Derg military regime to court in the 1990s (3). Before the year 2019, there was a need to address the collective memory of past conflicts through a sanctioned system of nation building (Dersso 3). In

February 2019, the Ethiopian government established the ERC to help build peace in Ethiopia. In a similar way, Ema and Aba decide to shoulder the responsibility of bringing peace between their children (1). One of the mandates of the ERC was to "maintain peace, justice, national unity and consensus and also reconciliation among Ethiopian peoples" (Addis Standard 1). It is important to state that the commission's peacebuilding was not limited to a specific conflict but various conflicts in the past and present (Dersso 5). According to the *Addis Standard*, the commission ended four years after its establishment without a visible or significant achievement (Addis Standard 1).

A significant component of collective memory is that it is selective and subjective in nature. This means that the memories of a group of people within a community are often adapted to present circumstances (Gijs 5). However, reconciliation cannot be possible when aspects of the truth are overlooked. Ema tries to convince Dessie to overlook Le'ul's misconduct by urging her to be more empathetic because Le'ul suffered in his childhood. Le'ul is Aba's very distant cousin by marriage, and he was raised by a single mother in a village. His father did not want him, so he was sent to Aba and Ema's home at eight years old. Ema and Aba found him standing outside their gate and adopted him. Dessie states that "[Le'ul] literally turned up outside [their] gate one day. That's what [she has] been told. [Her] parents adopted him. No one consulted [her]" (Fisseha 87). During one of what Dessie refers to as Ema's "tactic[s] in her forgiveness project", Ema tries to appeal to Dessie's emotions by telling Dessie that Le'ul "didn't know what he was doing" (65) when he sexually assaulted her, and that the assault was a result of his suffering in his childhood. Ema's tactics are underhanded because she attempts to measure Le'ul and Dessie's trauma. Ema suggests that Le'ul's suffering outweighs Dessie's suffering, and he is more deserving of empathy. As a result, the selective nature of collective memory downplays the severity of Dessie's trauma. Ema's influence on Dessie's way of remembering makes Dessie's healing difficult.

It is important to note that there are various step-by-step reconciliation models that have been established in both an international and an African context. In the American context, John Paul Lederach established a framework which sees the process of peace as an "openminded multilevel, political process of continuous interaction between whole groups and whole bodies politic" (Lederach 11). Lederach's model uses the biblical ethics from the Christian Bible as a guide for achieving reconciliation. The model's Christian foundation may limit its resonance within a religiously diverse Ethiopian community. According to the Federal Negarit Gazette of

Ethiopia, the ERC established a justice and reconciliation framework under Proclamation No. 1102/2018. The House of People's Representatives ended the commission's term in office in 2022 and passed its responsibilities to the National Dialogue Commission (NDC). Therefore, it is possible that the framework of the ERC had not been practical. Similarly, the terms of Ema and Aba's reconciliation project are not tailored for Dessie's needs. The project is solely based on attaining Dessie's mercy and forgiveness without the desire for the truth and justice that Lederach suggests are required in the pursuit of reconciliation. Therefore, in this section I identify the reasons why Aba and Ema's already established model fails and what that means for Dessie's experience in post-conflict Ethiopia.

Firstly, Aba and Ema use religion as a vehicle towards Dessie's healing, but Dessie cannot identify with their religious rituals. After Le'ul sexually assaults Dessie, Aba accompanies him for a pilgrimage to a place called Kulubi Gabriel for healing. Ema tells a young Dessie about the journey Aba and Le'ul take. She informs her that to complete the journey, they must "fly or ride a bus to Dire Dawa, […] walk seventy kilometres east again. […] carry rocks on [their] back the entire way and [they won't] wear shoes or socks" (Fisseha 144). When they return from the pilgrimage, Dessie doubts whether Aba and Le'ul went to Kulubi because their feet do not have bruises. Aba and Le'ul had made it back from Kulubi without bruises and that symbolises their lack of remorse and their fast recovery from trauma. They recover quickly because of their lack of remorse, while Dessie still struggles to heal. During the pilgrimage, Aba receives and uses holy water for a healing ritual for Le'ul, and Ema later declares that "with the holy water, Le'ul is healed" (151). Yet when a young and curious Dessie smells and tastes the water, she does not feel its power. She states that "it was just tap water" (150). This is a metaphor because it indicates the ineffectiveness of religion in her healing journey. In essence, there is a dissonance between Dessie's trauma and Aba and Ema's belief systems. Dessie cannot cooperate with the forgiveness project when religious misalignments hinder the possibility of reconciliation.

