Cinema in Ethiopia:

Genre, Melodrama and the Commercial Amharic Film Industry

MICHAEL WILLIAM THOMAS

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2019

Centre for Film Studies

SOAS, University of London

Abstract

This thesis explores the emergence of the commercially viable Amharic film industry in Ethiopia, investigating its system of genres and the manifestation of an Ethiopian-style melodrama. Emerging in 2002 from an economic scenario devoid of government support and dependent on entrepreneurial action, the commercial Amharic film industry is centred in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, where cinemas are devoted to screening the latest local releases to a young cinemagoing public. Film genre terms in Amharic are strikingly visible in the Ethiopian context. They often appear written on film posters, voiced in television and radio trailers and denoted in cinema listings. This experience of locally produced and consumed popular cinema and the prevalence of Amharic genres to its organisation offers an alternative case study to mainstream film cultures and experiences of cinema in Africa and around the world, while also presenting a point of keen comparative interest.

Enabled through ethnographic and textual research methods, this study applies a sustained and detailed appreciation of the history of Ethiopia, its specific cultural milieu and social orientations as central to understanding the nature of Amharic cinema. Contributing a historically and culturally conditioned study helps to focus on the role of local specificities in understandings of cinema in a field experiencing a trend towards more transnational approaches. Balancing an awareness of both local and global interactions through a study of genre and melodrama and their usages by producers and consumers in the Ethiopian case study reveals new conceptualisations of these phenomena and their interdependency. The research findings detail the affective characteristics that delineate most Amharic genres and the role an Ethiopian-style melodrama plays in this popular cinema, negotiating between romantic, familial, patriotic and spiritual notions of ፍቅር - *fiker/love*.

For Lideya, the love of my life

To my parents, brothers and close family in the UK and to my extended family in Ethiopia, Poland, Wales and other far-flung places across the world

Dedicated to my grandmothers, Irene Janota and Beryl Thomas, whose deaths have bookended this research and my grandfather Marian Janota who passed before my time but whose memory has always inspired me

And in celebration of the cultural work and lives of Michel Papatakis and Negash Gebre-Mariyam

ልብ ያሰበውን አፍ ይናገራል ፥ ዓይን ያየውን እጅ ይሠራዋል ።

Contents:

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

The road that first led me to Ethiopia was one paved by many, but I would never had travelled to Addis Ababa in 2010 if it wasn't for my cousin David Thomas and his wife Nadia Manning-Thomas. Thank you David and Nadia for all you did for your nineteen year old cousin; for facilitating my first trip to Ethiopia, welcoming me into your home and for sorting me out with the volunteer position through which Lideya and I first met. It has been through the generosity and support of family and friends like David and Nadia that has enabled me to pursue this thesis. Rachel Robinson and Dr. Ian Robinson have been most flexible and unwavering in their support, keeping me employed since the age of eighteen and despite my many journeys back and forth to Ethiopia since. This work has been as a "befriender" and then "PA" for their son Alex, who is in his own words "an autist", but who is as creative as any *auteur* filmmaker and one of my dearest friends. The little funding I've been awarded for this research pales in comparison to what the Robinson family have done for me. All funding I have received is, however, most appreciated and most helpful. The Sir Richard Stapley Educational Trust awarded me a grant in the first year of my PhD candidacy and the SOAS Santander Mobility Award covered nearly all of my fieldwork costs, I thank both funds for believing in my research at such an early stage.

This thesis would not have happened without the encouragement, enthusiasm, support, tutelage and friendship of my supervisor Dr. Lindiwe Dovey. Lindiwe introduced me to Film Studies when I was a second year undergraduate at SOAS and showed faith in me even then. Thank you for bringing me on board as the Ethiopian film advisor for Film Africa 2012 and giving me a credible reason for attempting to research cinema in Ethiopia for the first time. It was through Lindiwe's recommendations that I got my first publications and through her many contacts that I have gained new friends. A big thanks for also having me as your research assistant during the time I was away from SOAS completing my MA in Film Studies at UCL. I learnt much about the nitty gritty details of conducting and compiling fieldwork through this invaluable experience. I have also learnt much from the many guest lectures I have given as part of Lindiwe's MA and BA courses and the PhD research training classes we co-taught. A warm and most deeply felt thanks also for reading the many draft versions of this thesis with such a keen eye for detail and the bigger picture, for guiding me throughout this whole process and always helping make research so enjoyable, exciting and rewarding.

