

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

An Inquiry into Ethiopian Amharic Film: Reflection of Political History in ‘Tezza’

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Abstract

Films can be used to tell a story of any part of the past. It is now more convenient for literary historians to accept the representation of political history in films. This article explores the reflection of Ethiopian political history in Tezza, an Amharic film, which was produced in 2008 G.C. Data for this study were obtained from Primary and secondary sources, and they were analyzed qualitatively using a content analysis method. The findings of the study revealed that the director of the film employed different metaphors and symbolic expressions to significantly describe the 1970s political history of Ethiopia. The structure of the movie portrays an apprehension of the political history of Ethiopia using cognitive apparatus, such as the object, background of the film, themes, the plot, camera, setting, characters, colors and sounds. The study also demonstrated the themes and subjects of political history, the viewpoints and stories that are offered in relation to political history, and the ways in which the Tezza portrays historical events and personalities of that era.

Keywords: Film, Portrayal, Political History, Historic Film, Tezza

Introduction

In everyday situations, the terms “film,” “movie,” and “cinema” can be used interchangeably as synonyms in common contexts; nevertheless, “film” refers to a cinematographic depiction of a tale, drama, episode, or event. On the other hand, cinema refers to the entire film industry, and movies are associated with entertainment. (Cartmell, 2014). Film has long been a powerful medium for portraying history. Films that depict historical events have the potential to influence audience perceptions and contribute to the collective understanding of the past (Hauser, 2005). History and film have a closer association now than they had in the past. Some years ago, criticizing the portrayals of dramatized interpretations of the past was a very simple task for historians. People were probably never certain that what they saw existed until the century when photographic plates and later film started to capture what existed before the lens. (Rosenstone, 1995).

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Filmmakers have long used history in a variety of ways. People on the left and right of the cultural spectrum have used history for political aims and for commercial gain in several film industries. Film has served as a weapon of reinforcement for people who are certain of their place in the hierarchy and as a cover for people who were uncomfortable with their social standing to oppose change.

In recent decades, historians have eagerly turned to an analysis of films for insights into the changing interests of past generations. They have, for example, treated dramatic film as a mirror that reflects the conscious and unconscious values of the producers and their audiences. Historians also have examined film and television in order to study the history of the entertainment industry and to understand film's role as an influence on public opinion and as an instrument of propaganda (Toplin, 1988, p. 1210).

The debate between the actual and non-real representation of history intrigued historians and cinema makers to investigate its correct representation in the given society. The focal point of discussion in the meeting held in "International Congress of Historical Sciences" saw the scope of history presented on the canvas of film production (Salmi, 1995; Leland, 1923). The challenges related to the collection of history for film production were also configured. According to the Iconographical Commission, historical films are those "which record a person or period from time after the invention of cinematography and without dramaturgical or 'artistic' purposes of those films which present a visual record of a specific event, person or locality, and which presuppose a recognizable historical interest inherent in a subject matter" (Aldgate, 1979, p.5-6)

The representation of history in Amharic films has been a topic of less discussion in recent years. While the movie industry in Ethiopia has a long history of producing films that reflect important political histories from the country's past incidents, there have been concerns about the authenticity of these portrayals. In other words, the biggest issues facing the representation of political history in Amharic films is lack of scholarly attention. Many films that are based on historical events are often criticized for taking creative liberties with the facts, or for failing to authentically portray the historical context in which these events took place (Rosenstone, 2017)

This lack of attention to detail not only diminishes the historical accuracy of the movies but also perpetuates misconceptions and stereotypes about Ethiopia's past. It also undermines the ability of audiences to learn from and appreciate the rich history of their country. Another issue facing the portrayal of history in Amharic films is the limited perspective that is often portrayed. Despite these challenges, there have been some promising examples of movies that have successfully portrayed Ethiopia's history in an accurate and authentic way.

The Ethiopian cinema is facing a massive challenge in the production of video films practiced by untrained producers and due to the cinema hall that lack appropriate infrastructure. Producing historical films is challenging even though the new demands for Ethiopian films have increased worldwide, drawing interest for reviewing and watching them Micheal Thomas significantly talks about the different cinematic traditions that emerged in Ethiopian. However, they still contributed to the marginalization of the Ethiopian industry(Thomas, 2022; Ashagrie, 2016). As a result, one finds only a few films that depict the political situation of the country amid, the rapidly growing film industry that has experienced robust growth over past couple of decades. Nevertheless, the industry is still facing various kinds of challenges in terms of cinematic production and exhibition.

