



A Gynocritical Study of Female Experiences in Selected Amharic Novels

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Abstract

In this study, elements of feminine experiences were examined through Elaine Showalter's gynocriticism theory. Gynocriticism provides distinctive framework to analyze female's experience, subjectivity, identity, gender roles and the cultural circumstances of women's literature. For this reason, four women-authored Amharic novels, *Libuse-Tila* (2020), *Wedde Huala* (2020), *Yensiha Shengo* (2011) and *Yegebo Firie* (2010) were selected using purposive sampling technique. Employing qualitative research approach, the researcher identified four major themes: childbirth, gendered language, identity and subjectivity, and representation of women in their literatures. Based on the findings of the study, childbirth represents not only biological experience and process but also an implication of cultural contestation by honoring and recognizing females' bodies. The gendered language shows how women use language in their novels to resist patriarchal formations and to demonstrate internalized oppositions for creating space for women's agency. The psychological analysis also indicates that female characters acquire coping mechanisms to assess the influence of societal and cultural norms and to lighten up their quest for self-definition in patriarchal oppression. Similarly, in those novels, cultural context is displayed in separation as domestic and public works which contests space reflecting and shifting gender roles and realities. Besides, it presents how women's literary texts serve as a medium for articulating their identity, resistance, and resilience.

Keywords: Childbirth; gendered language; gynocriticism; subjectivity; women-authored

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Introduction

Many literary theories have been developed to study distinct subject matters of social, cultural, political, and economic situations. One of them is feminist literary theory—is used to examine gender and female related issues of inequalities. This movement did not start at a single moment; however, it developed in waves, evolving to broader feminist thought which comprised a variety of social, cultural, political and economic movements (Mohajan, 2022). The movements were struggle against all forms of injustice to achieve various advancements in women's lives. Sweetline and Senthamarai (2021) note that in 1960s, the rise of feminism emerged with the idea of the new woman who is completely different from her traditional counterparts. She may be confident, conscious and aggressive. Therefore,

women authors, through their works, attempt to reveal their societal and cultural perspectives as it is related with certain time and historical realities of a certain society. That is why women's literature can be used as a material to examine various trends on political ideologies, economic struggles, social and cultural norms and values.

Cheryl (2008) puts "women and men have different life experiences in their society that bring differences in the way of literary productions as well" (P. 1). This suggests that women's writing is often shaped by their lived experiences, which is helping them to demonstrate specific female subject matters and feminine mode of experiences. It helps them to depict and reflect their female subject matters and feminine mode of experiences. Moreover, women writers depict their subjective consciousness and perceptions

of their surroundings through their literary texts. In their literary works, women criticize or appreciate the society whom they write to. They also assess the past, the present or even the future socio-economic status, political discourses as well as historical and literary development of a society through rhetorical and discourse appeals. As a result, women's literature serves as an articulation of their experiences and functions as an autonomous way of exploring the self. It projects and expands women's literary culture and helps to see biological and aesthetic creativity of women as well. Along these lines, Rezigue and Mouro (2022) argue that women's literature offers an authentic portrayal of their lives and perspectives, operating independently of patriarchal constraints. By utilizing a unique linguistic style or "sub-culture"—women distinguish their writing from the traditional, male-dominated literary canon (p.469). Furthermore, Zulfiqar (2016) notes that "the advent of women's writing is a form of voice throwing to counter disrupt or problematize a patriarchal flow of discourse" (p.3). These lines reveal that women tend to write to fight patriarchy and to speak about themselves. Therefore, Hans (2001) adds "When a woman writes literary text, the meaning, history, genre and structure of the work is shaped by her own life experience" (p. 96).

In Ethiopian context, the emergence and development of women's literary writings is slightly different in progress when it is compared to men's. Angela (2016) notes that women started writing and publishing poetry in the early 1930s. In addition, Genanew (1982) also states that Yeshimebet Geneme wrote patriotic poems in the time of the second Italian invasion. After the Italian invasion, female poets tried to depict the five years of wartime misery and their everyday life experiences in their literary productions. Those women writers attempted to get a way to express themselves. Considering the overall picture of the novels of Ethiopian women writers, Zerihun (2012) demonstrates women's novels as mainly revealing stories of major women characters.

In the 1950s, women's literary writings flourished with the themes of social criticism on frequently emphasized social problems like women's inequality on access of education (Assefa, 1995; Genanew, 1982). During that period, women writers like Sindu Gebru attempted to address Ethiopian nationalism, anti-fascist struggle, Ethiopian heroism, martyrdom and other important social issues including love, marriage, and human behavior in her literary works. After the 1960s, the number of women's literary works increased and played their parts to the development of Ethiopian literature (Aboneh, 2012).

Since the 1970s, the number of women Amharic fiction writers has increased and novelists such as Yezina Worku, Tsehay Melaku, Elifnesh Bekurie and Kebedech Tekleab produced significant works. As Zerihun (2012) puts, during the 1990s, a considerable number of women novelists like Tsega Yohannis, Seada Mohammed, Muluwork Asrat, Debrework Tiruneh, Amarech Tesemma, Meskerem Shiferaw, Yemiwodish Bekele and Sesen Hadush published their prose works ever than before. In their works, these writers reflect their living experiences as women and project female's identity. They depict vital experiences of women's love, sexuality, motherhood, the mother-daughter relationship and women's friendship (Zerihun, 2012).

Consequently, this study examined how Ethiopian women writers produce textual meaning on rooted in their personal realities. It explored in detail the nuances of female subjectivities, identities, self-explorations as well as their perceptions of the surrounding world.