This research has been made a pleasure by the welcoming nature with which I have been constantly received by the many Ethiopian filmmakers I have spoken with. My deepest and eternal gratitude goes to the overwhelming generosity everyone has afforded me. This thesis is the fruit of interactions with all those whom I have had informal and formal conversations with. I am most indebted to Yidnekachew Shumete who I met first in 2013 and who always finds time for me, introducing me to many contacts in the industry, inviting me to many premieres, sharing with me his many experiences and for trusting in me. Likewise, I thank Paulos Regassa and Mesfin Haileyesus, who I met soon after and who always make time to speak to me and fill me in on the developments in the film industry. Tesfaye Mamo has been particularly encouraging and helpful, always sharing his time and experiences of filmmaking in the 1990s and early 2000s. Since my fieldwork in 2016, Behailu Wassie has also been especially encouraging and positive about my research and I thank him for the time, support and interest he affords me. I thank all the other filmmakers and people in and around the industry who met and spoke with me at length during my fieldwork and agreed to interviews that were recorded, Mikael Million and Debebe Eshetu, in particular welcomed me into their homes and were most generous with their time and hospitality. My deepest thanks also to: Abebe Beyene, Abraham Gezahegn, Biniyam Tefera, Dawit Tesfaye, Kebede Mesfin, Kidus (my local VCD vendor), Naod Lemma, Sewmehon Yismaw, Sintayehu Taye, Tatek Tadesse and Tewodros Teshome. Henok Ayele was most patient with me after I failed to press the record button for our first interview. Menelik Merid was most helpful during my fieldwork and facilitated my participation in the Alatinos young filmmakers association as well as setting me up with meetings with other filmmakers and a ‘VVIP’ ticket to the 2016 Gumma Film Awards. I am also most grateful to Eyerusaleam Kassahun who openly shared with me her experiences as a filmmaker in Ethiopia and her considerable knowledge and ongoing research on various aspects of cinema in Ethiopia at Addis Ababa University. I also met and interviewed Hermon Hailay during my fieldwork who, with her husband Max Conil, have since shared with me many enjoyable and entertaining anecdotes about their filmmaking experiences and become dear friends. Everyone has tried their utmost to enlighten me, have shared their experiences and perspectives and answered my many questions; most of these interviews were conducted in Amharic and I have done my best to understand and listen to the best of my ability. The writing of the thesis has blossomed from these interviews but any omissions are mine alone and I hope to fill in many more gaps in the future.

While in Ethiopia my research was helped by many other people in various ways. My mother-in-law “Etete” Menbere Siele, treats me with the same love and care she does her own children and during my fieldwork she made sure I was always properly fed and in good health. Ermiyas, Binyam, Mahelet, Kidus and Selam helped keep me in good spirits while Tsegaye Teshome and my extended family in Ethiopia were always most hospitable and willing in their support. Aaron Maasho has been a friend to me since 2010, he is in my opinion the finest journalist in Ethiopia and our discussions, from which I learn much, often last long into the early hours. To numerous other people: the shoeshine boys who had my back when I attempted audience research outside Cinema Empire, the many commuters who struck-up a conversation with me on public transport and those kind souls who paid my fare on two occasions.

Being part of the SOAS research community has enriched and enlivened this research. Many thanks to Dr. Martin Orwin who stuck by me and joined my supervisory committee despite previously supervising me for an independent study in Amharic during which he discovered my English grammar was no better than my Amharic. Thank you also for the stack of Amharic VHS tapes generously given to me after the office spring clean, they have been most treasured and most revealing. Thank you also to Professor Richard Reid for agreeing to be on my supervisory committee and particularly with regards to the advice on the history chapter. I have thoroughly enjoyed and benefitted from the diversity of research interests in what was the Centre for Film Studies and is now the Centre for Media and Film Studies at SOAS. For their camaraderie and advice I would like to thank Zebunnisa Hamid, Irene Gonzalez Lopez, Kerstin Fooken, Laz Carter, Akiko Nagata and Marcos Centeno. And warm thanks also goes to Lois Barnett, Jiratorn Sakulwattana, Isaya Singspongsporn, Tom Cunliffe, Elaine Chung and Yunzi Han who have all put up with my many tall tales of research experiences in Ethiopia. Michael Pollitt generously lent his time and expertise to identify an Egyptian film screened at Cinema Ethiopia in the 1950s. My gratitude and admiration to Carli Coetzee whose African Studies reading groups provided a wonderful platform to share ideas and who has shown a keen interest in my studies since 2013. My warmest thanks also to Robin Steedman and Estrella Sendra Fernandez whose great examples I have attempted to emulate and who helped me to get a GTA position teaching Film Studies at King’s College London. I am also most thankful for the support of Dr. Tom Brown during my time teaching at King’s, to all my students

who gave the best feedback I could have asked for and for the support of my colleagues: Sonal Kantaria, Laurence Kent, Bettina Malcomess, Barbara Plotz and Qi Li.