There are some prominent scholars in the Ethiopian cinema such as Micheal Thomas, Bitania Tadesse, Steven Thomas, Alessandro Jedlowski and others(Thomas, 2022; Ashagrie, 2016), who have extensively worked on the qualitative data with an angle of comparison with another African cinema. Thus, this study tried to analyze the portrayal of political history of Ethiopia in 1970s as depicted in The film *Tezza Morning Dew*, which tells the story of an Ethiopian doctor who returns to Ethiopia after years of studying in Germany.

Objectives

This study aimed at exploring political history as reflected in *Tezza*. Specifically, the focus of the study was:

- To analyze the objects and images that represent the 1970's Ethiopian political history.
- To categorize different aspects of historical representation, character portrayal, and thematic focus.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach, selecting among a diverse range of films that depict significant political histories. A coding scheme was developed to categorize different aspects of historical representation, including accuracy, narrative structure, character portrayal, and thematic focus. The film was selected using purposive sampling, with a focus on the movie that has been widely viewed and reviewed by audiences and critics. In addition, the film is historical by its genre. Also, the researcher employed document analysis as a tool. There are various theoretical models for film analysis that helps in understanding a co-relation between the text and image. The prominent theoretical models of the film studies are apparatus theory, subject-position theory and culturalism. Here, the researcher used a method of critical content analyses of the objects and images that narrate the 1970's Ethiopian history.

In the study, the researcher utilized both communicative and literal translation methods. The communicative translation method helped bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, while the literal translation method preserved the authenticity and nuances of the source material.

Finally, New Historicism, a literary theory that emerged in the late 20th century, primarily in the field of literary criticism, was used as a lens to understand the meanings in this study.

New Historicism seeks to analyse literature by considering the historical and cultural context in which it was produced. Rather than focusing solely on the text itself or the author's intentions, it emphasizes the interplay between literature and history, exploring how texts reflect and shape the social and political realities of their times. Generally, it seeks to understand literature as a dynamic and complex artefact that is deeply embedded in its historical and cultural milieu. It encourages readers to explore the connections between literature, history, and power, and to uncover the ways in which texts reflect and shape the world in which they were created.

Finding and Discussion

Symbolic and Metaphoric Meanings of Politics in Tezza (Morning Dew)

Filmmakers explore greater depths with plot, theme, and character development by utilizing symbols and metaphors. The director of *Tezza*, Haile Gerima, used unusual symbolic and metaphorical language, pictures, and sounds in the narrative to imply a deeper meaning.

As depicted in the film's narrative synopsis, and as presented in exposition of the film, Anberbir's mother goes to church to thank God for bringing her son from Germany. Here, it appears that the film maker (here, the director and film maker are used interchangeably) is portraying Anberbir's mother as an Ethiopian and symbolically representing the state of Ethiopia. When he came in, the nation greeted him with open arms. In the identical situation, the clergy members are seen bestowing blessings and leading a spiritual song in the church. The song stands for blessings and happiness combined. Anberbir, though, does not seem to feel at ease with the situation. He looks disoriented, experiencing hallucinations, and flashbacks and daydreaming about his early years. ("Morning Dew" 00:04:35).

In a scene, Anberbir is seated a top of the mountain often known as "Mussolini Mountain". This scene implies two main ideas at this instance. First, the mountain represents a greater viewpoint and the capacity to look from a loftier vantage point. It also represents

stability, firmness, eternity, and fidelity. Second, the mountain's name has a huge historical significance. Italy was vanquished in Ethiopian history in 1896 (Milkias & Metaferia, 2005). The victory was particularly significant since it was the first time in colonial history that African or Ethiopian armies had defeated a European power with such a devastating effect. Fascist Italy tried to defeat and conquer Ethiopia in 1935 in an attempt to exact revenge (Holbert, 2019). The Ethiopian Empire and Italy's well-equipped armies fought each other in the war. Many Ethiopians lost their lives defending their country, and the country became free after a five years long and bitter patriotic struggle. However, this freedom did not last long as the people became subject to the emperor's rule. Anberbir sits and regrets with his very words the people who sacrificed themselves for free freedom of their country as follows:

("I lost my father at the battle fought between Italy and Ethiopia at Tekezieh murdered with mustard gas along with countless people. They were sacrificed for nothing. There is nothing left of them except the tomb."; my trans.). ("Morning Dew" 00:04:35).