Methods and Theoretical Framework

This study examined and interpreted female experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and subjectivity in the selected women-authored Amharic novels. To do so, qualitative research approach was used. Four women-authored Amharic novels, *Libuse-Tila* (2020), *Wedde Huala* (2020), *Yensiha Shengo* (2011) and *Yegebo Firie* (2010) were selected as primary sources of data. They were selected using Purposive sampling technique. Those women authored-novels were selected through purposive sampling technique not only for their gender of their writers but also thematic depth. They also move beyond external descriptions of women's life to the inner sentiment and self-exploration of their protagonist characters. Moreover, those novels offer a nuanced look at identity and subjectivity by providing unique perspectives in relation to female realities in Ethiopian socio-cultural context, and allow for having broader understanding of how female subjectivity and experience has evolved in their literary writings. Thus, the data (excerpts) were collected through thorough reading of the selected novels; then, the data were identified and transcribed into English with key expressions indicated according to their relevance to female subjectivity. Those extracts were then transcribed and translated into English using the communicative translation method because it was selected to ensure that the key message towards the female characters' experiences remain accessible for academic audiences whereas literary translation frequently emphasizes on an

aesthetic equivalence. Thus, to preserve the tone and cultural nuances of the selected novels, the translation prioritized the emotional weight of the original language— Amharic expression. Since the study was qualitative analysis of female subjectivity, communicative approach enabled to notice the subtle shift in characters feelings, thoughts and emotions that are not lost in the complexities of literal linguistic differences. Furthermore, communicative approach enables for the adaptation of cultural context of Amharic expressions into equivalent English expressions that keep original mood and purpose that offers a robust basis for the successive analysis.

In this study, Elaine Showalter’s gynocritic theory was applied as a theoretical framework. Showalter calls women’s literary writings, which strive to address female’s realities within female’s perspective as gynocriticism helps to investigate women as a textual text producer. She coined the term “gynocriticism” to introduce a literary analysis that views women-authored texts as a projection of their struggles in the patriarchal society (Showalter, 1977). Gynocriticism helps to examine how women write about their identity, subjectivity, experience, language; the psychodynamics of their creativity that mainly concern the female authors and literary conventions associated with femininity. It enables women literary writers to be free from imitating the male-centric literary canon. This helps women to provide females’ view of life and real-life experiences in their literature. Gynocriticism proposes that gynotexts serve to present the issues of females’ through their own literatures because women literary writers were never truly free to write because of the economic and societal hardships they faced (Showalter, 1977). As Showalter demonstrates, the patriarchal ideology treated literary creativity by supposing women to achieve less in producing literary texts. However, women-authored literary texts provide a broader perspective into the lives of contemporary women who have historically been othered and misrepresented. Apart from economic dependency, women were bound to adapt the standards of the male literary canon and failed to meet their concerns.

Gynocriticism aims to bring women’s literature to the front (Showalter, 1977, 1979). Besides, gynocritical study helps to view how the cultural, social, economic and political perceptions treat women and seeks to change these conditions (Plate, 2016).

Gynocriticism also enables to assure the need of the literary work of the woman, for the woman and by the woman to construct cultural, social, economic and political experiences as well as wishes of women freeing in writing (Meenakshi & Manoj, 2018; Plain & Seller, 2007). Moreover, it focuses on identifying female subject matters and female identities in their literary productions and showing the history of female literary tradition (Ayoub, 2022). Hence, gynocritics emphasize on the depiction of females’ self-awareness in line with feminine mode of experience and subjectivity of thinking and perception recognizing that women’s literary texts reflect and shape cultural assumptions. Women’s discrete outlooks, experiences, and identities are often displayed in their literary writings. Showalter’s gynocriticism enables to demonstrate the idea that women use not only the language of the dominant (patriarchal) culture but also their own— muted language which is called double-voiced discourse.

Therefore, this study examined the selected women-authored Amharic novels through Showalter’s biological, linguistic, psychological and cultural gynocritical models.

One of the feminine experiences is childbirth which has long been excluded from public discourse as it is considered to be a private aspect of womanhood and many women are treated like objects (Cosslett, 1994). Literary writers emphasize how a woman’s identity is determined as motherhood in the eyes of society. For example, Tomlinson (2018) and Gibbs (1987) note that giving birth is a rich subject for writers since it is one of the greatest joys that a woman can experience in her lifetime; bearing her own child is the reward of her hard work. When a woman gives birth, her veiled femininity is revealed. Giving birth is a powerful experience that helps a woman to reaffirm her identities and re-establish a connection with her bodies that can be taken as an opportunity for personal development, self-affirmation and self-discovery. However, Didem (2009) states women affirm giving birth as a challenge for them and describe it as a painful experience. Tomlinson (2018) also expresses that childbirth is primarily situated within a shared societal belief that a woman’s main roles are those of being a wife and mother. So, many women do not perceive the experience of childbirth as a joyful event because they are imbued by negative societal childbirth stereotypes which undermine their efforts. Yet, Jeftić (2012) argues that a woman can be a mother and writer as well as creator and procreator; in the same way, she gives birth to her child, she can give birth to her poems and novels. Didem (2009)

also added the only way to be out of the oppressive relationships in the world of love is to give birth or write. In different cultures that prioritize fertility and the perpetuation of family lineages, childbirth is often depicted as a significant milestone that determines a women's societal value (Tomlinson, 2018).