Besides, Ema views the concept of reconciliation from an impractical standpoint. Instead of suggesting therapy as a method of Dessie's healing, Ema recommends a self-help book titled *The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness and Peace*, by Buddhist teacher Jack Kornfield. The text explores both traditional and modern Buddhist practices to cultivate healing in a reader's daily life (Kornfield 2). Dessie first learns about the book when Ema requests it for herself. Ema later reveals that the book is for Dessie, and it is meant to "crack [Dessie's] unforgiving stone heart"

(Fisseha 13). When Dessie meets her boyfriend Isak for the first time, he is holding the same book. He asks her about her interest in Buddhism, and Dessie reveals her unfamiliarity with it. She confesses that the religion is inapplicable to her life because she was raised an Orthodox Christian, and she has never met an Ethiopian Buddhist before (43). Ema's recommendation of a book written through an American Buddhist perspective falls short in facilitating reconciliation because Buddhism is unfamiliar to Dessie and it cannot help her heal. This means that Dessie's exclusively Orthodox Christian identity reduces the book's impact on her life. Additionally, Ema's efforts fall short because after her death, Dessie discovers that she has never read the book. As a result, Ema's methods to make Dessie forgive Le'ul are unworkable because of Ema's own unfamiliarity with Buddhist practices. Ema's failure to read the book she recommends suggests that those who set out the mandates of reconciliation must know the nuances of the relevant conflict to implement significant change.

Moreover, lasting reconciliation is not possible without recognition of the severity of the conflict by relevant parties; the victim, perpetrator and the institution, in the pursuit of this peace. Reconciliation is not practical for Dessie because Le'ul interacts with her as if he never assaulted her. There are also power imbalances that pressure her to follow the orders of Le'ul, Aba and Ema. For example, although Dessie resents Le'ul and disagrees with most of what he tells her to do, she confesses that she has "only ever obeyed then avoided Le'ul" (51) to keep the peace in the family. It is evident that Le'ul holds power over her and has expectations to keep relations between them unchanged because after Ema's death, he sends Dessie an email for the first time with an attachment of a headstone he has picked for Ema. In the email, he tells her "[they] went to see [the headstone] in the mason's workshop. Aba got Stanley to tell him where he had them made. Can you believe Aba tried to lift it? He must think he has the strength of Samson" (51). In this case, Le'ul tries to use humour to appeal to Dessie as her big brother. He starts with a joke, poking fun at Aba's lack of strength while carrying the headstone, as if he expects her to laugh with him like siblings should (51). His use of humour is a method to reclaim his place as her playful big brother even though their relationship has changed. As a result, forgiveness and healing is made difficult for Dessie because Le'ul is not willing to take accountability, and he cannot gauge the severity of his actions until the end of the novel.

In 2019, the ERC was formed to "prosecute offenders, nor refer individuals for prosecution" (Dersso 13). The commission was formed to "initiate recommendation[s] that enable

[…] lasting peace and […] prevent the future occurrence of such conflict" (13). The advice Ema gives Dessie is not a recommendation. Her advice is an instruction that holds authoritative power over Dessie's life. When Ema dies, Dessie feels the loss of Ema's authority. Without Ema, Dessie contemplates how she ought to act. She wonders, "What are the rules of the world without Ema?" (Fisseha 51). Ema's death brings Dessie a power and agency she is unfamiliar with and she gains the courage to order Le'ul to stay away from her. The key point to consider is that while Aba and Ema's imposition can be downplayed under the guise of a 'recommendation', their advice is often commanding and makes the process of reconciliation pressured and unjust. Their encouragement has an adverse effect on Dessie because she is pressured to do what she believes is acceptable by her parents and her culture.

