

Exploring Intertextuality in Ethiopian Amharic cinema: A Postmodern Perspective

Abren Tesfamar, Kaleb Wondimu

Faculty of Humanities, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Abstract

This study seeks to examine intertextuality in Ethiopian Amharic cinema, concentrating on two films: "Ethél" (2013) by Zelalem Neged and "Wuha ina Werq" (Water and Gold) (2011) by Mohammed Ali. It examines the insufficient investigation of intertextuality in Ethiopian Amharic film and emphasises the neglected application of postmodernism as a perspective in this domain. The chosen films embody postmodernist themes and employ intertextuality as a characteristic of postmodernist literature. The research employs a descriptive qualitative methodology, highlighting intertextuality as a defining feature of postmodernist literature in the selected films. It utilises intertextuality theories presented by Kristeva, Barthes, and Genette. The study meticulously analyses the films' content, identifies occurrences of intertextuality, and evaluates their relevance within a postmodern context. The results demonstrate significant utilisation of intertextuality in the films to create a universal cinematic language and communicate themes and concepts. The films draw from various materials, exemplifying adaptation, reinterpretation, and rethinking of poetry, history, mythology, and the Bible. This borrowing results in hybridity or plurality of meaning as filmmakers integrate their own concepts with those derived from imitation literature. Intertextuality is evident in story, conversation, as well as in the visual, aural, and technical aspects of filmmaking. In summary, the examination of "Ethél" and "Wuha ina Werq" illustrates how intertextuality constructs a complex network of references, allusions, and reinterpretations, enhancing a universal cinematic lexicon.

Keywords: Intertextuality, postmodernism, Amharic films, postmodernist themes, Ethiopian cinema

1. Introduction

The primary purpose of this research is to explore the presence of intertextuality in Ethiopian Amharic cinema, focusing specifically on the films "Ethél" (2013) directed by Zelalem Neged and "Wuha ina Werq" (Water and Gold) (2011) directed by Mohammed Ali. The researchers strongly believe that studying postmodern features

in selected Amharic films is valuable and relevant for the following reasons. First, analyzing postmodern features in Amharic films allows the viewer to explore how Ethiopian culture and identity are expressed and represented in contemporary cinema. By examining the ways in which postmodernism intersects with Ethiopian storytelling, aesthetics, and cultural references, the audience can gain insights into the unique perspectives and artistic choices of Ethiopian films. Intertextuality has become a defining characteristic of postmodern writing for many authors, playwrights, and poets. Postmodernists, in general, believe that achieving a definitive and universally accepted interpretation of texts is unlikely due to various factors related to individual readers and the principles of hermeneutics. There is ongoing debate about whether films can be considered equivalent narrative mediums to novels.

McFarlane (1996, as cited in Bezabih, 2020) supports the role of film as a narrative medium by highlighting its shared qualities with novels, regardless of its origins as an invention, a form of entertainment, or a means of expression. Intertextuality, as a concept, extends beyond discussions of literature and can be observed in various cultural and artistic productions such as cinema, painting, music, architecture, and photography. Allen (2000) acknowledges the existence of complex patterns of encoding, re-encoding, allusion, echo, and the transposition of previous systems and codes within the "languages" of cinema, painting, and architecture.

Norman (2011) argued that postmodernism in film should be regarded as a cinematic genre raises certain issues pertaining to genre theory beyond that of the mere inclusion or exclusion of particular films, which is a subject for debate in all cinematic categories. More important is whether it is possible, or legitimate, to conceive a genre based on the mingling and subversion of generic characteristics it might be argued that such a category would be more in the nature of an "anti-genre". According to Liknaw (2020), intertextuality involves elements such as parody and pastiche, as discussed by scholars Bennett and Royle (2004) and Jameson (1992). Parody and pastiche both rely on the imitation of earlier texts or objects. Liknaw (2020) further argues that in postmodernism, intertextuality is intentionally used to highlight differences between the interconnected texts. This is particularly evident in parody, where there is a desire to mock by exaggerating the divergence of the original text from conventional discourse. This aligns with the postmodern concept of intertextuality. On the other hand, in the case of pastiche, narratives are created in an interconnected manner where it becomes less clear to distinguish between the original and the imitated texts.

In contemporary times, it is more appropriate to view film as one medium that interacts with other forms of media, forming a multimedia experience or interconnectedness. Intertextuality plays a crucial role for both readers and authors. When engaging with a hypertext, which is the text being read or watched by the audience, readers or viewers can recall references to the hypotext, which is the text being referenced. Similarly, authors, poets, and playwrights incorporate intertexts in their work to add critical or additional meaning, make a point, create humor, or even reinterpret an original work. The researchers believe that the selected movies exhibit a significant amount of intertextuality, which is a prominent feature of postmodernism. The playwrights of these films demonstrate their connection to existing intertexts, whether explicitly or implicitly. They incorporate other literary works, the Bible, mythology, history, and culture as intertexts to unfold the narrative of their films.

According to Aboneh (2016), Ethiopia produces over a hundred films annually. However, the existing literature on African and global cinema fails to adequately include the Ethiopian perspective, resulting in a lack of comprehensive knowledge. Aboneh (2016) further argues that Ethiopian cinema, despite being a pioneer in Sub-Saharan Africa, has not received sufficient academic attention. It is crucial to contextualize Ethiopia's film industry within the broader Sub-Saharan context, as it shares some similarities but also exhibits significant divergences. Additionally, Michael (2011) highlights the notable absence of Ethiopian cinema in key reference books on African cinema published in English over the past three decades, despite the vibrant nature of the Ethiopian film sector throughout the twentieth century.