In the same scene, a bird is seen flying on the top of the mountain and over the tomb. This is used to depict their sacrifices for freedom. It is known that a bird is a symbol of freedom. Similarly, the director depicted the winner and the highness of Ethiopia by seating Anberbir on the 'Mussolini Mountain' and making him watch through a high angle camera the sunrise. It is well known that throughout various cultures, the sun represents strength, power, expansion, passion, and the cycle of life. As previously noted, Ethiopia was represented by Anberbir's mother. There is a point in the film where she says, after a long journey, that her legs are hurt. A light is seen in front of the scene. This image seems to tell that the nation was in pain and that her son Anberbir was attempting to save or cure her. In a similar manner, during a scene in the film, groups of children approach a house with gifts, offering blessings, and presenting their good wishes for light. Ethiopians celebrate the New Year at the start of Meskerem. (September 9), which is perceived as a month of renewal, brightness, and hope. There are various practices performed to celebrate the festival of new year. Among them is lightning torch which represents virtue and enlightenment.

Ethiopian history has it that Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in September, and the Dergue administration took over the same month. As a result, the film suggests that the dictatorial regime of Dergue might move in to transition to democracy following the overthrow of the emperor. However, the Dergue rule gave way to a complete military dictatorship after just two years. The film generally attempted to capture the political climate of the 1970s. It appears that the symbols of birth, September, fertility, cleansing, and the torch represent the transfer of power within the monarchical system. And from the monarchical rule to democratic system. However, the students' movement, or the struggle, failed, and elites and young people were banished in the process of establishing democratic government and equality. In most cases, the director used a scene to symbolize political history.

In a scene in which Anberbir's mother gives him money to give to children who are waiting for outside, Anberbir's brother became disappointed because he is elder than Anberbir. In Ethiopian culture, the elder is given priority in such a situation. Here, the disagreement between the two brothers symbolizes the countries conflict. The rivalry and the competition of two brothers symbolize political rivalry and feud between the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (Amharic: መላ ኢትዮጵያ ሶሻሊስት ንቅናቄ) and The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) (Amharic: የኢትዮጵያ ሕዝባዊ አብዮታዊ ፓርቲ. Therefore, the director wants to depict the country's political issues and its hope during Haileselassie regime.

The political situation of the nation is portrayed in the film in a different scene. Azanu is the name of a minor character in the film. She appears to be a tenant sign. And she is having a pot and is ladling the sea water. She is singing a rather sad song that articulates her suffering. Anberbir is listening to her music in the scene. The song seems to be a mixture of both elements of lamenting and praying. Emperor Hailesillasié made significant contributions to Ethiopia, and according to many historians and academics, he was regarded as the father of Africa. However, a number of academics argue that the emperor was blamed because the people had no authority over their own properties including land. They were regarded as tenants, and there were classes among the people that governed under the monarch. Political authority was granted to the person who has a royal blood or linked to the royal families. Azanu, the tenant, talks to God about her suffering and burden in the following way:

“What would I say to God”

If I could find Him?”

“He mistook me for someone else because I had blessed him.”

“Fly. Fly, birdie.

And tell Him that I am suffering”(my trans.). (Morning Dew: 00:12:37).

As a result, in the film, she talks/laments to God about her suffering and burden. (“Morning Dew” 00:12:37). Throughout her speech, Azanu asks the bird to inform God of her sorrow in life. In this situation, birds stand for liberation. As a result, the filmmaker accurately portrayed the political and economic classes and showed that there was no freedom at the period.

In the same scene, Anberbir is depicted in monologue which contains a deep meaning in relation to Azanu being symbolized as lodger. Anberbir is asking himself about the role of Azanu to his mother. He says, “Azanu works hard, and she is working day and night. She always gets up in the morning and milks the cows. Then, she goes to the lake (Tana) and catches fish. She is everything to my mother. What would happen if she was not

there?" ("Morning Dew" 00:13:33) my trans.).

There is a scene in the film with deep significance. Anberbir is led to a realm of spirituality. He is splashed with holy water after the bell rings and the clergy, holding the holy cross, are waiting for him. Anberbir puts on white clothing, as do his families. Three items: the bell, the cross, and white clothing are represented here. First of all, bells have a deep and symbolic meaning that has to do with the mind and raised consciousness. Anberbir's troubling mind and thoughts represent the troubled political structure of the nation. The sound of the bell serves as a warning alarm to the people. Furthermore, knowledge is also seen to be a system of gaining wisdom and a greater understanding of an idea. Therefore, the people's bell is a symbol for saving the nation's democratic system and raising awareness.