Gendered language is a central component of feminine experience that Elaine Showalter (1981) identifies linguistic model of gynocriticism which provides a comprehensive framework to comprehend how language and style are not neutral rather these issues are influenced by cultural, social and biological determinants. According to Showalter's view, historically, patriarchal structures construct language; as a result, women writers frequently operate within a double-voiced discourse since women authors should negotiate their own real experiences using language. Therefore, in this analysis, gendered language is defined as linguistically concepts that women authors used to reclaim their voices from forced silence. However, it does not mean about the creation of new rather the subversion and adaptation of the existing literary works to present stories that are authentically female. Moreover, this study examined how language plays as a site of resistance by identifying how female characters use linguistic expressions either to support or stand against the predominant gendered awareness by challenging social influences

Accordingly, psychological model of gynocriticism that deals with the inner sentiment feature of female's identity that frequently scrutinizes the consequences of patriarchal systems on women's self-perception, desires and subconscious. Psychological model points out the difference in women's writings, which is related to the psychology and gender of the writer.

According to Showalter's argument, as psychological model is shaped by the body, the language development, sex-role socialization, as well as women's literary writing and women's psyche. Freudian's notion of creativity is dominated by consciousness and biology of each sex; it also examines the concept of a mother's role in the development of identity and the influence of early familial relationships on psychological development (Leaper, 2014 & Mills et al. 1989).

Showalter's cultural model of gynocriticism is also a part of her broader feminist literary framework, and it is a critical lens focusing on the relationship between women's writing and the larger cultural contexts where it is produced. Culture determines the nature and character of women's writing and the writers

themselves may differ culturally, racially, nationally, and historically (Ayoub, 2022). Cultural context shapes women's literary expressions and helps to examine how women develop their own literary traditions in the face of different limitations. Therefore, Showalter asserts the possibility of the existence of a female culture within the general culture shared by men and women. She argues that women's culture is the main source for women to construct and conceptualize their bodies and myriad living experiences. How women live and how they relate with their daily lives and their environment are a major foundation of women's creative processes.

Review of Related Studies

The existing literary studies on women-authored Amharic literary writings have significantly advanced the perception of gender dynamics in Ethiopia. For instance, Fitamlak Adane (2013 C.E), MA Thesis, "Feminist Reading in the Amharic Novels *Nibut* and *Ememnet*" and Nahom (2012), MA thesis, "The Images of Women in *Nibut* and *Yederasiwa* File" examined female resistance to patriarchal tradition while Napoleon (2000), MA thesis, "Major Themes in the selected Works of Four Ethiopian Women writers" and Mulumebet (1996 E.C.), MA thesis, "A comparative Analysis of the Image of Women and Men in the Works of some Ethiopian Women Writers studied moral integrity as well as empowerment verses oppression. Moreover, Assefa (1995 E.C.), MA thesis, "An Analysis of Literary Techniques in some of the Prose Works of Ethiopia Women literary writers" (1959-1985 E.C.) and Zerihun's article analyzes the image of female characters in women's Amharic novels in 1990s have provided important insights related to narrative structures and social and historical roles of female.

However, those literary studies emphasized the realm of feminist critique by examining female characters' reaction to patriarchal domination, social, economic and political influences. So, this study distinguished itself by adopting gynocriticism, by shifting away male-centric theoretical framework-examining woman as a victim of patriarchal tradition toward analyzing a female as a producer of textual meaning. While socialist or liberal feminist approaches indicated the external women's struggle, gynocriticism is appropriate to disclose the internal mechanisms of female subjectivity, self-exploration, female identity and sexuality. By focusing on woman as a textual meaning producer, this analysis goes beyond the study of images of women, rather examining the linguistic and thematic textures that constitute feminine Amharic literary tradition. For

this reason, the choice of gynocriticism is not only a different theoretical preference but also a methodological necessity for having the nuanced interiority of female experience.

There have been also international literary studies on women’s literature that utilized Showalter’s theoretical approach, gynocriticism and that focused on feminine experiences. Aziza (2022) assessed the historical and philosophical bases of feminism and studied linguistic aspects of feminine speech using the four models of gynocriticism, like biological, linguistic, psychology and culture. Mohammad (2020) used gynocriticism to Rupi Kaur’s, *Milk and Honey*, to illuminate how the four gynocritical lenses were essential to examine feminist themes in the poet’s work. Jemal and Hashmi (2020) studied gender stereotypes and victim-blaming in Rowan Coleman’s *the Summer of Impossible Things*, conveying the way patriarchal thoughts and norms restrict women’s roles. These foreign literary studies highlight various utilizations of gynocriticism in exploring female subjectivity and oppression in literary writings, but the current research focused on how Ethiopian women write about experiences and representations in their novels through four models of gynocriticism.

Finding and discussion

The analysis utilized Showalter’s biological, linguistic, psychological and cultural models of gynocriticism to examine female’s experience of childbirth, gendered language, female identity, subjectivity and the representation of women’s work.

I. Childbirth

In women’s literary productions, how patriarchal norms and childbirth are intertwined with a woman’s capacity to bear children is examined. This is because bearing children serves as a source of power or control in patriarchal societies. Tomlinson (2018) puts that instead of seeing giving birth as a painful and sacrificed experience, women will be able to see it as a creative and powerful moment, and it is the ultimate way for women to celebrate their bodies and their strength. This reproductive potential is represented as a source of fulfillment and one of specific social roles that women carry out. It is shown as follows:

“መውለኛ!” ይህ እኮ ተአምር አይደለም። ቅድም እንዳልነው ብዙ ሴቶች በተለያዩ ምክንያቶች ያሰቡት ሳይሆን ቀርቶ ወልደውና ኃላፊነትን

ለብቻ ተሸክመው ዘርፈ ብዙ ችግሮችን እየታገሉ በስርዓት አሳድገው ለቁም ነገር የሚያበቁ ጀግኖች እንዳሉ ሳታውቁ አትቀረም (ፀሐይ፣2004፣ ገፅ 212)።

“Giving birth!” It is really no miracle. As we discussed earlier, you must be aware that there are many heroic women who didn’t have things go as planned for various reasons, but they gave birth, took the responsibility alone, struggled with numerous problems and raised their children with discipline to make them successful individuals (Tsehay, 2011, p. 212).