Intertextuality is a theoretical construct of the first importance, and it is not without direct practical consequences. It leads one to think of a text as a dialogue with other texts, an act of absorption, parody, and criticism, rather than as autonomous artifact which harmoniously reconciles the possible attitudes towards a given problem; it alerts one to the artifice of literature, the special conventions and interpretive operations on which it is based; and it makes one particularly sensitive to the special referentiality of literary works: whenever a work seems to be referring to the world one can argue that this supposed reference is in fact a comment on other texts and postpone the referentiality of the fiction to another moment or another level (Culler, 1976, p.1384).

The researchers are motivated to conduct a study on postmodernist features in selected Amharic films due to the following reasons. First, the researchers noticed a gap in postmodern literary inquiry within the Ethiopian context. Postmodernism has not been extensively considered in the critical studies of literature in Ethiopia,

primarily because the literature produced by Ethiopian writers did not align with this avant-garde trend. Additionally, many literary research outputs in Ethiopia have focused on traditional approaches rather than exploring postmodernism. While the practice of incorporating postmodern aesthetic features in literature production and critical studies has been prevalent in the West for decades, there is a scarcity of literary research works related to postmodernism in Ethiopian literary scholarship. This intertextual exploration of Amharic films contributes to our understanding of cultural nuances and connections in Ethiopian society, supporting cultural preservation and stimulating discussions on Ethiopian identity in a globalized world. Additionally, it adds to the discourse on postmodernism in cinema, demonstrating the effective use of postmodernist themes and intertextuality within a specific cultural framework. This research paves the way for continued analysis of intertextuality in film, fostering interdisciplinary dialogues and enriching the field of film studies with a focus on Ethiopian Amharic cinema. In order to partially fill such gaps, researchers of this study formulated the following research questions:

- 1) How does intertextuality manifest in the selected Amharic films?
- 2) Why are those specific intertextual elements employed by the playwrights in the selected films?

2. Literature Review

2.1.2. Intertextuality and postmodernism

This section aims to summarize the association between the theory of intertextuality and the concept postmodernism within the context of literary studies. The discussion will proceed in a descending order of generality, beginning with a brief overview of postmodernism, followed by concluding with intertextuality.

To begin with, according to Olsson (2008), the advent of the postmodern era was said to be inaugurated in the last quarter of the 20th century by Jean-François Lyotard (in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, 1984). Postmodernism, a critical attitude that emerged in the latter part of the 20th century, challenges prevailing frameworks of world politics by examining how they create and perpetuate power dynamics. Prominent thinkers associated with postmodern thought include Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean Baudrillard. Postmodernism rejects the privileged status granted to Western grand narratives and canonical literary texts. It calls into question fundamental modernist values such as rationalism, objectivity, and the notion of scientific progress (Allen, 2000; Olsson, 2008; Shank, 2008).

Intertextuality, a term rooted in postmodernist literary criticism, refers to the interconnectedness of texts, whereby one text makes references to, quotes, or echoes another. Texts are not isolated entities; they exist within a network of references (Alfaro, 1996; Allen, 2000; Bennet & Royle, 2004). Intertextuality challenges the notion of originality and highlights how texts borrow from and influence one another. It reveals the intricate relationships between literary works and underscores the ways in which they shape and are shaped by each other. In summary, postmodernism has a critical stance toward established norms, while intertextuality explores the complex interplay between texts. These concepts collectively enhance our understanding of literature and culture, inviting us to question established beliefs and explore new perspectives (Alfaro, 1996; Allen, 2000).

2. 1. 2. Theoretical Framework of the Study

This research takes a pluralistic perspective, allowing for the examination of intertextuality as a postmodernist element in the chosen Amharic films, considering their intricate nature. To conduct the analysis, the study draws upon the overarching concepts of postmodernism put forth by different scholars. However, the analytical framework utilized for the subsequent analysis of the selected films is derived from the theories of intertextuality proposed by Kristeva (1980), Barthes (1981, 1977), and Genette (1982).

Julia Kristeva's (1980) theory of intertextuality emphasizes the idea of the "intertext," which refers to the network of texts that shape and influence a particular text. Kristeva argues that meaning is not fixed or stable, but is instead produced through the dynamic interactions between different texts. The researcher uses Kristeva's theory to explore the ways in which texts are interconnected and how they contribute to the creation of new meanings in film.

Intertextuality, a term coined by French semiotician Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s, originates from the Latin word "intertexto," which means to intermingle while weaving. In her essay "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" (1980), Kristeva challenged traditional notions of the author's influences and the text's sources. She proposed that all signifying systems, ranging from everyday objects like table settings to literary works like poems, are shaped by how they transform earlier signifying systems. According to Kristeva, a literary work is not solely the creation of a single author, but rather emerges from its connections to other texts and the structures of language itself. She argues that "any text" is composed of a mosaic of quotations and represents the absorption and transformation of other texts (Kristeva, 1980, p. 66):

Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double. (1980, p.66)

Dialogue and ambivalence lead me to conclude that, within the interior space of the text as well as within the space of texts, poetic language is as "double". (1980, p.69). The writer's interlocutor[...] is the writer himself, but as reader of another text. The one who writes is the same as the one who reads. Since his interlocutor is a text, he himself is no more than a text rereading itself. The dialogical structure, therefore, appears only in the light of the text elaborating itself as ambivalent in relation to another text. (1980, p.86-87)