In the same scene water is used. Water is a symbol of life. It is connected to fertility, birth, and refreshment. It has various meanings for Christians. Christ's walking on water, and changing it into wine can be interpreted as a metaphysical interpretation of the earthly circumstances. Typically, flowing water is a symbol of change and time elapsed. Anberbir recovers and recalls what happened to him after being immersed in the sacred water saying, "when the priest baptized me with that cold holy water, my memory became open and I remembered everything"; (my trans.). ("Morning Dew" 00:21:12).

Since Ethiopia's political system had many difficulties during the 1970s, Anberbir's mental illness served as a metaphor for it. Anyone can infer from this that the filmmaker was optimistic for the political system in his nation. In a certain scene, Anberbir is seen at a lab looking through a lens of a microscope and examining a disease. The director showed the disease as a metaphor for Ethiopian politics. The director intends to represent Ethiopian politics, as depicted by the following monologue of Anberbir. "I concentrated as much as I could on my studies. I made a vow to Tesfaye. After completing our studies, we pledged to combat the disease that claims the lives of our people (my translation). ("Morning Dew" 00:23:12).

The director symbolized the disease in the laboratory by something abstract. Anberbir is trying to investigate the disease in the laboratory. From this, anyone can understand that a country's politics is symbolized metaphorically by the disease.

The director displayed the dogs, doves, and birds in different scenes. For instance, the dog barked when the militia searched the village looking for the youth whom they wanted to take military training camps. Similarly, birds were flying in the same scene when the soldier shot a chick. As previously discussed, birds are symbolically associated with freedom. The message that the victim was killed for freedom was what the director wished to get across.

When the boy is murdered in the same setting, several young people lament. To show their feelings, the director symbolized fire as a background. Fire's metaphorical significance changes greatly depending on the situation in which it is used. It can bring about agony

and death in addition to consuming, warming, and illuminating. It is typically the sign of motivation. Here, the filmmaker used the image of youngsters being consumed by the system like fire, inspiring and infuriating them to rebel against it.

The director showed the famine and starvation in Northern Ethiopia in one sequence. As history has it, hunger occurred the 1970s in most parts of Ethiopia, particularly in the northern regions of “Wolo” and “Tigray.”

In Tezza , a big marriage ceremony is shown in one of the scenes. People are eating, drinking, and dancing because it is a royal marriage ceremony. The bridegroom’s son hails from Azanu. Even though she was born into a royal family, he does not help her. She is living with dreadful life.. The bridegroom had a son from Azanu before his second marriage. As she is attending the marriage ceremony, her kid, that she carries on her back, begins crying in the middle of ceremony and she feet hopeless and throws the kid in front of the royal family and the public, as a consequence. Then, the marriage quickly descends into grief. “ (Morning Dew “ 00:23:12).

The director intended to use costume to convey a deep meaning. Everything in a film has a purpose, including the lighting, costumes, noises, colors, and attire. As a result, Azanu’s hairstyle in the scene makes her to represent the women of Wolo and Tigray. As previously indicated, Azanu and her son represent the impoverished.

In the scene, the director conveyed Hailessilasie’s regime lack of concern for the starving masses. Historians blame the system for having allowed the nation to descend into starvation; this was due to poor planning and management. Other parts of the world have plenty of resources and were not starving. In Ethiopian history, there were several ups and downs as well as political upheaval following the overthrow of the Haile Selassie’s administration. This is the setting that the film portrays. The discourse that follows makes situation quite evident. The dialogue takes place between Tesfaye and Anberbir. The dialogue might be transcribed and translated as follows:

“I wish to visit my mother,” says Anberbir.

Tesfaye: “The nation lacks stability. There is no peace on the roads.”

“How about politics?” asks Anberbir.

Tesfaye: “Tomorrow is our meeting day. You and I can go together if you’d like.”

“For me, politics is enough,” says Anberbir.

Tesfaye: “This is when you have no choice. This isn’t Germany. This place is full of groups. They have extremes of their own. You will be viewed as an enemy if you choose not to affiliate with any group. Thus, for your own safety, you have to join one group. They have a really wise phrase. “Two bullets hit

the opportunist” my trans. (“ Morning Dew “ 01:01:12).