I have been fortunate to have gained many friends from SOAS who have aided me in the research. John Taitt, Mohammed Nur and James Figueroa have always kept me grounded and entertained whether in Ethiopia or back in London. I have learnt much from Sara Marzagora whose research and networking have led me to new places. Sara connected me with Alessandro Jedlowski who was conducting fieldwork for his post-doc in Ethiopia during the winter of 2013/14 when we met for the first time. Alessandro has since taken me under his wing and has been a mentor and a friend. I am most grateful for the many events he has invited me to participate in, all of them enlightening and thoroughly enjoyable. He has also instigated some important publications that we have worked on together, I have learnt so much from how he handles these processes. His advice, continued enthusiasm, kindness and belief in my potential have kept me going throughout. I am also deeply grateful to Asist. Professor Aboneh Ashagrie of Addis Ababa University who, like Alessandro, always has time for me and promotes my work above and beyond all reasonable expectations. I met Aboneh for the first time in 2012 (if I recall correctly) and for me he epitomises everything that is good about Ethiopia and yet often underappreciated, I have learnt much from him and I continue to do so.

My sincerest heartfelt gratitude and love to my family, especially to my parents, Dr. Gareth Thomas and Susan Janota who have taken great care and time to read over this thesis and help identify my infamous grammar and spelling mistakes. They are not responsible (nor is anybody else) for any remaining mistakes, those are mine and mine alone. Stefan and Mark have always been there for me and Charles Skerrett has long been a part of the family and a great support. I also want to thank my other many friends for sticking by me during this period when I have not always been so outgoing. My grandfather William John Thomas speaks to me in those calm and caring welsh tones, imparting a sort of unquantifiable wisdom that fills me with great admiration and purpose. My deepest gratitude also goes to my grandmother Irene Janota who was a permanent weekly fixture in my life before her passing on 24 December 2018 and who spoilt me greatly with all of her love and immense affection. I have learnt much from the dignified manner in which she led her life. This thesis is dedicated to the memory of both “Nana Paul” and “Nana Beryl” Thomas, my other grandmother, who I miss greatly

after passing away during the early stages of this research in October 2015. Nana Beryl always put family first and she was much loved. This thesis is also dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, Professor Marian Janota, whom I never had the chance to meet but whose memory has long been an inspiration to me since childhood.

Finally, my deepest gratitude is to Lideya Tsegaye Teshome who has shown me love in all its perplexing forms. It is through Lideya and our love that I have come to know Ethiopia, its peoples and its cultures in a small but privileged way. This thesis is dedicated to Lideya. My analysis is indebted to the time and efforts Lideya has put into helping me understand Ethiopia and the nuances of Amharic in interviews and in films. The misunderstandings which remain are my mistakes and not hers, she deserves only appreciation. I feel great shame that Lideya has had to endure the "hostile environment" of the inhumane British immigration system since moving here to support me in December 2014, for this I can only apologise and thank Glyn Lloyd for his generous assistance. At times working three jobs at once and being stuck with a student for a husband, Lideya has persevered and continues to be a shining example of the best humanity has to offer to all those fortunate enough to meet her. ሊዲያ ፣ እወደሻለው ።

INTRODUCTION

> We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always "in context," *positioned* […] it is worth remembering that all discourse is "placed," and the heart has its reasons.
>
> Stuart Hall (1996, 211)

This thesis addresses some major gaps in recent trends in Film and Screen Studies scholarship towards transnational approaches to "world cinema" and contributes to broader ideas on film genres and melodrama. My research arises from the specific context of the commercial Amharic film industry that is cultivating a popular local cinema in place of foreign projections. The central question of the thesis is: to what extent has genre, and more broadly melodrama, been used to make Amharic films commercially viable in Ethiopia? The concomitant question is: what are the characteristics of localised Amharic film genres and what role does melodrama play?