Roland Barthes' (1977) concept of the "death of the author" and the idea of the "readerly" and "writerly" texts are also influential in the study of intertextuality. Barthes suggests that texts are not created in isolation, but are instead part of a larger network of cultural and literary references. The researchers use Barthes' theories to analyze how filmmakers engage with and subvert traditional narrative structures and conventions through intertextual references. Gerard Genette's (1982) theory of transtextuality further expands on the concept of intertextuality by examining the ways in which texts relate to one another through various intertextual practices, such as allusion, quotation, and parody. The researchers use Genette's framework to analyze how filmmakers draw on existing texts to create new meanings and interpretations in their films.

Roland Barthes, a prominent advocate of intertextuality, challenged the notions of fixed meaning and absolute truth. In his essay "Theory of the Text" (1981), Barthes provided his own definitions of the terms "text" and "intertextuality," drawing inspiration from the works of Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin. Barthes argued that the "text" should not be confused with the physical inscription of a "work." Instead, he posited that the "work" is the material that offers the potential for meaning, closure, and interpretation. The term "text" refers to the act of writing itself. Barthes emphasized the distinction between the tangible "work" and the intangible "text," stating, "The work is held in the hand, the text in language" (1981, p. 39).

Barthes concludes his essay "The Death of the Author" with the idea that a text is composed of multiple writings, influenced by various cultures, engaging in dialogue, parody, and contestation. However, he asserts that the reader is the focal point where this multiplicity converges, rather than the author. The reader becomes the space

where all the quotations that constitute the writing are inscribed without any being lost. The unity of a text lies not in its origin but in its destination. Barthes suggests that the emergence of the reader necessitates the demise of the author (Barthes 1977:, p.148).

Similar to Kristeva, Barthes (1981) argues that the limitations of the linguistic-structuralist approach can be overcome by integrating different epistemes, specifically dialectical materialism and psychoanalysis. This integration leads to a new method that generates a new object called the "text," which is inherently intertextual. The text contains other texts within it, at various levels and in different recognizable forms. Barthes' concept of intertextuality also emphasizes the frequent anonymity of the sources of intertextual quotations. This idea aligns with Kristeva's notion of the absorption of social texts, where the social realm consists of anonymous ideas, commonplaces, folk wisdom, and clichés that form the backdrop of one's life. Unlike traditional influence studies that primarily focus on allusions to well-known works from the past, Barthes places importance on the commonplace: "the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read" (Alfaro, 1996, p.278)

In *Palimpsestes*, Genette emphasizes the comprehensive nature of transtextuality and presents five subcategories (1982, p. 1-5). Intertextuality refers to the co-presence relationship between two or more texts, where one text effectively appears in another through plagiarism, quotation, or allusion. Paratextuality involves the connections between a text's main body and its title, subtitle, epigraphs, illustrations, notes, initial drafts, and other supplementary signals that surround the text and sometimes provide commentary. Metatextuality, often referred to as "commentary," establishes a link between one text and another that comments on it without directly quoting or even mentioning it. This critical relationship is paramount. Archtextuality pertains to the generic category to which a text belongs. While a text may not explicitly acknowledge its genre, readers and critics determine its generic nature. This perception significantly influences the reader's expectations and, consequently, the reception of the work. Hypertextuality concerns the relationship between a subsequent text (hypertext) and its preceding text (hypotext). Genette defines hypertext as any text derived from a prior one through direct or indirect transformation (imitation), rather than through commentary (Genette, 1982).

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To the best of researchers' knowledge, there is scarcity of literary studies on intertextuality on Amharic films. Thus, studying intertextuality in films involves examining both ontological and epistemological rationales. Ontologically, the study of intertextuality in films explores the nature of cinematic texts as interconnected with other texts, such as literature, art, or popular culture. By analyzing how films reference and incorporate elements from other sources, researchers can investigate the ways in which meaning is constructed and negotiated within the cinematic medium. Epistemologically, studying intertextuality in films allows scholars to consider how knowledge is produced, circulated, and interpreted through the interplay of different texts. By examining the relationships between texts and the ways in which they shape our understanding of the world, researchers can gain insights into the complex processes of meaning-making and cultural production in film.

When analyzing "Ethél" and "Wuha ina Werq," Kristeva's theory enables us to recognize and explore the intertextual references utilized by the filmmakers. We can investigate how the films incorporate elements from diverse cultural, literary, and historical sources, such as Amharic poetry, folklore, and religious narratives. By identifying these intertextual components and their adaptations within the films, we gain insights into how the filmmakers interact with and reinterpret Amharic cultural heritage, thereby contributing to the films' postmodern characteristics.

Likewise, Barthes' theory, specifically his ideas about the "death of the author" and the reader's active role in interpreting texts, is relevant to studying intertextuality in *Ethél* and *Wuha ina Werq*." By applying Barthes' concepts, we can investigate how these films challenge traditional narrative structures and norms by incorporating intertextual references. We can explore how the films encourage viewers to actively engage in creating meaning by identifying and analyzing intertextual elements. This examination helps us comprehend how the films disrupt linear storytelling and interact with postmodern concepts of authorship, reader involvement, and the diversity of interpretations.