Furthermore, Dessie's experience of healing in post-conflict Ethiopia, which in a broader national sense would be referred to as nation building, relies on the mandates of authoritative figures and transitional justice systems to set out the parameters of her journey. The problem with Ema and Aba's forgiveness project is that they communicate a desire to not hold Le'ul accountable for rape through prosecution. This is similar to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa (TRC) which was formed to foster peace during the transition from apartheid to democracy. Many victims' needs were not met due to issues like the commission's leniency towards the perpetrators and the victims' expectations being overlooked. When the victim's expectations of justice are compromised in the process of reconciliation, the transition towards peace is complicated. It seems that what Dessie really desires is to distance herself from Le'ul. In the end, she sets out the parameters of her own healing journey by telling him to stay away from her. This is when she finally finds some semblance of peace.

Lastly, Dessie never expresses a desire for reconciliation, and this invalidates Aba and Ema's forgiveness project. It is impractical to seek reconciliation when one party is not willing. Throughout the novel, Dessie states her yearning to be away from Le'ul. She admits to wishing for Aba to return from Kulubi Gabriel to Vienna without Le'ul. Correspondingly, she constantly states how much she yearns for sisters instead of an adopted brother and even goes as far as to ask to move in with Babbaye. In the end, Le'ul apologises to Dessie when she finally confronts him. Despite Le'ul's apology, she does not show a desire to reconcile and tells him to stay away from her. She tells him to "stay away from [her]. [She] used to wish so much that [he] would find wherever the dead go and recognise it enough to stay. Make my wish come true now, be dead to

me" (217). Her final act of distancing herself from Le'ul demonstrates that she is setting the course of her own healing. In a broader context, the NDC in Ethiopia has replaced the ERC since 2022 (Addis Standard para. 2). The NDC is primarily focused on addressing and dealing with conflicts through dialogue and discussions rather than focusing more on justice and accountability (para. 2). In the same way, Dessie's freedom from Aba and Ema's forgiveness project does not guarantee that she will receive any form of justice. The last time she sees Le'ul, she insists that he should keep the key to her condo when he attempts to return it. Handing her key over to Le'ul is symbolic. It implies that she no longer needs permission to heal on her own terms. Her healing happens internally, and it is not reliant on Aba and Ema's 'forgiveness project'.

4.4 Scars of Trauma: Reflecting on the Consequences of In/visible Trauma on the Body.

In my reading of *Daughters of Silence,* I observe that trauma visibly manifests on the female body. It takes the form of religious body markings, scars of illness and self-harm. As I previously mentioned, the title of the novel *Daughters of Silence* alludes to the trauma passed down across generations in the form of silence. This shows that trauma and violence persist in the aftermath of war. In this section I explore how Ema, Dessie and Gela's unspoken trauma and culture of silence are transmitted across generations and become visible in various forms on their bodies. In this case, this embodiment of trauma is rooted in symbolism because there is a hidden meaning behind every visible scar, and that meaning elucidates each character's silent trauma. For example, Ema's scars from her cancer surgery are visible to the human eye, but she hides them underneath her clothing so that only she knows how many scars she has. The hidden scars represent her repressed trauma. They constantly itch, as if reminding her about what she refuses to speak of and confront. Somatic experiencing is a psychological term coined by Dr. Peter Levine who theorises that there is a link between trauma and embodiment. In his research, Levine argues that "trauma cannot be fully healed until we also address the essential role played by the body […] the body is affected by trauma" (Levine 3). This analysis attempts to find the symbolic significance of each scar as a bodily manifestation with the intention of understanding each woman's trauma. My argument is that Ema, Dessie and Gela's silent trauma are revealed on their bodies. I also suggest that their trauma functions in different ways; Dessie's childhood trauma heals and fades with time. Ema's

is deliberately hidden and therefore unresolved; Gela's trauma is evident and yet to be reckoned with.