In this extract, childbirth is reflected as a source of strength, endurance and fulfillment. In this line, women are caregivers and responsible for their children despite of the high cost they pay. As the narrator tells, women usually attempt to shape their children for a better future. Even if women themselves are unable to be successful, they do not let their children be unlucky. Thus, childbirth reflects the societal and cultural expectation placed on women’s shoulder, and it is a sign of resilience and hope instead of being pain. Childbirth is a significant human experience while it is framed as women’s duty that frequently needs sacrifice. And the representation of childbirth is inseparable from women’s everyday life; moreover, women’s works reveal that perceptions and experiences of childbirth are not only shaped by societal attitudes towards childbirth but also by broader cultural beliefs like the role of the family (Tomlinson, 2018).

On the other hand, in the following excerpt, childbirth is portrayed as a female’s confinement, and it is perceived by the society as a sacrifice rather than privilege, fulfillment and power. “ሰው ለምን ልጅ ይወልዳል? እንደ እኔ የአንድ ግቢ እስረኛ ሆኖ ለመሞት?” (ዮርዳኖስ፣ 2020፣ገፅ 107)። “Milki interrogates “Why do people even have children? Just to end up a prisoner in a compound like me, only to die?” (Yordanos, 2020, p.107). As shown in this statement, the narrator, Milki in her monologue, worries about the misery of her life, for her husband and mother-in-law perceive her as an object. She does not have any role but lives for the benefit of her man and mother-in-law; because Melaku (her husband) and Woizero Azeb (Her mother-in-law) are decision makers; all the responsibilities, related activities and needs in their home are not Milki’s concern. The only thing needed from her is a child in her way of working domestic tasks. Their influence on Milki’s experience of childbirth is represented as a routine of suffering

and an endless subjectivity. Here childbirth is depicted as pain and suffering which is extended to the emotional domain. Milki interrogates the reason for bearing a child with confinement and suffering as though she could get an answer from the society she lived with. She wanted to know the societal expectations towards childbirth. Her words reflect that a society viewed motherhood as a fundamental obligation and framing childbearing inevitable women's task. However, she challenged such patriarchal assumptions about childbirth as it affects women's freedom. In this extract, the female body is intervened with the societal roles and assumptions; her life is full of conflict because she feels confined by such traditional bondage. Milki considered herself as if she were a prisoner. This reveals that being a mother is less of a choice and it is not an imposed experience left to women respecting their personal ambitions.

Patriarchy loses women's power by restricting them from education. This creates power imbalance on women and confines them at home. Patriarchy also limits women's autonomy on what they want to accomplish in their future and distract them from their goal as it supposes them to bear children and carry out specific social role. This is shown in the quote below:

እኔ ከእንጀራ አባቴ ወልጃለሁ። ...12ኛ መልቀቂያ ፈተና ለመፈተን በዝግጅት ላይ በነበርኩበት ወቅት እሴት ውስጥ በማጠናበት ጊዜ፤ እናቴ ወደ ገበያ በሄደችበት ቅዳሜ ቀን አባቴ በር ዘግቶ አፌን አፍኖ ደፈረኝ።... በደረሰብኝ መደፈር ካተረፍኩት የሞራል ስብራትና መሸማቀቅ በተጨማሪ እንደፈራሁት ፀነሰኩ። ... የአባቴ ታናሽ እሁት ዘንድ ወደ ጅምር ከተማ ሌጅ በአጋጣሚና በሃይል ተደፍሬ መፀነሱን፤ የተደፈርኩትም በጨለማ በመሆኑ ከማን እንደፀነሰኩ እንኳን እንደማለው አልቅሼ ነገርኳት። ... እስክወልድ እንድትደብቀኝ ተማፀንኳት። ... ወልጃም ለጥቂት ወራት ቆየሁ። ስለ እድሌ መሰበር ብዙ ካሰብኩ በኋላ ልጄን እዚያው ትቼ እንደገና ጠፍቼ ከጅምር አዲስ አበባ ገባሁ (ፀሐይ፣ 2011፣ ገጽ 197-198)።

I have a child from my stepfather...While I was preparing to take the 12th-grade national exam, studying at home, on Saturday when my mother had gone to the market, my father closed the door, covered my mouth, and raped me. ... In addition to the moral devastation and shame I suffered from the rape, I became pregnant, just as I had feared.

... I went to Jimma town to stay with my father's younger sister and tearfully told her that I had become pregnant due to a rape; I even told her that I didn't know who the father was because it happened in the dark. ... I begged her to hide me until I gave birth. ... I stayed there for a few months after giving birth. After much thought about my ruined fate, I left the child there, disappeared again, and moved from Jimma to Addis Ababa (Tsehay, 2011, p. 197-198).