From their dialogue, it can be concluded that the country was within deep political unrest, and the director wanted to tell his audiences that there was a political transition. In addition to this, he conveyed the political situation after the emperor was gone. It seems that the director wanted to tell the situation by symbolizing the character’s name. The dialogue was held between character “Tesfaye” and character ‘Anberbir’, in Ethiopia, the name Tesfaye in Amharic literally associates with hope. The name of the character has intentional meaning. It seems the director wants to show the people of Ethiopia that there would be hope in the coming regime after the emperor lost power. In the film, Tesfaye had hope in the country’s politics, but he was killed. Then, Anberbir became disappointed and hopeless. In the scene, the director didn’t lose hope. He hoped Anberbir would be there for the country. When Anberbir takes the path, and the drop of water increases, the audiences begin to be hopeful because water symbolizes purification. It is associated with positivity. Similarly, in the same scene, as he takes the path, the sun rises. This implies that still there is hope. But Anberbir’s heart is broken as the result of Tesfaye’s death. The death of Tesfaye is foreshadow to help the audience guess the nature of the coming government.

In the scene, Anberbir sits and starts thinking of Tesfaye’s death. The director depicts the situation as follows: “During the Ethio- Italy war, Tesfaye lost his father. He had no mother too. He had great hope in his country to protect and cure her of the disease.” When Anberbir was narrating in his room, soldiers came and took him forcefully to the commander. Two men stared at Anberbir and said: “He was a humble person, but the hyena is going to eat him.”

The director included two significant symbolic meanings of diseases and hyena into the speech and scene above. He connected the illness to the nation’s political structure during the Dergue administration. The second symbolic meaning came from two individuals who used metaphor to criticize the Dergue dictatorship, saying things like “the hyena will eat him.” People have historically tended to have a bad opinion about hyenas, identifying them with avarice, filth, and dread because of their hunting habits, which include looting tombs for food. In many local cultures, they have also been linked to wickedness. The director used the hyena to represent the military administration.

Power in Tezza

The king’s authority throughout Ethiopian history, particularly during the imperial dynasty, is believed to have come from God. As a result, the director attempted to capture how power was shown in the film. He wanted to show the nature and the source of power during emperor Haile Selassie’s regime and how the emperor attained authority and how it was lost. Every scene in the film features a representation of power. The director made it evident how Haile Selassie starts to lose his influence. As was previously noted, Ethiopian history was shaped by the belief that God was the source of Haile Selassie’s power, and

that everyone should submit to him because the power i emanated from God. It was thought that anyone who opposed the monarch was thought to have stood against God. Nonetheless, many Jamaicans revere the emperor; they honor him calling him Rastafari. The Rasta lion is the primary emblem of Rastafarianism and the most significant symbol of the movement. The lion is seen in profile, occasionally holding a banner or donning a crown, and with one foot up. An emblem of the Ethiopian ruler, Haile Selassie, was the lion of Judah. For many Jamaicans, the Bible's Book of Revelation which read, "King of Kings, Lord of lords" represented the Messiah, and Ras Tafari's coronation signified the fulfillment of divine prophecy and Haile Selassie was believed to be their rescuer.

In a scene, the director depicts as emperor Haile Selassie visits America, with white people and religious leaders bowing down to the king and showing their respect for him. Here, the director used colored videos and photos. However, after Haile Selassie lost his power, the director turned the color to black and used black and white colors. Traditionally, black color is associated with fear, death, evil, attack, rebellion, and difficulty. Similarly, in a scene, the director utilizes the visual arts to express certain ideas regarding how the emperor leaves his power. He makes a historic speech, and the director presents it in a scene. His last words are presented as follows:

"We have heard what you have read. Our time on the throne has been more than just a title. Our time ends here, and your time will follow. But, if you fail, ours will come back. To the best of our abilities, we have served our people and our country. We shall cease working and accept anything if the possibility to serve the Ethiopian people necessitates that we be removed (my trans.); my trans. ("Morning Dew" 00:47:37).

From the above speech, it seems the director wanted to convey that the transition period from monarchical rule to the Dergue regime was a critical turning point of Ethiopian politics in 1970s.

Generally, the director seems to reflect he 1970s Ethiopia which saw a transitional period under the Haile Selassie and Dergue regimes, where the people initially had hope until the Dergue regime became a repressive military government that went against the predominantly religious Ethiopian population by imposing a communist system.

There is yet another scene of a profound significance with Germany being the location of the scene. In the story, the students are seen rejoicing over the overthrow of the emperor. Their words are quoted as follows:

"The 3,000-year-old debt has vanished, guys. Ethiopia is unencumbered. The throne has become free. What then are your expectations? Enter and take the lead! It is not the question should not be about Haile Selassie removal; it should be about who will come after him? We are the one who deposed the old emperor, so we should seize the power.(My trans." ("Morning Dew" 00:48:39).