The novel displays trauma as a visible manifestation when Dessie first meets her half-sister Gela, whom she initially believes to be Babbaye's maid. She sees the rural religious crucifixes etched on Gela's forehead and chin from Gela's time living in the Ethiopian town of Dessie. Gela's "forehead and chin are scarred where there once were tattoos, typical markers of a rural Christian. She endured having crucifixes needled in, then removed when she came to the city. By heat or blade, who knows" (19). The use of words like heat, blade, scarred, and needled in imply a long, excruciating period of physical pain and torment, therefore signifying the lasting impact of Gela's childhood trauma on her life. Dessie is where Ema left Gela with her Eritrean father and grandparents after her birth. When Gela was born, her father was sent to the Eritrean frontline to fight for Ethiopia in the Ethiopian Civil War. Her grandparents were deported back to the Eritrea they had not seen in 40 years, forcing Gela to flee to Babbaye's home to escape her own deportation (Fisseha 201). Thus, the crucifix scars on Gela's face are symbols of her traumatic childhood. Crucifixes generally represent the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for humanity upon his crucifixion and they also symbolise the hope for a resurrection. Gela's visible crucifixes signify that she was sacrificed for the family's honour because Ema had her out of wedlock. The crucifix also implies a potential resurrection, and on Gela's face, the crucifixes symbolise her hopes to establish a new life with Dessie's family. Equally, the crucifix scars are exclusive to rural Christians. Dessie did not grow up with Gela; therefore, she does not fully understand the meaning behind Gela's facial scarring.

In the same vein, Dessie describes the scars that she and Ema bear on their bodies. She "think[s] of the daisy that [she] carved on [her] inner wrist with the tip of a compass when [she] was ten. The mark is so faded only [she] know[s] it is there" (19). The age of 10 is significant in Dessie's childhood because it is after she experiences sexual assault. After the assault, Le'ul goes away to university in America. During this period of her childhood, Dessie carves a daisy on her wrist with a compass, enacting a form of self-harm as a coping mechanism. The daisy she etches on her skin is symbolic of her desire to regain the childhood innocence the assault takes from her. As an adult, the scar gradually fades to the extent that only she knows it is there (20). The idea

that she is the only one who knows about the scar implies that her trauma is not undetectable to others. The fading scar further implies that Dessie is on her way to recovery.

Correspondingly, Ema bears scars of her own from her skin cancer surgeries. When Dessie sees Gela's scars, she reveals that she is grateful that unlike Gela, Ema's scars were "all out of sight" (20). Ema hides her scars underneath her clothes. This suggests that she keeps her trauma hidden. When she dies from skin cancer, she dies with the secret of her trauma because she did not resolve her pain concerning her illness, her children's contentious relationship, and her abandonment of Gela. For example, when Dessie sees Ema in her coffin, she wants to dress her but states that "she wouldn't want me to see her scars, not at the same time" (79). Ema would not let Dessie see all of her scars because she had a difficult time coping with trauma and pretended it did not exist. The itching of these scars is also symbolic. It implies that her trauma taunts her and forces her to acknowledge its presence. Her light scratching of each scar implies that she is reluctant to confront her trauma head-on and wants to repress her trauma further.