The extract shows that the female character's body (biological difference) is a site of oppression and suffering. Her body is assumed to be an object by her Stepfather because in patriarchal systems biological differences are frequently used as a tool of control. The attack imposed the character into emotional hurt, distress and shame; it also led her to be silent. Even though she was waiting for her grade twelfth exam, the character isolated herself from family and moved to her aunt; so that, she could hide herself since she was impregnated by her Stepfather. She did not tell the truth to her aunt, and her hope disappeared. The female character's subjugation started with rape; however, it was the birth of the child that solidified her status in her aunt's home, leaving no pathway to free herself from confinement— the society's patriarchal expectation. She was raped and pregnant; gave birth and took care of the child. As a result, she decided to leave her child with her aunt after thoroughly thinking that she did not get any opportunity to help her baby. Her situation could not allow her to go beyond. She did not have confidence to talk about what happened to her to any one because having a child from a stepfather is shameful and it would be cast out and shame both on her and her families. So, she developed emotional and psychological trauma from such double edged suffering and embarrassment. In this extract, childbirth is represented in the context of a young girl who is raped by her step father is demonstrated as a painful experience that makes young woman's life devoid and full of obstacles. Her experience is perceived as a systemic violence in which biological difference plays role to dominate and control female subjectivity.

The above extract also demonstrates how female reproductive rights are frequently treated as a public commodity instead of an individual's right. However, the female character struggles to contend her reproductive freedom reversing the very experience of giving birth into refusing against patriarchal traditions, and the female characters reclaims control

over their reproductive rights as a way of asserting their autonomy.

II. Gendered Language

Gendered language utilizes terms and expressions that emphasize societal distinction between men and women. This linguistic phenomenon is pervasive across various language parts of speeches (Jakiela & Ozier, 2020). In those selected women-authored novels, gendered language was used as a primary tool for examining how discourse either reinforce or resist traditional gender roles within a character’s inner monologue, characters’ interpersonal relationships and their broader social contexts. Since language shapes how we organize our thoughts (Jakiela & Ozier, 2019) which becomes the fundamental tool to express identity. But, in various languages, this organization is strictly divided into sex-based classifications—masculine and feminine. It can be seen as follows:

እኔ ልጅ ከወለድኩ ወንድ እንዲሆን እጸልያለሁ፡፡
 ፡ ያኔ ከሥር ከመሰረቱ ኮትኩቼ አሳድገዋለሁ፡፡
 የወንድ እና የሴት ያስተሳሰብ ልዩነት ተፈጥሯዊ ነው? ወይስ አስተዳደጋዊ? የሚለውን አስቸጋሪ የምርምር ሥራ መመራመሪያ አደርገዋለሁ፡፡
 ...

ፈጣሪዬ ግን አንተም ብትሆን የልዩነቱን ፅንሰ-ሀሳብ ብትረዳው የሚከፋህ አይመስለኝም፡፡ እንደሆነ “ሄዋን አዳምን እንዴት እንዳሳሳተችው?” የሚለውን ሃቅ ተረድተህ ለወደፊት ስህተቱ እንዳይደገም ለማድረግ (ዮርዳኖስ፣ 2020፣ ገፅ 18)፡፡

If I give birth to a child, I will pray it to be a boy. Then I will nurture him from the ground up. I will make him the subject of a difficult research project to investigate whether the difference in thinking between males and females is natural or due to upbringing. ...My Creator, I don’t think you would mind if you also understood the concept of this difference. What I’m telling you is to understand the truth of ‘how Eve misled Adam’ and to prevent that mistake from being repeated in the future (Yordanos, 2020, p. 18).

As can be revealed above, the narrator, Melkam, expressed her regret for the way a child grows in her community. She strongly inquired to get an answer from her surroundings, as male and female children are not equally treated by the patriarchal

assumptions. Melkam’s experience on gender issues is one of the critical social matters that should be given attention for change; she needs a change by carrying out her experiment to challenge the patriarchal point of view in relation to male and female children’s treatment. She wanted to question the patriarchal norms and values on child growth. Because of her subjective impression, she sees the social trend differently. This gender-specific attitude makes her develop an intention of investigating new way to change the societal perspective of gender roles. Her language usage enhances the ability to express her thoughts on the issue of the traditional society’s attitude toward gender roles. Thus, in this short extract, linguistic utilization signifies how the female character, Melkam, worried about the issue of nature and nurture in relation with the tradition she lives in case of child bearing. The traditional society shapes female identity through social context and pressures women to be silent instead of expressing their views about themselves.

The female protagonist, Melkam, is confident, her language is more assertive which shows her resistance to the patriarchal norms frequently imposed on women’s life. She wanted to examine her subjectivity and perception of being a woman by looking for female nature through her articulation of language. She challenged not only her society but also the Creator who blames Eve for their failure and loss of paradise. She tried to bring ‘taboo’ issue to the public. Melkam brought her wishes what contradicts to the societal trends, and she made it public. Her language expression firmly resists and goes beyond the social norms lined for women to be silent.

Melkam used language as a means of advocating the difference between nature and nurture for indicating social roles towards women’s subjectivity. She went further reminding the Creator not to blame only Eve for being driven out of the Eden of Garden. She claimed both Adam and Eve should be equally responsible for breaking the rule and leaving Eden. Thus, she strived to expose gendered constraints on the self-expression of female’s experiences. So, the above explanation depicts how language plays a vital role to empower women in terms of resisting patriarchal thoughts. Therefore, this extract signifies that language categorizes people while it conveys a woman attempting to break those normative patriarchal categories. The story teller wanted to see if a “boy”—a gendered category is vividly different from a “girl” if it is just “upbringing”—societal influence that makes them so.

Gendered language is used for showing the roles, expectations, and gender stereotypes imposed on women in a traditional society. Many words and phrases that we use are likely gendered which indicates how we see male and female, perceive masculine and feminine and what stereotype we have. This can be seen as follows:

“የአንች ኃላፊነት ቤት ውስጥ የሚያስፈልገን ነገር ማዘጋጀት ነው ገብቶሻል?”