Finally, Anberbir reacts, " Haile Selassie is gone. we are the ones who should come to

power.” Here, the director tried to convey a message after the removal of the imperial regime, the coming government is symbolized by a black and blurred color. Meanwhile, the students are eager to join the country’s politics, yet they were not organized to come to power right away. Therefore, the director represented the coming regime with a black color. Therefore, it seems that the director feared that the next government might not be a democratic one. The events in black video are seen shadowed forth.

In one scene, the director attempted to portray the Dergue rule as a military dictatorship. When Tesfaye is seen introducing the surroundings to Anberbir, a scene depicts numerous people who are eating raw meat. Anberbir turns down invitations to this occasion. Eating raw meat has a symbolic meaning in this context. This is A popular practice in Ethiopia, eating raw meat has more connotations in various cultures than just what one might anticipate given its use in food. It represents something barbaric and inhumane. It is a masculine emblem in matters of gender. Therefore, the director tried to convey a message that the Dergue regime seemed undemocratic or dictator. Also, as mentioned in the character analysis of Tesfaye (hope), the character name symbolized the then government and failed hope.

The situation is depicted as follow:

Anberbir: We emerged as the nation’s new vitality. Countless people were banished without any guilt, and we ended ourselves living in the houses of people who had been wrongfully defrauded. We, the former rebels, switched to communism.

Anberbir: The Dergue is not the only one to blame. Even we, the so-called scholars, cannot seem to agree.

A student: Could you please elaborate?

“When the Dergue gets closer to the elites, we get apart and we make the country hell,” said another student. my trans.). (“Morning Dew” 01:06:24).

There have been many difficulties in Ethiopia’s political structure, particularly since the 1970s. No one accepts accountability for the nation’s failure. Elites, historians, and former leaders placed reciprocal blame on one another. In between, both the nation and its citizens were suffering. For this reason, Tezza attempts to depict the gap, as stated in the text above. Nobody on either side accepts accountability for the system’s breakdown. As a result, the filmmaker tries to portray the real history of the 1970s in a fair and balanced manner.

Generally, the director of Tezza skillfully depicted the political history of the 1970s Ethiopia, presenting a balanced and nuanced representation of power dynamics, where the struggles of individuals and groups against authoritarian rule are juxtaposed with the complex realities of those in positions of authority.

Elite Expelling in Tezza

Ethiopian history from the 1970s is contentious. According to some historians, the emperor and the Dergue dictatorial regime were anti-elite, and a large number of intellectuals were either executed or banished from the country. Yet, some historians disagreed, arguing that while the emperor attempted to increase access to education, the public did not enjoy the same level of educational opportunities. In a same vein, they mentioned that Dergue avoided illiteracy and attempted to increase education. As a result, the film has more scenes depicting the treatment of the elite by both governments.

The role of elites and how the Dergue banished them were both vividly portrayed in the film. Anberbir, for instance, was accused of disrespecting the regime and of defying the senior officials when he was called to office in a certain situation. Anberbir returned to Ethiopia, as the storyline states, and attempted to use his career to help his country, but in a later scene, the regime was forcing him to leave. He complied by acknowledging that his remarks had offended the regime, but he still addressed them. The conversation that follows demonstrates how the regime suppressed free speech and how it was driving out the elites. Anberbir; for instance, was charged with making fun of the government.

Anberbir and the commander are having a conversation. The conversation is presented as follows:

“Leave this feudal language, and say, comrade,” said the commander.

“There are still a lot of things you didn’t understand,” said Anberbir.

Commander: “This is your final opportunity. We promise that if you don’t stop, you will be shot. How could you say, “Let the revolution go hell.”

“The poor are suffering,” says Anberbir.

Commander: “Comrade, we are not here to argue over who is right or wrong; that is not the major goal of our meeting. Will you accept or reject the self criticism? I am asking you for the last time!”

“I don’t accept the self criticism,” said Anberbir.

Commander: “You don’t? You’ll have to pay for it . (“Morning Dew”
01:16: 10)

The director attempted to convey the political system semiotically, as both the discourse and the scenario illustrate. There was a picture with a crimson frame lying on the wall when Anberbir was urged to take the selfcriticism. In a similar vein, the rear wall was painted a bright red color as the commander spoke. There was also a large red-colored slogan inscribed with “Forward with Mengistu Hailemariam’s Leadership”. In a similar manner, the portrait of Mengistu Hailemariam is hung on the wall. His t-shirt is completely red, and the frame is filled with the color red. Thus, the director tried to represent the brutal leadership of the Mengistu Hailemariam.