Nevertheless, the terminal nature of Ema's skin cancer does not diminish the idea that she reclaims power over her scars and her body after death by deciding where she will be buried. When Babbaye tells Dessie of his concerns about Ema's body being buried in the foreign land of Canada, Dessie tells him that it was Ema's dying wish to rest in Toronto (33). Dessie describes Ema's burial spot to reassure him. She says that "where Ema rests now […] [she] see[s] her in there clearly, as if she's asleep under a spotlight, intact, despite what I'm told happens to flesh and skin after death" (23). In this statement, Dessie's use of the word "intact" implies that Ema has been buried in a dignified manner. Although skin cancer spreads and takes over her skin, Ema's satisfaction with her resting place gives her ownership of her body. Moreover, before Ema's funeral service, Dessie takes it upon herself to substitute Ema's posthumous attire of a "black Max Mara suit, pink micro-pleated blouse, silk print scarf […] black purse and heels" (79), for Ema's hager libs.[12] Ema loved her hager libs and "dreamt of wearing [them] every day for the rest of her life after retirement" (79). Dessie's decision to change Ema's clothing helps to restore Ema's sense of self because the black suit was not in line with her character. While the scars on Ema's

[12] Hager Libs are the traditional dresses that Ema wears in the text.

body represent her trauma, the dignity with which the same scarred body is buried suggests that her scarred body is her own despite the trauma inflicted on it.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter began with a discussion of Babbaye's traumatisation and how it affects the experiences of Ema, Dessie and Gela in the form of inter-generational trauma. It showed how Babbaye sought to manage his trauma by exerting discipline over the women in his family. As a result, the women also inflict their trauma through inter-generational trauma. It begins with Babbaye, who passes it down to Ema. Ema eventually passes her trauma down to Dessie and Gela. I argued that Babbaye's downfall reflects that of Emperor Haile Selassie, whose reign was compromised by harsh opposition and modernity in Ethiopia. Like the Emperor, Babbaye is adversely affected by his daughter's death, yet his love for his descendants leads to the relinquishing of his power over them. I also explored Aba and Ema's 'forgiveness project', which sought to encourage Dessie to forgive Le'ul for sexual assault. This 'forgiveness project' functions as a reflection of a reconciliation commission but in a personal context. The analysis revealed Aba and Ema's 'forgiveness project' to be flawed because it complicates Dessie's healing in the aftermath of violence. Additionally, I examined how trauma manifests on the female body in the form of a scar. I suggested that Ema, Dessie and Gela's scars are presented in different forms; hidden, fading and not dealt with. This demonstrated that for women, violence persists into the aftermath of a war. However, regardless of this violence, women ultimately find a way to exert their own power due to a changing and modern world.

This analysis showed that despite being disciplined by Babbaye, Aba and Ema, Dessie holds more authority than she understands. Her power is revealed when she is given the opportunity to rearrange Babbaye's living room and when she cuts off relations with her abuser. In addition, my analysis has shed light on the relationship between war and trauma. I have found that war causes inter-generational trauma. The Second Italo-Ethiopian War is a continuation of the First Italo-Ethiopian War. Thus, those who fought in it are affected by the trauma of their predecessors and like Babbaye, seek various mechanisms for coping with their trauma.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

"And what on earth do you do with the women?" (Serpell 2)

The epigraph above is a question posed by writer Namwali Serpell, who attempts to uncover the secret to writing a war narrative. Serpell acknowledges the exclusionary nature of both traditional and contemporary war writing. She questions whether the portrayal of women as refugees, casualties, nurses, and victims of rape is "a profound truth or a blind spot" (Serpell para. 3). A growing number of women writers, like Mengiste, Edemariam and Fisseha have rejected non-inclusive portrayals of women in war. A Sierra Leone-born woman named Aminata Conteh-Biger reflects on her lived experience of war on an episode of a radio programme by the *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service* called "Outlook". In the episode, Conteh-Biger narrates the story of her abduction by armed rebels at 18 years old and discusses the sexual violence and abuse that she experienced during the Sierra Leonean Civil War in 1999. Before the war, Conteh-Biger had been raised in a protective bubble by her financially secure father, with whom she shared a close bond. After her abduction, the war forced her to adapt to a significantly less privileged way of life under the control of the fighter who had kidnapped her. The war transformed Conteh-Biger by subjecting her to sexual violence. As a result, she developed survival skills and was forced to mature quickly. She was later released by an army leader and returned home, although the home that she had left behind was no longer the same. Her father, whom she described as having been joyful and optimistic previously, struggled with feelings of guilt for failing to save her.