መሆን የምፈልገውን መሆን የእኔ ውሳኔ መሰለኝ አልሁ ጫን አድርገን?”

“ሂሂሂ... እውነትሽን ነው! የአንች ውሳኔ ነው። ወደ እኔ ውሳኔ ስንመለስ ...”

“እንግዲህ ቁርጥሽን እወቁው አንድ ቤት በሁለት ራስ አይመራም።” ...

.... በጾታው መጫን ለሚፈልግ ማጎንበስ ልክ ሊሆን አይችልም። ... መሪ መሆን ያለበት ማን ነው? የሚል ጥያቄ ሲነሳ ግን አዕምሮ እንጂ ጾታ ጋር የሚያስከኔደን ጉዳይ የለም፤ የአስተሳሰብ ልዕቀት፤ የመምራት ብቃት እና የሞራል ልዕልና ከጾታ ጋር ተጣብቀው አልተፈጠሩም (ሊድያ; 2020፣ ገፅ 16፣19 20)።

"Your responsibility is to prepare what we need in the house, understood?"

"I think, becoming what I want to be is my decision," I said, stressing it.

“Hehehe... sure! It’s your decision. When we get to my decision...” “Then know this for sure: one house cannot be led by two heads.”

... Submitting to someone who wants to dominate based on their gender cannot be right. ... When the question of “who should be the leader?” arises, it’s about the mind, not gender; the superiority of thought, leadership ability, and moral excellence were not created attached to a specific gender (Lidia, 2020, Pp. 16, 19 &20).

As demystified above, gendered language is associated with domesticity that reflects social expectations of a woman as a caretaker, nurturing, compliant and dependent for her husband. Fasil (Sofia’s husband) wanted to subjugate her by lowering her position through his gendered language. He imposed her to be dependent by placing himself at the center and not giving any priority for Sofia in various aspect of situation. Fasil wanted Sofia to follow him by giving care and protection and fulfill his needs and wishes. He banned Sofia from making

her own decisions, and he did not acknowledge her decisions even she made. However, Fasil objectified her in various aspects, Sofia never lost her victory; she strived to resist such kind of gendered expressions. She did not allow being belittled. She struggled to break her husband’s confinement and demonstrated her strong belief about her stand using confrontational but polite language like “I think it’s my decision what I want to be”. This strong voice highlights Sofia’s strong autonomy and self-worth but polite assertion that challenges Fasil’s traditional patriarchal experience. Sofia not only resisted Fasil’s patriarchal dominance but also attempted to challenge her community’s assumptions.

Female characters also used gendered language: intensifiers to portray their emotions and enhance their dialogues. Lakoff (1973) suggested nine categories that are considered to be women’s language in their literary works. From the nine suggested categories, hedging is one of the expressions that enabled them to strengthen politeness, submissiveness, meaning and emphasis of what female characters say because hedging refers to how the speaker expresses her/his certainty or uncertainty. It is also intentionally employed to subvert patriarchal expectations or reflect internalized gender norms. The following short extract is taken from Eneye’s *Yegebo Firie* that reveals the capability of hedging language to soften female characters' speech agreeing with gender norms deliberately to acknowledge patriarchal beliefs. “ሴቶች የተፈጠርንው ለዚህ የስቃይ ኑሮ ብቻ ነው ብላ የምታምን ትመስለላች (እነዩ፣ 2010፣ ገፅ 72)።” “She seems to believe that women are only made for such life of pain” (Eneye, 2010, p. 72). In this statement, the female character, Netsanet’s mother, narrated how women submit themselves to patriarchal suppression. She signified her belief that females’ dependency is perceived as natural and legal in their everyday lives. The woman expresses her unfortunate life seems to have no hope for her future due to the usual gender norms and experiences. In this speech, Netsanet’s mother tried to clarify female’s including her daughters’ life is already God given. This indicates her internalized patriarchal perspective. She is totally trapped by traditional beliefs of gender norms; she has not fought to escape from it. So, gendered language is seen as a mode of silencing and interruptions that often indicates males’ supremacy in the traditional community. It represents a broad social prohibition of women’s voices. Thus, the specific use of language in those selected novels was examined to explore how feminine perspectives are expressed and signified how linguistic choices shape the reader’s

understanding of female characters and their relationships within the text.

III. Female Identity and Subjectivity

Examining female identity and subjectivity in women-authored literary texts help to see how women articulate patriarchal resistance, resilience, and redefining their roles in literature and society. In women’s literature, Showalter argues that female subjectivity aids to explore the inner thoughts, feelings, and life experiences of women. Subjectivity delves into the inner world; it looks at how women create their identities in reaction to cultural, familial, and societal demands (Showalter, 1977, 1979). In women's literature, females’ identities frequently represent the intersection of individual experiences with cultural norms and societal roles (Silvernail, 2017). Women's experiences can be explored in relation to autonomy, agency, and belonging by looking at how women are defined by themselves or others. Women’s identities may be significantly shaped by themes such as class, ethnicity, parenthood, motherhood, or wifehood. Similarly, women's inner world is a realm that can be examined through the study of their subjectivity, their feelings, desires, thoughts and conflicts.