Every color has an emotional value of its own and adds fresh visual dimensions to films. Bright colors like red and yellow, for instance, arouse and captivate viewers. Red is a key color in the film and conveys a significant visual motif. Red has historically been associated with fury, energy, speed, power, heat, aggression, danger, fire, blood, war and violence. This is largely the source of red's current connotation. Thus, based on the information given above, it appears that the director represented the Dergue's authority with the color red as evidently seen turning in to a brutal dictatorship.

Generally, Tezza provides a sober and well-researched portrayal of the Dergue's repressive actions during the 1970s, depicting how the authoritarian government systematically expelled, tortured, and killed the youth and elites it deemed a threat to their power. Through its balanced and detailed representation, the film effectively conveyed the Dergue's anti-elite sentiment and the harsh realities faced by those jailed or targeted by the regime's crackdown on dissent.

In the same scene, there is a huge historic meaning in the film. When Anberbir was confronting the commander, his image was in between two photo frames. The two photo frames represented አ.ሀ.አ.ፓ (Ethiopian People Revolutionary Party, and ሙአ.ሶን (All Ethiopia Socialist Movement). Anberbir seems to be a member of EPRP. Therefore, if he accepts the self criticism, he will betray the EPRP, so he fails to decide. The director crops Anberbir's image into two separate picture frames to illustrate his struggle to accept the self criticism. Eventually, under the continued pressure of his pals, he has to accept the criticism. He keeps his word when he takes the criticism. He hears the reverberation. He attempts to vent the criticism as soon as he exits the stage. He metaphorically spits the criticism out by sticking his finger down his throat. There is a lot of depth to this scenario. From the dialogue and interpretation given above, one can generally deduce that the filmmaker intended to communicate the idea that the Dergue dictatorship drove out elites and exploited experts for his own political ends. Similarly, in the film, there is a dialogue which depicts the government expelling elites. The dialogue was held among Anberbir, Tesfaye and a certain commander. Since Anberbir loses hope in the system, he seems to stop his active engagement or involvement in politics saying, "I refrained from politics and focused on my professional duty. However, this is viewed as a sin, and they are always observing me. "As Anberbir was reading outside, a commander approached him and spoke to Anberbir as follows:

Commander: Good morning. You are still reading, Dr. You can never learn enough. I doubt that you recall me.

Anberbir: Is she your daughter?

Commander: It makes no sense. She is my flesh and soul. A revolutionist is her name; my trans.). ("Morning Dew" 01:10: 15)

When the dialogue keeps going, Tesfaye comes in and relates to Anberbir that he had a meeting with the cabinet members of the regime saying, "I had meetings with illiterates".

The commander heard this and was offended by the word 'illiterate'. Then, he said, "Take care! Thanks to our revolution. You are not the only one educated and human, we are human too. The so-called elites are denouncing us. We are familiar with this all and have accepted it." . From the dialogue, it can be recognized that there was a harsh confrontation between the system and the elites. Therefore, the director tried to depict how the Dergue regime stood against elites.

In a different scene, Anberbir is seen working in the laboratory when a soldier kills someone and demands that Anberbir sign a document stating that the death occurred due to an accident. Anberbir rejects this command. This encounter makes it rather evident how the Dergue trespass upon experts and exploit them for their own political ends. The conversation might be presented as follows:

Commander: Please sign this document, Dr. Only your signature is required; he died accidentally.

Commander: You work here because you have a profession.

Anberbir: I am not a medical doctor.

Commander: You betrayed your profession when the revolution needed you. We have a great deal of knowledge about you. You condemned others and aligned yourself with imperialism. You mock our revolution. You are in danger if you do not sign. You will have to pay for it.

Anberbir: I'm not a signer. (my trans.). ("Morning Dew" 01:11:19)

At last, a drop of blood appears, and the wall was covered with blood as Anberbir collapses and sobs on the ground. A drop of water is seen in the same scene. The director's message here is that blood represents the system, which is corrupt, and water is a symbol of purification. But the droplet is insufficient. It can be; therefore, deduced from this moment that the director intended to portray the regime as a murderous and autocratic one. Anberbir is disturbed by the dropping water and tries to open it so he can get some water, but when he fails, he closes it. The quantity of water suggested that the nation was seeking a lot of purification.

In a different scene, Anberbir experiences a dream in which he is in his nation. He asks an old man about the meaning of the dream. The old man's interpretation of the dream has a deep symbolic significance.

In one moment, Anberbir is quite concerned for his nation. In the film, he experiences a dream about a barn ("ገገ" in Amharic), an earthen grain container. Filled with food grains to the brim. But, all the grain is spilled through holes in the barn. Anberbir attempts in vain to protect these seeds from spilling by trying to cover the holes with pages he tears off a book. In the scene, Anberbir goes to see an elderly person and attempted to get an interpretation of all these. The person tells the meaning of the dream to him.