This story brought a few important points to my attention. Firstly, that women are active participants in war, yet men's experiences of war are distinctly prioritised over those of women. I also started to understand the importance of providing women with channels through which they could express their experiences of war. I later questioned the impact of war on a woman's development, given the survival skills that Conteh-Biger acquired. It was also important for me to understand how a woman's wartime experiences affected her life in the aftermath.

For this reason, my initial goals were to examine how two different literary narrative genres – fiction and non-fiction – represent the experiences of Ethiopian women in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. Next, I intended to analyse the capacity that women have in making their own

choices when factors like patriotism and desperation are involved. I also wanted to use both African and Western theories of gender and trauma in my analysis. Lastly, I hoped to investigate how contemporary revisionist literature is used to question gendered historical ideologies concerning Ethiopian women. At the onset of this study, I intended to show how my three selected texts give visibility to the stories of women and how women's roles and experiences vary during wartime. I set out to explore how much control the women characters of *The Shadow King* have over their bodies after assuming various roles in war, and in my analysis of the narrative, I discovered that Aster and Hirut's bodily autonomy is compromised through military servitude and sexual violence. Additionally, my objective was to question how desperation and patriotism affect the agency of Yetemegnu, the protagonist of *The Wife's Tale,* and in my analysis of the text, I found that that desperation often complicated Yetemegnu's agency. The decisions of various women from the three texts, particularly, Yetemegnu, Aster, Hirut, Ema and Dessie were often driven by survival and desperation. I further questioned how women's physical and emotional trauma manifests in *Daughters of Silence*, and in my analysis of the narrative, I identified that Ema and Dessie's physical trauma serves as a symbol of their emotional trauma. In the end, I recognised that three of the research questions posed at the beginning of this study are related to the female body and personal choice. The questions were as follows: how much of their bodies do the women characters of *The Shadow King* control after assuming varying roles in war and how does the war transform a woman's body into a locus of constant negotiation. I also questioned how desperation and patriotism affect the agency of the protagonist in *The Wife's Tale*. Lastly, I questioned how much of women's suffering is displayed on their bodies in *Daughters of Silence* and how each woman manages to exercise her agency in her respectively constrained social context. My study further reveals that the female war experience is often marked by struggle and violence. This insight reframes my understanding of war as a system that positively transforms women but also disempowers them.

Chapter One serves as an introduction. It questions how war has been written in Africa. This chapter is instrumental in placing the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and the three texts of analysis into context and in revealing the broader issues relating to my thesis topic, such as the need for women's representation in Ethiopian literature. It indicates that although there is a need for women's representation, there are also gaps in the Ethiopian literature landscape that contemporary women writers are gradually filling. Since the political and the personal are linked

so closely in many of the three texts of analysis, it is vital for women to feel included in war literature, as it helps them to understand themselves better within the larger political Ethiopian landscape.

Chapter Two begins with an analysis of the inversion of character roles in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*. While writing this chapter, I took delight in being able to analyse the way a technique functions in a text. *The Shadow King* offers a vast amount of information that can be interpreted in various ways, thereby making it easier to discover what and how Mengiste reimagines history, as well as the effects of her writing techniques. My analysis affirms that wartime roles are not gender specific, therefore women can occupy different types of roles. I also reveal how the inversion of roles as a writing technique often serves to expose the unseen injustices of women's oppression. This chapter reveals information about character agency, and whether this agency is dependent on social, economic, and political circumstances. In the end, it is evident that agency relies on social and economic status. I suggest that a woman's capacity to occupy a man's position in war does not imply that women are stronger, better, or superior to men, but I suggest that both genders are capable of assuming different kinds of wartime roles. One of my other primary goals was to discover the state of a woman's agency when patriotism and desperation are involved. Due to its heavy focus on the political background of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, *The Shadow King* portrays strong themes of patriotism and desperation. It touches on how little concern the women characters show for their own interests because of the loyalty they have for Ethiopia and their hatred towards the Italians.