Women’s inner world depicts how they react to outside events and how they try to establish a distinct identity in the face of social constraints. This perspective highlights the conflict between personal initiative and other influences such as patriarchy. This can be shown as follows:

እኔን የማይመስል ነገር አትንገረኝ!
 አላደርገውም!... የምትፈልገው ነገር ካልገደለብኸ
 አርፈሽ መኖር ነው። እኔ አውቅልሻለሁ ብሎ ነገር
 -- ትርፍና ጉድለትን እንዴት ነው የሚያሰለው?
 መልሽልኝ እንጅ ... ብሎ ጮኸ በድንገት። ...
 መልሱን ሲጠብቅ ዐይኑን አስኪሰብር ድረስ
 አፈጠጥኩበት። የተናገረውን መልሶ
 እንዲያስበው ፈልጌ (ሊድያ; 2020; ገፅ 60)።

Don't tell me a thing that does not make sense to me! I won't do it!... If your need is fulfilled, just live. But, saying 'I know for you... how he weighs strength and weakness? Reply to me... He suddenly shouted... while he was waiting my response, I stared at him until he cast down his eyes. I was hoping he would think on what he had said (Lidia, 2020, p. 60).

In this extract, the female character’s narration reflects a vivid rejection of imposed patriarchal authority. Sofia, the female character, asserted epistemic agency signifying her ability to understand and react based on her own internal reality instead of submitting herself to her husband’s traditional impositions. Her words reveal an act of boundary-setting that affirms her sense of self. Her silence stare becomes a way of resistance by inverting the traditional gaze in which women are typically observed and judged; rather Sofia becomes the one who sees and interrogates and prompting her husband to retreat. Similarly, Sofia’s silent gaze functions as a non-verbal assertion of identity and a mode of resisting patriarchal control resulting from her inner strength and emotional composure. Rather than retaliating with anger, she demonstrates her hope as a psychological strategy. Through her verbal resistance, controlling gaze and silence but expectant stare that Sofia constructs an identity that is autonomous and inwardly centered. Sofia becomes a self-defining subject and psychologically grounded in her own reasoning, feeling, emotion and desire. Hence, Sofia powerfully asserted her subjectivity and psychological independence in her situation of patriarchal influence that reflects her struggle to reclaim internal authority and validate her own awareness of reality through a rational inner voice. In this extract, as a woman, Sofia’s subjectivity was affirmed through her emotional intelligence and resistance in thought of patriarchal traditional norm.

As a result, silence, gaze, and boundary-setting represent women’s psychological resistance to patriarchal control, as shown through these subtle, introspective experiences. Sofia’s actions signified that female identity and subjectivity are constructed not only through overt resistance but also through emotionally intelligent and self-aware mechanisms that challenge gendered power dynamics.

IV. The Representation of Women’s Work

Cultural context examines the way female writers set up their own literary traditions. It analyzes whether the writers often work within or in opposition to cultural norms and male-dominated literary canons. The way women utilize literature to express their challenges, resistances, and goals related with the cultural norms of their day has special relevance to culture (Ortner, 1995). Thus, the representation of women's work, either public or domestic, is one of the elements that give a critical insight to analyze the complex representation of females’ experiences. In the context of culture and society, cultural context focuses on how women's writing reflects and affects

women's roles, values, and agency (Bakan & Stasiulis, 1995). Therefore, the representation of women's labor, creativity, and experiences in the larger framework of culture, history, and society is the main subject of gynocritical literary analysis of women's literature. According to Gemma (2013) in Ethiopian history, there are women who have their own roles—in public spheres like political responsibilities beyond domesticity and caring family. It is reflected in the following extract that was taken from the novel, *Wedde-Huala*.

ለማንበብ ወይ ለመጻፍ ስቀመጥ ብስጭትጭት ይላል። ደህና የተስተካከለውን ቤት፤ ማመሰቃቀል፤ የሚታጠብና የሚተኮስ ልብስ ፊቴ መከመር፤ ጨርሶ ባይበላውም፤ ከሰራሁት ውጭ ሌላ ምግብ ማዘዝ። ብቻ... እኔን በሰራ መወጠር የተለመደ ተግባሩ ሆነ። እኔም በተቻለኝ መጠን ነፍሴ ላይ ስለት ያለው ነገር እንዳያርፍ ከንግግሩም የሚቆረቁረኝን፤ ከሰራውም የሚከብደኝን በይደር እያሳለፍኩ ኖርሁ። አሁን ውስጤ በርትቷል፤ ሕይወትን ለማጣጣም እንጅ ላለመሞት ያህል የምኖር ሰው አይደለሁም (ሊድያ፣2020; 7ፀ 26) ።

When I sit down to read or write, he would grow irritable. He made a habit of cluttering the well-ordered house, piling laundry before me for washing and ironing, or ordering different meals even if he barely touched them—simply to dismiss what I had already cooked. In short keeping me buried in chores became his routine. For my part, I endured it all, setting aside his piercing words and the crushing weight of the labor just to keep my sprit from being wounded. But now, I have found my inner strength. I'm no longer only surviving; I am living to savor the fullness of life (Lidia, 2020, p. 26).

As can be seen above, Sofia, the female protagonist, reflected that she experienced how patriarchal structures expect and enforce women to be primarily responsible for domestic labor and tries to manage it. Regarding this, she said that Fasil intentionally resisted the attempts she did to assert autonomy through intellectual engagement—reading or writing. He also created barriers that restrained her to household tasks. He deliberately “made a habit of cluttering the well-ordered house, piling laundry before me for washing and ironing, or ordering different meals even if he barely touched them”. He

has already assigned his wife for a perpetual cycle of domestic tasks by confining her to domestic sphere. Therefore, her public role made Fasil unhappy as it was beyond his authority. Fasil’s actions highlighted how the patriarchal system restricted Sofia’s intellectual and professional pursuits by burdening her with unending responsibilities.