Then, Anberbir realizes the profound significance of the dream. The interpretation can be presented as follows:

I think the seed you have seen over and over again symbolizes our people. The barn means country, and the holes symbolize the country's problems. Finally, the book that you were tearing to cover the holes is knowledge. (my trans.) ("Morning Dew" 01:48:18)

Therefore, it appears from the scene that the filmmaker was trying to convey that elites were attempting to serve their country and address numerous problematic issues that the people and the nation were facing in the very system that pushed them away.

Massacre and Torture in Tezza

As demonstrated in the political history of the 1970s, numerous historians and academics share the view that the Dergue regime murdered and tortured prominent figures it deemed dangerous to its dictatorial rule. Professor Bahiru Zewdie; for instance, in his interview with Ethiopian Broadcast Corporation argued that, "the Dergue dictatorship is known to have brutally massacred political party leaders, the youth, and the political rivals". Therefore, this section vividly presents the mass murder and torture carried out by the regime as reflected in the film. In one episode; for instance, Anberbir visits youngsters hiding in a cave because they are afraid of the regime. The conversation between Anberbir on one side and the youngsters on the other goes as follows:

"These are the only survivors. Are you familiar with this individual? Gesgis Belay is his name. This is Asfaw Birhanu. It is believed that he resides in Sudan. Jemberu Kassa is the next person who was murdered along his way to Sudan. Mesfin Ejigu (MA) is the other one. He was murdered with Jemberu. All of them we have seen have perished. There are also others, such as Bitew, Tasse, and Gezahign, among others.

"Are you living here?" asked Anberbir.

"Yeah," replied they in unison. Here is where we now reside. The soldiers will find us and take us to the war if we go outside. (my trans.). ("Morning Dew" 00:26:09).

Here, the director aims to demonstrate the untold atrocities, massacres and genocide by perpetrated by the Dergue dictatorial regime. The flame, the cave, and the name of characters have deep symbolic significance. The cave can represent both a haven and a jail. The speech presented above makes clear that those hiding in the cave protect themselves. Therefore, the cave serves as a convenient shelter. Furthermore, because people are unable to relocate, the area resembles a prison.

The whole story contains different forms of symbolism used to teach the audience. The cave symbolizes the country governed with repressive hands. If one is confined in a cave,

he/she cannot move freely. It also represents ignorance, as those in the cave live accepting what is given at face value. Ignorance is further represented by the darkness that engulfs the people because they cannot see the objects. The other symbolic element in the film is the torch. Torch conveys different meanings in different contexts; it stands for a familiar emblem of both enlightenment and hope. On the other hand, it might symbolize death, while a torch held up symbolizes life, truth, and the regenerative power.

Finally, by including the names of significant characters in the film or scene, the director hoped to communicate a deep meaning. For instance, he intended to ascribe the names of the individuals whose names seen inscribed in the cave to elites, lights, and hope. For example, the character's name “ገስገስ” (Gesgis) can be literally associated with waking up in the early morning, and the second name, “Birhanu,” literally means “light.” The name of the other character is Jember, which means “sunlight.” As a result, the director used the characters' names to strongly suggest that Ethiopia lost its elites in the 1970s typically executed and banished by the brutal Dergue.

At the end, as portrayed in the film even though the Dergue administration had shown some successes, it slaughtered and banished elites in the name of “Ethiopia first, Without Any Bloodshed” which ironically bathed the country with blood

Conclusion

The article attempted to explore the representation of political history in Ethiopian Amharic films, with a specific focus on *Tezza* (Morning Dew). The study employed a qualitative approach and descriptive analysis to examine how the film accurately portrays the political history of Ethiopia of the 1970s. The findings of the study revealed that the director of *Tezza* effectively utilized metaphor and symbolic expressions to adequately convey the political history of that time. The film employed various cinematic elements; such as the object, background, themes, plot, camera, setting, characters, colors, and sounds to create a comprehensive portrayal of the historical events. Using these techniques, the film provides an authentic representation of the political history of the country during that particular time.

Based on the above findings, it is essential to emphasize the importance of films in documenting and presenting history. Besides, film makers should conduct research and conduct consultations with historians to improve the accuracy and authenticity in representation of history in Amharic films. By doing so, filmmakers can contribute to a better understanding of Ethiopia's rich history and prevent the perpetuation of misconceptions and stereotypes.

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