Film genres are evident in every stage of a film's development and distribution in the Amharic film industry. As a film's budget is often indicative of a film's genre – comedy generally being less expensive than suspense – this in turn influences the decision making processes of script development, casting and sound design. When films are then marketed through different strategies the film's genre is almost always indicated and often even explicitly detailed on film posters. These Amharic genre appellations accompany films as they are shown in cinemas, appearing immediately after film titles in cinema listings. Then, when films are distributed on VCD, DVD or online, the same or sometimes different but similar generic appellations appear in order to group and define films, making searching easier for prospective viewers.

For this study, attention to genre, historical, and cultural perspectives help reveal a nuanced understanding of the changing production, distribution, exhibition and consumption experiences in Ethiopia, as I will show. Through investigating the role of film genres in making the local Ethiopian film industry commercially viable I will draw upon and contribute to scholarship on film genre, melodrama, African screen media, Cultural Studies, and Ethiopian Studies. This multifaceted approach helps better understand the emergence of a culturally specific film phenomenon made commercially

viable by local cinemagoing audiences in Addis Ababa and Ethiopia's other large towns and cities.

Throughout the thesis I call upon a more integrated approach to the study of film genres and melodrama by applying a critical sensibility attuned to the industrial, social, political, historical and cultural subtleties of the Ethiopian context. This approach emphasises a "cultural turn" to the study of commercial cinema in which films are examined within the context of the time and place of their production and reception and informed by ethnographic and media industries methodologies. Although textual analysis and the analysis of contexts of production and reception are often difficult to balance, it is important that each should inform the other so that a more holistic understanding of film as a narrative medium and as a cultural product can be achieved. This case study of Amharic films, which are produced by the local film industry centred in Addis Ababa and which are commercially viable due to the cinemagoing culture in the city, therefore, also departs from transnational cinema discourses increasingly favoured in contemporary film scholarship because such films are the product of an inherently localised industrial structure.

Bringing attention to the characteristics of the Amharic film industry contributes to global debates surrounding the direction of film and media studies. By analysing commercial Amharic films, their genres and the industry in which they circulate, the research helps to highlight the diversity and complexities of local film industries around the world. Responding to recent calls in Film Studies for research into film industry contexts outside America and Europe (Altman 1999; Neale 2000; Moine [2002] 2008), the Ethiopian case study raises potential questions concerning the methodological approaches to film genres and Film Studies in general. Such approaches have historically been narrow in remit, focused on readings of film texts and removed from industrial realities. Building on a cultural turn in contemporary Film Studies, the focus on a previously overlooked film industry such as in the Ethiopian case, de-centres mainstream Euro-American approaches.

Furthermore, this focus on Ethiopia contests common homogenising assumptions about African cultures. This is particularly relevant in the wake of the ground-breaking scholarship on Nollywood in Nigeria where the transnational, or "minor transnational" (Adejunmobi 2007) reaches of the industry are often too readily accepted as an African-

wide phenomenon. Based on a variety of research methods that includes fieldwork carried out in Addis Ababa between February and March 2016, this thesis establishes a perspective rooted in and conditioned by the complexities of the Amharic film industry and the particular significance of melodrama and genre to its commercial viability while considering what implications these have on broader scholarship.

Systematic research on the Amharic film industry is in its infancy. The case of Ethiopian film is of interest not only due to the rapidly growing size of its potential internal market[1] but also because, unlike the rest of Africa, European languages are not widely spoken. This has meant that whilst Nollywood profits internationally from the global power and status of English (Adejunmobi 2002), Ethiopia remains relatively untouched by the Nollywood phenomenon and also cannot export its film products in the way that Nigeria can. Instead, the local Amharic film industry has grown to fill the gap in demand for locally produced and consumed films. The differences presented by cinema in Ethiopia, means that it provides an excellent test case for assumptions about what constitutes "film genre" and what constitutes "Africa" and thus allows for a rethinking of key concepts in Film and Screen Studies, and in African Cultural Studies.

The History of Ethiopia: An Exception within Africa?

The history of Ethiopia presents a particularly insular and independent narrative that has fundamentally influenced Ethiopian experiences of cinema. The specifics of the history of cinema in Ethiopia are explored in detail in the first chapter of this thesis. Ethiopia's distinct historical trajectory and experiences of state-formation, however, are important to emphasise here for their broader role in making cinema in Ethiopia markedly different and relatively isolated from other African cinematic experiences. These distinctions can be regarded as threefold: the specificity of Amharic as the most prominent language through which Ethiopian cultural production is expressed; the network of international relations derived from Ethiopia's long history of self-determinism; and Ethiopia's resistance of European colonialism (and nationalist consequences). These three points are briefly discussed below.