Sofia’s struggled to resist Fasil’s harsh speeches and the overwhelming workloads illustrated the emotional labor she did to maintain her mental well-being. Sofia’s survival mechanism and form of resilience in the face of systemic patriarchal oppression also revealed context of emotional labor. Sofia’s expression said “crushing weight of the labor” depicts her point of view and refusal of the tiresome tasks. She attempted to distance herself inwardly and slowly but surely from her husband’s patriarchal oppressive system. In spite of the traditional hindrances, she decided to focus on developing her intellectual and mental growth. Her declaration, “I’m no longer only surviving; I am living to savor the fullness of life” indicates Sofia’s strong decision of agency and self-assertion. She wanted to reveal her being an independent woman even if she is engaged under the umbrella of marriage. As can be seen in this extract, Sofia prioritized for her safety and happiness through utilizing subversion agency in order to navigate her domestic sphere. Instead of appealing a direct confrontational struggle on the contrary of her husband’s demands which is probably resulted by further oppression. Since gynocriticism used as a double-voiced strategy, Sofia attempted to manage her busyness in domestic chores and emotional labor whereas she wisely lightening her work load by creating her private space autonomy. This indirect approach signifies an explicit female tradition of resistance. Thus, she used such very structure meant that indicates confinement for protecting her personal well-being as well as psychological honesty.

Thus, the analysis of the above excerpt indicates how the systemic patriarchal structures marginalized women through domestic and emotional labor. It also displays the female protagonist’s refusal of patriarchal oppression as she is demonstrated in navigating the challenges of structured system of oppression. Sofia’s awareness and mental development help her to be emotionally strong and confident. This illustrates a form of cultural critique because it stands against the women’s traditional roles by providing them a room to empowerment and self-actualization. Sofia’s economic independent is indicated in the speech: " I endured it all ". This

speech portrays Sofia's desire of autonomy goes beyond conventional household responsibilities; that is, She made a deliberate choice to oppose oppressive domestic duties, striving for freedom through her mental resilience.

Based on Showalter's cultural model of gynocriticism, Sofia's expression is analyzed as a symbol of the historical fight women do to escape from the constraints of unpaid household work which prevents them from economic and professional advantages. Fasil's intention to keep her busy is an example of his desire to get Sofia focused solely on domestic tasks; so that, she gradually accepts her fate as a normal duty in traditional society.

In addition, Sofia's professional work can be interpreted as a sign of empowerment and independence because it illustrates her struggle to have economic independence. Sofia directly demonstrated her mental strength and personal growth saying: "But now, I have found my inner strength. I'm no longer only surviving; I am living to savor the fullness of life." This is a strong commitment that reflects her powerful emotional resilience to lead sustainable life even if her husband lets her be domestic worker. She gave more emphasis for her values and activities and exhaustively tried to enhance her professional career, but she did not devote her time on doing domestic roles. Despite of Fasil's dominative actions and controlling system, Sofia's schedule for reading and writing shows her aspirations of self-improvement. Sofia understood she could get life transformation through economic independence and defeat the patriarchal norms and values that affect her life. Hence, she tried to resist Fasil's controlling system and emphasized on her self-development. For this, she embodied the possibilities she got to express her agency and escape from economic reliance.

Sofia left Fasil's patriarchal demand; so that, she could prioritize her mental and emotional well-being. She challenged the entrenched traditional norms that propose women to sacrifice their aspirations for the household. Her mental strength "the fullness of life" signifies the importance of resisting the traditional oppressive system which often undervalues women's contributions beyond domestic spaces.

Showalter's cultural context helps to examine and make critique of the above extract in order to validate women's ability of making decisions and being financially independent that Sofia's tenacity and refusal to fit in with conventional expectations

exemplifies. Thus, Sofia's struggle is an indicative of broader cultural norms that curtail females' independence. Sofia's life experience also serves as a metaphor that symbolizes women's relentless fight for independence in patriarchal cultures. The analytical implication through the cultural paradigm critically conveys the patriarchal structures that confine women's roles to domestic labor while also highlighting women's resistance through intellectual agency, economic independence and emotional strength.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that those selected women-authored Amharic novels offer profound insights in relation to female identity formation, agency, and resistance against patriarchal structures. Using Showalter's gynocritical approach, the study illuminates how those novels signify childbirth not only as biological but also as socio-cultural phenomenon where women explored complex intersections of oppression and empowerment by challenging deep-rooted patriarchal norms. The assessment of gendered language implicates the negotiation of meanings which convey women's ability to express their thoughts, experiences, identities and feelings in ways that disrupt and reinterpreting the societal expectations by reshaping gender roles and power imbalance. The focus on identity and subjectivity reveals the psychological depths of women's coping strategies, female character's inner thoughts, emotional responses and sense autonomy indicate their internal resistance and identity construction that women face since the female characters strive for self-recognition. Similarly, the representation of women's work reflects cultural narratives that evolved in context about gender roles, economic participation, and societal value. The analytical implication of the cultural model conveys that the patriarchal structures which confine women's roles to domestic labor while highlighting women's resistance through intellectual agency, economic independence and emotional strength. Moreover, the above analysis reveals that the selected women-authored Amharic novels reflect women's subjective experiences and the powerful tools for social critique and feminist expression. By locating those selected novels within the broader feminist literary tradition, the study emphasizes their significance and contribution in reshaping cultural narratives to the ongoing dialogues about gender, identity, female elements and representations. Thus, it is concluded that by examining women's literatures and their outlooks, individuals could have more awareness about the potential for social changes.

Finally, those women's novels illuminate the resilience, creativity, and agency of Ethiopian women, and they offer valuable perspectives that challenge patriarchal paradigms and inspire new feminist engagements.

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