Similarly, Genette's concept of transtextuality provides a framework for examining specific intertextual techniques, such as allusion, quotation, and parody, found in

"Ethél" and "Wuha ina Werq." By utilizing Genette's theory, we can pinpoint instances where the films incorporate, modify, or reinterpret elements from other texts. This analysis enables us to grasp how the filmmakers establish intertextual links and generate fresh interpretations within the films. We can investigate how the films interact with Amharic literary customs, cultural symbols, or cinematic allusions, and how these intertextual strategies contribute to the films' postmodern aesthetic. By employing the intertextual frameworks proposed by Kristeva, Barthes, and Genette, we can perform a thorough examination of intertextuality as a postmodern element in "Ethél" and "Wuha ina Werq." These theories allow us to recognize, analyze, and value the complex interaction of texts, meanings, and cultural allusions present in the films, providing insights into their artistic goals and their significance within the larger realm of Amharic cinema and postmodern artistic principles.

3. Methodology

In terms of methodology, this study utilized a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on describing intertextuality as a characteristic of postmodernist writing in the chosen films. By employing a descriptive research approach, the study aims to provide a detailed and comprehensive description of the postmodernist features present in Amharic films. This approach allows for a rich exploration and understanding of the topic within the specific context of Amharic cinema. Textual analysis was employed, treating the selected films as texts. Relevant extracts that exhibited intertextuality were extracted from the films and examined within the context of each film's plotline, which played a crucial role in understanding the portrayal of postmodernist intertextual features.

Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009) identify five research methods for data analysis: ethnography, phenomenology, case study, textual analysis, and applied research. In this particular study, textual analysis is utilized as the data analysis technique. Textual analysis involves the identification and interpretation of verbal or non-verbal signs. The primary technique of textual analysis employed in this study is close reading of the film scripts which involves thoroughly watching and re-watching the selected movies while considering postmodernism-related issues. The films were selected using a purposive sampling technique, considering their content's appeal to postmodern films and the presence of postmodernist features or techniques such as intertextuality. The selected films belonged to the feature film category, defined as "full-length" motion pictures lasting over 60 minutes, typically around 90-120 minutes, focusing on a specific topic which fulfill the characteristics of feature film set by Kernvak CKV Online Glossary of Film Terms (cited in Bezabih, 2020, 20).

The chosen films were *Ethél* (2013), written and directed by Zelalem Neged, and *Wuha ina Werq* (*Water and Gold*) (2011), written and directed by Mohammed Ali. After thoroughly watching the selected films, extracts were transcribed into written texts, and were translated into English. Due to the researchers' limited background in cinematography, the analysis was confined to the examination and interpretation of dialogue and narrative. Consequently, narratives, dialogues, and screenshots were considered as data for the analysis to demonstrate how intertextuality was employed in the selected films. Selected extracts related to intertextuality were analyzed using the analytical frameworks of Kristeva's (1980), Barthes's (1987), and Genette's (1982) theories of intertextuality.

4. Analysis and interpretations

4.1. Intertextuality in *Ethél*

In contemporary times, it is more appropriate to view film as one medium that interacts with other forms of media, forming a multimedia experience or interconnectedness. Intertextuality plays a crucial role for both viewers and playwrights. Authors, poets, and playwrights incorporate intertexts in their work to add critical or additional meaning, make a point, create humor, or even reinterpret an original work. The researchers believe that the selected movies exhibit a significant amount of intertextuality, which is a prominent feature of postmodernism. The playwrights of these movies demonstrate their connection to existing intertexts, either explicitly or implicitly. They incorporate other literary pieces, such as the Bible, mythology, history, and culture, as intertexts to unfold the narrative of their films

Poems are rich in symbolism, metaphor, and ambiguity, allowing filmmakers to convey multiple layers of meaning. By incorporating poems into their films, playwrights can create a complex interplay of ideas, inviting audiences to explore different interpretations and engage with the narrative on a deeper level. In the film *Ethél*, there is a referenced poem that explores the theme of identity crisis experienced by the characters. The poem portrays a sense of hybridity and dilemma, questioning whether one exists in Ethiopia or in an alternate universe:

I'm here, I'm there, and it confuses me
This is how I feel
I say I'm here, I'm physically sitting and I'm thinking
I fill one two three four divvy lottery
I also email the scholarship.
This is how I feel

I think of DC when I sit on my island
My mind calls for me the State of Mary, Maryland.
I can see the axis sitting down
The image of Theodor's disappeared from my eyes
I wish to be shooed by Tupac's pistol.
Trump's speech gives a joy to me
I live in dew and the snow makes me cold
I guess it smells like a burger
I'm here, I'm there, it confuses me
I baptized the black hater
I like white slime
Don't neglect the country of art
Ethiopia is a country, Ethiopia is a world
God's abode made by art
Hey, I'm here, I'm there. It confuses me.
(Zelalem, 2013, 08:40-10:07).

The inclusion of intertextual references, particularly to Amharic poetry, provides an additional perspective for interpreting the narrative of the film. While watching the film, viewers may recall lines and verses from a poem composed by Bedilu Wakijira prior to the release of the film *Ethél*. This poem highlights the disparity between reality and the central theme of the poem. The speaker of the poem aims to persuade readers that Ethiopia is a country of art, wisdom, and divine blessings. In contrast, the characters in the film yearn for America and reject their Ethiopian identity. They experience a sense of dual consciousness, being physically present in Ethiopia but mentally drained by aspirations for America and Europe. The scriptwriter also addresses the question of who holds the ultimate authority in creating meaning in a postmodern text. By employing self-aware forms of intertextuality, the playwright provides the audience with the necessary familiarity to comprehend these references and offers the pleasure of recognition. The act of referencing other texts and media serves as a reminder that we exist within a mediated reality.