Chapter Three focuses on Edemariam's memoir, *The Wife's Tale.* It begins with a discussion of the memoir's value in representing Ethiopian history. A memoir is an effective and informative tool for conveying Ethiopian history. *The Wife's Tale* sheds light on both the personal and national history that comprise the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. By interweaving the domestic details of a woman's personal history alongside the war's political aspects, readers can comprehend war as an experience transcending politics and large-scale physical violence. The text not only entertains, but it also adds to the reader's historical knowledge by making them aware of Ethiopian political events and history. Furthermore, it is important to consider the channel through which this history is conveyed. By analysing the functionality of Edemariam's vicarious writing in the same chapter, I discovered that vicarious writing is necessary when subversion and national archiving are concerned. Moreover, learning about Ethiopian history through a woman's

personal life demonstrates and validates the notion that women are integral to not only the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, but also to Ethiopian society entirely. The events in her life represent much about Ethiopia on a large scale. One of my goals for this chapter was to explore how the experiences of Ethiopian women can be represented by two different literary narrative genres: novels and a memoir. The analysis provides an opportunity to understand a memoir better as a literary genre, as well as the women who write it.

Chapter Four is concerned with the aftermath of war. It analyses *Daughters of Silence* by Fisseha. What stands out is that its protagonist's family system can be viewed as a symbol of the much broader Ethiopian political landscape. It views the protagonist's family's encouragement of forgiveness in a reconciliation commission and the female characters' scars as symbols of invisible trauma. The analysis of symbols allows for a better understanding of complex ideas, such as trauma, silence, and forgiveness, which are not always digestible. By analysing how men's infliction of violence impacts women, it becomes evident that understanding men's trauma can also be significant in fostering a deeper understanding of war, society, and the relationship between men and women. Furthermore, this chapter implies that because of intergenerational trauma, the aftermath of war is just as unfavourable for women as the war itself.

A thematic connection between all three texts is their decentralisation of male figures. Although the men in these texts are fully developed characters, whose opinions and roles in each woman's life are also narrated, they merely serve as plot devices and minor characters. This offers female voices a space where one did not exist previously. Another thematic connection that links the texts is each woman's growing agency, which is brought about by her sense of desperation. In a way, each character's desperation and growing agency lead to the assumption of a new role. In *The Shadow King*, the limited number of male fighters and the Ethiopian army's impending victory result in women acting on their own behalf and fighting on the battlefield. In *The Wife's Tale*, the absence of a breadwinner sparks enough desperation to sow the first seeds of the protagonist's personal agency. In *Daughters of Silence*, the protagonist's exposure to Western culture is what provides enough agency to confront their trauma.

Moreover, these three books are of two different literary genres; therefore, their shared themes suggest that there are few differences between women's roles and experiences that are told in history, and those that are explored through fiction. As such, it is arguable that fiction can serve as a conduit for history. I observed that in all three novels, there is a constant tension between

personal choice and obligation. Each character is conflicted about either being loyal to their country of origin or their family members. In *The Shadow King,* this tension is portrayed through Hirut's backstory and the happy memories of her father. These memories are contrasted with the struggle of her current life as a servant. In *The Wife's Tale*, the tension is shown through Yetemegnu and her desire for freedom from her marriage. This desire is contrasted with her familial obligations and her role as a wife and mother. In *Daughters of Silence*, the tension is in Dessie's resistance to conforming to Ethiopian traditional norms, contrasted with her loyalty to her patriotic grandfather, Babbaye.