[1] The population in Ethiopia is due to double, reaching a projected 210 million people by 2060 according to the latest UN projections in 2018. This equates to the second largest population in Africa after Nigeria and places Ethiopia as the projected ninth most populous country in the world (PRB 2010, 2).

As David Turton (2006) has underlined, discussing Will Kymlicka's (2006) work on nation-building in Africa, state formation has been based on the cultivation of colonial (European) languages and the creation of a "pan-ethnic national identity" (Turton 2006, 4). Turton notes, however: "Ethiopia, which owes its existence not to European colonialism but to 'Western-style' dominant group 'nation-building' by an 'ethno-national' group […], is an obvious exception to this rule" (Turton 2006, 4; see also Kymlicka 2006). The consequences of Ethiopia's exceptionality within Africa, and indeed in the context of global history, are numerous and have deeply affected the development of Ethiopia as a nation and will be referred to throughout the thesis. What is important to note here, however, is that Ethiopia's lack of integration into broader spheres of African culture are related to its historical trajectory, geographical location and affiliations with Semitic languages and the three major Abrahamic religions, all of which have had a long history in Ethiopia. European colonialism in other parts of Africa in the nineteenth century brought missionaries and languages and despite the atrocities colonisers and collaborators committed throughout sub-Saharan Africa, colonialism also amplified processes of modernisation and globalisation (Geschiere *et al.* 2008). Christianity in the form of Catholic and Protestant evangelists and European languages such as French, English, Portuguese and even Spanish have significantly contributed to this dynamic resulting in communities of political, intellectual and artistic elites. Many colonial powers also helped establish media infrastructures and even set up local film production units which, in some countries, provided the foundations for film production after independence (Diawara 1992). These strategies were aimed at inculcating the intellectual elites of the newly independent African countries towards espousals of modern education and state formation (Hoefert de Turégano 2005), but they had an equally important role in making the cinema that emerged from these regions of Africa (particularly Francophone Africa) more visible internationally than that of other regions, such as the Horn of Africa.

In Ethiopia, the position of the Semitic language Amharic as the working language of the polity and Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church since the twelfth century has had a series of important consequences for the development of cinema in Ethiopia as well as for its relative anonymity outside the country. It is certainly true that, as Bitania Tadesse (2016) suggests, Amharic has had a limiting factor on the circulation of films when compared to films produced in Francophone or Anglophone countries. However, if the best-known African films produced in the 1970s and 1980s are considered, it becomes

apparent that they were in African languages (albeit with subtitles, unlike many commercial Amharic films). The more insular sphere of cultural production that has emerged in Ethiopia is perhaps more significant here as the majority of local intellectual reportage has been in Amharic (Marzagora 2017), including studies and press coverage concerned with the production of screen media. So, while most scholars of African cinema took advantage of the wide use of European languages across Africa to adopt comparative approaches, they often lacked the ability to speak the languages of the regions they were working on (apart from, in the case of African scholars, that of their native ethnic group).

While Ethiopia resisted the forms of modernisation and globalisation associated with European colonisers, a state-led modernisation had originated during the rule of Tewodros II in the mid-nineteenth century and furthered by his successors, most prominently Menelik II and Haile Selassie I (Tibebu 1995; Zwede 2002a; 2002b; Donham 1999 and discussed more in Chapter 1 and 3). Therefore, while looking for comparative models of modernisation beyond European examples, early on Ethiopia entered into significant global relationships with Japan (Clarke 2011), Cuba (Valdés 1979), Mexico (Savarino 2004), and the Soviet Union/Russia (Korn 1986; Patman 1993). During the Cold War, the Soviet Union/Russia was undeniably the country that had most consequences on the advancement of screen media in many other African countries (see Woll 2004) as well as in Ethiopia (Jedloski 2015 and discussed more in Chapter 1). Although Ethiopia's divergent trends make a particularly interesting case study for understanding alternative conceptualisations of modernity, this trajectory also stopped the country from liberalising its media industries. Combined with the specificity of Amharic, these non-Western connections contributed to making experiences of cinema in Ethiopia less visible and accessible to scholars outside the country.