The connection between postmodernism and religion can be seen as a clash of ideas. Postmodernism challenges established beliefs in biology, cognition, and morality, whereas religions are built upon these foundations. In the film *Ethél*, the prominent form of intertextuality is the incorporation of biblical texts and mythology. Conversations between characters like Dagim and the Godfather regarding the symbolic and metaphorical significance of Ethiopia can unveil the presence of both mythology and the Bible as intertexts. Conversations between characters like Dagim

and the Godfather regarding the symbolic and metaphorical significance of Ethiopia can unveil the presence of both mythology and the Bible as intertexts:

God father: Do you know what Ethiopia means?

Dagim: Burnt face

God father: No, Ethiopia was founded at the Ghion River basin on the banks of Lake Tana. Its founder was Ethel, the son of the priest Melchizedek. God appeared to Ethel on a mountain and changed his name from Ethel to Ethiopia and suggested that he would establish a foundation in the Gihon basin of Lake Tana. Ethel founded a country called Ethiopia given by God at Lake Tana. Ethiopia means a gift of gold to God. Therefore, the ancestor of all Ethiopians is Ethel or Ethiopia. Ethel and his sons were very wise, so they organized the whole of Africa and named it Ethiopia after their fathers. They named it and established a powerful country called Ethiopia, just as it is now. The children of the old Ethiopians of the present Africa were powerful and wise, just like the Europeans who colonized the Africans, so your ancestors also colonized the Europeans. But they did not use force, but wisdom. Surprisingly, my child, before the Europeans colonized Africa, this map of Africa was called Ethiopia.

(Zelalem, 20131:28:23-1:30:06)

Playwrights' strategy of intertextuality creates a narrative that is both intellectual and effective; it preserves history and feeling, thus allowing spectators to feel connected to the past and recognize themselves as historical beings. From the above conversation held between Dagim and the God father, we can say that the film *Ethél* draws intertextuality from Ethiopian mythology to give critical magnitude to the character of the protagonist in the film. Mythological speaking, the meaning of "Ethiopia" is "burnt face." This meaning is the literal meaning which has strong tie to the skin color of most Ethiopians. The above extract also indicates the figurative meaning of "Ethiopia". This figurative meaning, according to the Godfather in the film, is derived from the divine thought. According to the Holy Bible, *Ethiopia* implies a gift of gold to God.

Karen (1990) differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic intertextuality. He said that most contemporary theorists of intertextuality use the term "extrinsic intertextuality" to refer to their focus on the reader's role in producing intertextual readings, whereas the text re-written or incorporated by another text is "intrinsic intertextuality". At times the intrinsic intertextuality is quite overt, indicated by quotation marks or identified by name. The Ethiopian playwrights of the films under

analysis have made references to Ethiopian history, African and European historical accounts in different scenes of the film. For example, the playwright of the film *Ethél* has provided either explicit or implicit hints that guide viewers to place the historical events at the background of the narrative of the film. The dialogue between Dagim and the Godfather in the film *Ethél* also indicates that the scriptwriter relies on history so as to develop his film story:

Son, this book is a history book that your ancestors wrote on parchment and hid for us three thousand years ago. It is one of the wisdom books that the Europeans stole from us once in war and once by missionaries. The reason why they stole from us is because your ancestors were very wise. Because most of them had written and stored in this and other books even with the technology seen in the world. Therefore, if they wanted to be a powerful country like us, they had to hold these books of our ancestors in their hands.

(Zelalem, 2013, 1:27:31-1:28:20)

The provided excerpt suggests that the scriptwriter of the film utilizes extrinsic intertextuality. This is evident through the use of direct quotation marks in the conversation between Dagim and the Godfather. The film's storyline acknowledges the existence of a historical book written by ancestors on parchment, which plays a significant role in the development of the narrative. The Godfather insists that Dagim reads this book in order to fulfill both mythological and biblical prophecies. The content of the book is explicitly described by the God father, encompassing indigenous wisdom, paths to modern technology, mathematics, physics, and astronomy.

The dialogue between characters Dagim and Ashebir demonstrates how the playwright references ideas from history. Ashebir presents historical evidence to showcase the greatness of Ethiopia, despite Dagim's initial reluctance to embrace his Ethiopian identity. Writers can make a text seem more realistic by referring to ideas, people or events that exist in the real world. By making reference to things we can relate to, writers help us to feel a sense of familiarity with the world they are creating for us:

Ashebir: Ethiopianism is a secret, Ethiopianism is wisdom, Ethiopianism is power, and Ethiopianism is the spirit of victory.

Dagim: I don't know where Ethiopia is? The only one I know is Ethiopia, a country known for famine. Let me tell you the truth, I'm an Ethiopian, and I'm very ashamed of myself. You know why, everyone thinks Ethiopia is a country known for famine.

Ashebir: They conspired to make you not trust your Hebrews again. This is the result of conspiracy. Yes, we are starved. We know that everyone in the world is starved again. I have proof of this. For example, look at this photograph (*showing a photograph*).

Dagim: Are you kidding me? Are you saying America is being starved?