One limitation that I encountered while writing this thesis was a lack of books written specifically by Ethiopian women about women and the Second Italo-Ethiopian War. I mainly discovered books that were written by men in this specific war period, or that were written about men, and books that women wrote about other wars in history. I opted for texts that were written by diasporic writers who had settled in Canada and the United States of America. At first, I was apprehensive about basing my research about Ethiopia on texts written by diasporic writers, given the negative commentary that exists about the hybrid identity of diasporic writers and their supposed inability to relate to the life and politics of their country of origin. Regardless of my concerns, I soon decided that their status as a diasporic writer did not affect the kind of literature that they produced, and that these specific texts offer unique perspectives that cannot be found anywhere else. Another limitation was my inability to include some of the secondary sources I had initially intended to use for my analysis. Among the books that I wanted to reference is a poetry collection by Mahtem Shiferraw titled *Your Body is War*. I initially selected this book because it is a contemporary text that was published in 2019. It is also written by an Ethiopian writer and is rooted in the theme of war and women. Unfortunately, a poetry collection was impractical to analyse, lacking enough historical background information about the war. A few of the texts that I opted to use for this thesis narrate a character's life through various historical events. As a result, there is more explicit and detailed information about the war in *The Shadow King* than in *Daughters of Silence,* for instance.

One of the most significant challenges I experienced was the language barrier. Some texts are either written in Amharic or, like *The Wife's Tale,* contain an excessive use of unfamiliar terms or concepts of Ethiopian culture, some meaning of which is not easily accessible on the Internet. Additionally, the thesis intended to use both African and Western gender and trauma theories to

analyse the selected primary texts. This research managed to do so, although searching for these sources revealed the lack of literature and scholarly criticism written about books such as *The Wife's Tale* and *Daughters of Silence*, which were both published between 2018 and 2019. This is a limitation, as it affects the scope of study that is specific to these two books, and it also proposes that the texts may not be viewed as worthy of scholarship, like Mengiste's *The Shadow King.*

Now that I have read and analysed Mengiste's, Edemariam's and Fisseha's texts, the words female soldier, nurse, female warrior, spy and female-lead rebellions are additions to the extensive list of words that I associate with war. More importantly, I can now revisit Conteh-Biger's story and interpret her wartime rape differently. For example, I am now able to recognise the similarities in Conteh-Biger's wartime experiences to many of the women in the texts that I analysed. As Edemariam has done for her grandmother, Conteh-Biger has narrated her war experiences in an account titled *Rising Heart*.

Upon completing this thesis, it is clear that there is a reliance on the autobiography as a form of expression for women. Additionally, I have previously mentioned Yemataw, Waganesh and Mekides' observation in my introduction about wartime rape being used by soldiers as a tool of war to serve a much deeper systematic motive. This is a theme that is revealed in the fictional text *The Shadow King*, which I have linked to Conteh-Biger's real-life experiences, as she mentions a rumour that the army would kidnap virgin girls to use for sacrificial purposes during the Sierra Leonean Civil War.

Above all, I hope this research will prompt further study. I would recommend that future scholars should further investigate the issue of the kidnapping of virgin girls, and specifically, the kind of superstitions that exist about women during war. Moreover, Serpell's question in my epigraph about whether the widespread portrayal of women as refugees, casualties, nurses, and victims of rape is "a profound truth or a blind spot" (3) should be further investigated. I am not currently able to answer this question. In order to understand the roles of women in war and to encourage others to recognise women's contribution to nation-building, we must first uncover why women's stories are being overlooked.

Another topic that I would recommend to future researchers is a detailed study about the lack of representation of women in Ethiopian literature. How has the absence of women figures like Empress Taytu Betul in canonical literature shape the reader's understanding of war literature?

Ideally, my insight will provide a new perspective on the complexities of women, war, Ethiopian culture, and contemporary African literature.

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