Ashebir: Of course, she was being starved. “They are so busy with our things that they forget their own pains”(Zelalem, 2013, 32:10-33:20).

The dialogue above suggests that the scriptwriter aimed to highlight the contrast between texts. The history of the United States and Ethiopia, both in the present and the past, presents a paradoxical relationship. Ashebir's photograph serves as evidence of America's deprivation, but Dagim is skeptical and unwilling to accept Ashebir's account of Ethiopia's superiority. When imitating a text, one tends to blend their own ideas with those present in the imitated text, resulting in a hybrid or multiple interpretations. In the context of film, the use of intertextuality through visuals, colors, sounds, movements, and adaptations from literature, whether through technology or mechanics, transforms film into a form of technical intertextuality. This highlights the departure between the current text and the referenced text, which is a key aspect of intertextuality in postmodern writing.

The use of mythology as intertext in films can serve to challenge and subvert traditional storytelling conventions, blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy, past and present, and myth and history. This can create a sense of ambiguity, irony, and playfulness in the film, prompting viewers to question their assumptions and expectations about narrative structure and meaning. The dialogue between Dagim and the God father consists of myth as a textual reference. The secret of the so called Nissan yields cosmological reference:

Dagim: What is the secret of the accolade?

God father: The first secret was prophesied by our forefathers that Ethiopia would be forgotten, its power and glory, but in the 14th generation since the prophecy was given, a man like Ethel will rise and reunite Ethiopia and Africa and restore power and glory. He reconciled the Vondemamas and plowed the land, when he put his hands on accolade which was inherited before the 14th generation. Another secret behind the sign is there are texts written in secret in Geez. The meaning of Geez is one of these books of our ancestors and the natural resources and minerals contained in the Ethiopian underground. The basis of all this is the Nissan. If the accolade does not reach the 13th

generation, the prophecy will be prolonged and its resources will be left behind. Look for the Nissan and bring it. May God be with you (Zelalem, 2013, 1:30:10-1:31:46)

Another form of intertextuality present in the film *Ethel* is folklore. The traditional Amharic folk literature adds flavor to the audience's experience within the context of Amharic cinema history. In *Ethel*, the playwright draws inspiration from war chants, which are a significant part of Ethiopian oral tradition:

Robber Akaki Robber
Robber Akaki Robber
An invincible female lion
The shadow of the killer roars
I am the woman who gave birth to a man
When a coward boasts, he won't deny me
Robber Akaki Robber
Robber Akaki Robber
If you haven't heard about it, you will find this
I threw it away like a storehouse.
I am the son of a king
Pride runs through my blood
I dare not like my country
I will fight for my glory
I am an Ethiopian, the remnant of heroes
Honey for my friend, aloe for my enemy
Robber Akaki Robber
Robber Akaki Robber

(Zelalem, 2013, 1:38:42-1:39:03)

According to Shiloh (2007), the concept of narrative is often used extensively but lacks a clear definition in academic discussions. In works of fiction or film, intention is typically attributed to human agents, such as characters or the narrator. These agents drive the cause-and-effect chain, where cause-effect relationships and agency collaborate to create the narrative. Postmodernists challenge the notions of originality and authenticity, as mentioned in the aforementioned source. The provided excerpt from the film highlights the anonymous nature of war chants. Birkie, a minor female character, utilizes a war chant after her victory over her adversary. In the Ethiopian context, war chants are employed to commemorate significant achievements within society. This cultural aspect is passed down orally

from one generation to another, implicitly reflecting and acknowledging the society's culture and traditions.

4.2. Intertextuality in *Water and Gold*

Intertextuality plays a significant role in postmodernism by acknowledging and referencing earlier literary works. Many postmodern artists have embraced intertextuality as a defining characteristic of their style. It is important to consider the influence of other literary works in completing the narrative of a present text when discussing intertextuality in postmodern writing. While all playwrights draw inspiration from their predecessors, contemporary writers often consciously incorporate elements such as imitation, quotation, plagiarism, and parody extensively. The incorporation of poems as intertextuality in postmodern writing can take various forms. It could involve directly quoting or visually representing specific poems, adapting poetic techniques into the film's visuals or dialogue, or even creating original poems that align with the film's themes and motifs. These poetic elements contribute to the overall intertextual tapestry of the film, encouraging viewers to engage critically and interpretatively with the work. In the film *Wuha ina Werq* ("Water and Gold"), the playwright aims to demonstrate that a text is not an independent entity by acknowledging and incorporating previous texts to unfold the storyline of the film:

You the dream of Cush, the son of Nimrod
Yesterday you were an African Rome
When the water goes away
Why you remain as thin as a river rock
(Mohammed, 2011, 13: 26-13:41)

The poem used as intertext in the film alludes to the biblical origins of the black African race, highlighting the significance of Ethiopia as an African powerhouse and a pioneer of civilization on the continent. The scriptwriter employs this poetic intertext to illustrate the contrast between Ethiopia's past and present. In postmodern writing, intertextuality aims to challenge established discourses. Postmodern authors deliberately incorporate elements such as plagiarism, kitsch, and false or pretended quotations from well-known texts to create meaning.

"Allusions to cinema, myth, epic, religious texts, fable, fairy tale, gossip, proverbs, and superstitions, popular songs and films, comics, advertisements, news items, anecdotes, as well as Rushdie's other work, come together on his canvas. "Postmodernism" as Hutcheon maintains, "directly confronts the past of literature

- and of historiography, for it too derives from other texts (documents). It uses and abuses those intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions and then subverting that power through irony". (Hutcheon, 1988,118).The director of the film "Wuha ina Werq" draws intertextual references from Laureate Tsegaye Gebremedihn's poetry anthology titled "Fire or Flower" to shape the narrative:

Please Saint Mary, you the symbol of love
Give me patience to share the pain of my Motherland
Ethiopia
From the furnace that burned her to taste the poison
from her bites
Let me die her own death
Yes, I'm alone, I'm afraid
I lost my heart
I lost a corner to hide
(Mohammed, 2011, 1:20:41-1:21:10)

In the film "Wuha ina Werq" or "Water and Gold," the main character, Dr. Dejene, strongly advocates for Ethiopian traditional values, norms, customs, and the economic system. However, his opponents, such as Miss Rihana, are opposed to his beliefs. Dr. Dejene faces dismissal from a company after engaging in a heated argument with the owner regarding the rights of the working class. Despite presenting a cost-benefit analysis to the owner, his concerns are not taken into consideration. In a classroom setting, Dr. Dejene teaches principles of economics by using practical examples of the struggles faced by workers, rather than focusing on the theories put forth by Adam Smith, who is considered the father of modern economics. As he observes people prioritizing personal gain over moral values and the greater good, Dr. Dejene recites the aforementioned poem, highlighting the contrast between self-interest and self-sacrifice for truth and country.

History serves as another significant intertext in the selected films. In the film "Wuha ina Werq" ("Water and Gold"), the playwright attempts to challenge the poststructuralist idea, influenced by Derrida, that "there is nothing outside of a text." This is achieved through allusions to the analysis of Ethiopian history within the film's narrative:

Our history has a close relationship with stone. Axum is stone. Lalibela is a stone. Even a modern cobblestone is a stone. Even if we say that we have three thousand years of history, we are unique people who do not feel that we are the only ones who are retarded/backward, who

have been farming with oxen for three thousand years but good at saying we are always number one.

(Mohammed, 2011, 02:43-03:07)

An intriguing illustration of intertextuality in postmodern writing can be found in the excerpt above. The writer demonstrates to us the necessity of a vertical relationship in his film by utilizing the aforementioned intertextual reference. In postmodern films or any other text, there should be a relationship between text and text, not between text and author. To put it succinctly, one text shapes the meaning of another. Playwrights don't always and exclusively rely on their own concepts.

The goal of the postmodern artist is to highlight the differences between the referenced material and the original text. As Ethiopians, we like to claim that our history dates back three millennia, that we are the cradle of humanity, the forerunners of African culture, etc. In this film, the popular Ethiopian motto "we are always number one" is questioned, highlighting the central theme of intertextuality in postmodern writing. The excerpt serves as an example of how, despite our constant claims to be pioneers in many areas, we continue to farm using oxen that date back more than three millennia. The dialogue that transpires at the funeral service between Dr. Dejene and his neighbors demonstrates how the author draws on history to tell the tale of his movie:

Dr. Dejene: It is very sad when a person is buried, but it is very happy when such poisonous ideas are buried. I am so glad that you neighbors were present at this wonderful funeral.

Female Neighbor: How could a funeral be nice?

Dr. Dejene: My mother, the author of this book is called Max Webner. He says that the poor have no rights. Politicians like Winston Churchill who follow his ideas say that it is fair to oppress poor countries. The author of this book is called Kant. And he says that we Europeans are light and the rest of the world is dark. What is a toxic thought? We bury these poisonous ideas under this banner.

(Mohammed, 2011, 50:40-51:36)

The aforementioned quotation demonstrates how using an original text as an intertext raises certain issues. History and religion are two meta-narratives that postmodernists are inherently opposed to. The dramatist takes issue with Max Webber's notion that the underprivileged have no voice, that Europeans are light, and that everything else is black. The film's dramatist accepts concepts from oral literature in order to demonstrate diversity or plurality of meaning. Put differently, the writer in the movie draws on earlier works to demonstrate how all texts are

connected to one another. The way the female character Rihana in disputes the importance of stories for social progress is supported by history. She breaks down the identities of the people who created Axum and Lalibella in the following monologue:

There is no example of civilization like the Europeans in the world. We need to improve in science, economy, social, politics and individuals. Therefore, we need to learn to be like the Europeans like Turkey and South Korea. We do not know who built Axum and Lalibella or who brought them to us. We wouldn't be surprised by them all our lives. But our faith of yesterday is our poison of tomorrow. (Mohammed, 2011, 01:35-02:25)

Dr. Dejene who is the protagonist of the film *Wuha ina Werq* ("Water and Gold") also alludes to ideas from the analysis of Ethiopian and world history with the intention to persuade that the theory of Ethiopians is better than Darwin's theory of evolution:

Bogale: In the era of globalization, modern education should survive.

Dr. Dejene: Bogale, we should be like the society in which we were created. Charles Darwin's theory, which you mentioned, does not work for this society.

Bogale: How?

Dr. Dejene: That's a good question. Charles Darwin's theory is about individualism. He is talking about bullying. Some scholars accepted his idea, just like Max Webber, the so-called father of sociology. What do you think he means? They accepted the idea of Social Darwinism. On the other hand, look at our society's proverbs. For example, If the web shines, it binds the lion; two heads are better than one; he who eats alone dies alone. So what theory is there better than that of ours (Mohammed, 2011, 38:24-39:30).

It is clear from the two intertextual quotations stated above that the characters Rihana and Dr. Dejene are criticizing meta-narratives such social Darwinism and the idea that Europeans are a superior race. Ethiopian history claims that our ancestors constructed the obelisk of Axum and the hewn churches of Lalibella. For example, Saint Lalibella constructed Lalibella from a single rock before a century passed. In contrast, Rihana, Dr. Dejene's antagonist in the film "Water and Gold," undermines the boastful claims of Ethiopian historians. She firmly believes that we do not know who granted Ethiopians access to Axum and Lalibella, as well as who constructed them. Above all, she emphasizes to her children that this is merely a story and should not be believed. The voice-over narrator in the movie "Water and

Gold" presents historical evidence to illustrate the exploitation of laborers by the bourgeoisie. Drawing from global history, the narrator demonstrates how the lower class was oppressed by the upper class. The film incorporates intertextual evidence from figures like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who rebelled against the oppressors and advocated for the rights of the proletariat, shaping the plot:

When I look at it simply, Ethiopia looks like a gentle farmer. Any civilization in the world is centered on the workers. The sad thing is that there is not enough pay to support the lives of the workers. Our right hand works but our left hand decorates. Both the farmers and the skilled workers are oppressed in all ages. This is why. So, the distribution of resources is unfair. One quintal of my soybeans consumes more than 25 liters of oil.

(Mohammed, 2011:01:35-02:25)

A literary text, film, or any form of art is not solely created by one author, but is influenced by other texts and the underlying structures of language. According to Kristeva, every text is composed of a collection of quotations and is shaped by the assimilation and reinterpretation of existing works (Kristeva, 1980: 66). To illustrate the negative aspects of tradition to her students, Rihana shared a story in the classroom:

When a person walks on the road, he sees elephants tied with thin thread-like ropes. He is very surprised and approaches the owner and asks him how elephants as big as these can be tied with these threads and keep quiet. This is what it means: it consumes the energy of civilization, it darkens the world of tomorrow, it is a backward race.(Mohammed, 2011, 1:10:51-1:11:30)

The role play made among students and Dr. Dejene in classroom about the principle of Adam Smith and sellers near by a road also shows how the script writer intertextually draws on ideas from history:

Dr.Dejene: Who can tell us the difference between the principle of economics via Adam Smith and the gult worker.

Female Student: It is not clear to me what the woman has to do with economics. Adam Smith is so genius and the father of modern economics (Mohammed, 2011:34:51-35:14:)

Towards the end of the story, Dr.Dejenie told a story for children .The moral of the story is instead of building a fence people should build bridge for the betterment of nation survival:

Once upon a time, there were two brothers who loved each other very much. One day, these brothers had a fight. Then they both started to cultivate a large field between them. Then a big cliff was formed between them. Both of them asked a carpenter to build an eight meter long fence for them. The carpenter agreed to their idea and spent the night building a bridge for them.

(Mohammed, 2011, 1:27:40-1:29:30)

The playwright of the film "Water and Gold" demonstrates a deep understanding and analysis of intertextuality, which refers to the need to reference other texts in order to fully comprehend certain elements within a specific text (Parkinson and Thomas, 2000: 49 cited in Ayenew, 2015). The director of the film "Water and Gold" exhibits a skillful ability to adapt and incorporate various sources to create his own cinematic work. Similarly, the playwright of the film being analyzed also draws inspiration from another movie. The voice-over narrator in the referenced film portrays the dynamics of love and the interactions between lovers:

Male Actor: Are you looking it? Love has the power to be stretched like rubber. What if I leave this rubber?

Female Actor: It burns me.

Male Actor: What if you let this go?

Female Actor: You will be burned.

Male Actor: Love is living in harmony, so is marriage.

(Mohammed, 2011, 1:05:21-1:05:57)

The aforementioned quote suggests that incorporating elements from other films is an additional instance of postmodern intertextuality. In this case, the scene from another film is utilized to promote the idea that love is inherently reactionary. It emphasizes that lovers should adhere to the natural laws of the universe. The concept of reciprocity and the consideration of materialistic calculations are essential for maintaining engaging relationships.

5. Conclusions, recommendations and limitations

5. 1. Conclusion

In summary, the narratives of the chosen films are constructed through a dialogue with other texts. The success of these filmmakers lies in their ability to challenge and subvert established systems of thought and belief. Mythology, folklore, history, and various literary works serve as the foundation for their stories. It means all texts are related to one another and often implies that the text that we are reading or a film that we are watching is referencing other texts, which creates a lot of depth for the

reader. A very well-known playwright will often include so many obscure references, the viewer is not able to be aware of the bulk of them. Triggering the memory of the plot and scenes from another story has them race through the audiences' mind as they continue reading the text or watching a movie that's actually in front of them at the moment giving them a depth of experience that writing in the normal manner leaves out.

5.1.1. Recommendations

These findings can serve as a foundation for future researchers to explore other postmodern features such as magical realism, parody, pastiche, paranoia, historiographical meta-fiction, as well as postmodern themes in Ethiopian Amharic cinema.

5.1.2. Limitations

While conducting this study, the following limitations were noted. The first limitation is cinematography part of film analysis is not included due to the researcher's study scope. It is a literary study and focuses on the script of films. Secondly, while we translate Amharic words to English, we lack the English equivalent and this may create confusion for readers of this study who are nonnative speakers of Amharic.

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