A crucial factor in modern Ethiopian history, in comparison to other African countries, is its experiences of European colonial advances. The 1868 British expedition to Abyssinia, although punitive in nature and with no colonial ambition, nevertheless made a national martyr out of Emperor Tewodros II and in learning lessons in defeat, set the tone for the successful Ethiopian resistance of Italian colonial advancements in 1896 (Zewde 2002b). In an attempt to avenge their defeat at the Battle of Adwa in 1896, the Italians under the Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini mounted a second attempt to

colonise Ethiopia in 1936. This attempt to colonise Ethiopia became characterised by the brief but violent Italian occupation of Ethiopia between 1936-1941 (Ben-Ghiat and Fuller 2016). This occupation had lasting socio-political, economic and cultural impacts on the country. For many, however, Ethiopia's ultimate resistance and victory over European colonialism remains a powerful symbol, somewhat idealised, of an independent and free Africa (Moses 1998; Scott 2004). Many international documentary films produced on Ethiopia in the early twentieth century further attributed images of Ethiopia as an ancient civilisation built over a three thousand year history of independence and infused with localised Orthodox Tewahedo Christian traditions (see Haars *et al.* 2014). The lasting effects of these images, combined with the reportage of famine and war that emerged in the 1970s, are foundational in the continued stereotyping of Ethiopia common in contemporary international media representations of the country. International discourses about the country, as well as early visual representations, were significantly influenced by these idealised and/or stereotypical understandings of Ethiopian history (Scott 1993; Moses 1998).

The implications of Ethiopia's history and essentialist representations, however, equally intensified internal divisions and opinions surrounding the country's past. As Alessandro Triulzi's states, Ethiopia is "overburdened" by its past (2002, 280), referring to how the contestation and re-writing of history in Ethiopia has become significantly fraught amongst different ethnocultural groups since the ethnic federalisation of the country in 1991. While many stress the integral role of the Ethiopian Empire in the resistance of colonialism and in forging a national culture rooted in tradition and religion, others denounce these same factors as assigning and cementing the relations of power in the country whereby certain groups are more privileged than others.

Since the ethnic federalisation of Ethiopia in 1991 and its legitimisation in the 1994 constitution, divisions, borders and boundaries have intensified questions of culture and ethnicity.[2] Throughout Ethiopia's long independent history, power has been contested by regional rulers with allegiances to various ethnic groups. Throughout the last 700 years or so, the Amharic language along with the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church have spread throughout the country as a result of their prevalence within the ruling courts of Ethiopian Emperors (Appleyard 2003). This process of acculturation

[2] There are over 80 recorded ethnic groups of which the Amhara are said to make up roughly 27% of the population of Ethiopia.

has been dubbed "Amharization" by prominent scholars to denote the importance of the Amharic culture and (largest) religion in enabling social mobility in Ethiopia (Levine 1965, 2003; Keller 1988; Appleyard 2003; Donham and James 2002; Smith 2013; Yates 2016).

The absolute ethnic definition of the term Amhara is also up for debate as Amharic became a lingua-franca, widespread within urban centres developing across Ethiopia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to the modernising aspirations of Emperors Tewodros II, Yohannes IV, Menelik II, Empress Zewditu and Haile Selassie I. Similarly, membership into the Habesha community and culture, associated with the imperial elites of the country, became obtainable due to political, religious and cultural shifts and a proximity to the imperial centre. As such, groups who inhabited the highlands of Ethiopia (predominantly communities associated with Amhara, Tigray and Northern Oromo groups) could obtain membership into the Habesha community through geographic proximity, proficiency in Amharic, "eighteenth and nineteenth century historic linkages, population size, and elite conversions to Christianity. This shift [also] led to an active role in modernizing the state, which included marrying into the families of Shäwan political elites and administering newly incorporated parts of Menilek's Empire" (Yates 2016, 195).

The processes and outcomes of these assimilations have been intensely debated, with Lahra Smith arguing that "Amharization was not an uncontested political process at any point" (2013, 67). The particularly complex, hybridised and fluid nature of the term 'Amhara' is further evident within the contemporary Amhara Administrative Region where Amharic is predominantly the mother-tongue but where people identify themselves not as 'Amhara' but as 'Gojjam', 'Shewa', 'Begemdir' or 'Wello' (depending on their local regional associations and dialect) or even as 'Islam' if they are Muslim.[3] Whilst conceptualisations of "Amharization" and Habesha fuel contemporary political debates and ethnic polarisations within the country, the term is crucially linked to the formation of a modern, centralised state and is fundamental to the national Ethiopian identity.[4] The legacy of Amharic as "the majority language of most urban dwelling Ethiopians" (Appleyard 2003, 233) denotes the contemporary cosmopolitan

[3] The hybridised nature of this example becomes even more apparent as both Orthodox Christian and Muslim religious practices and holidays are observed in Wello.
[4] The unification of various factions under the Ethiopian banner was instrumental in mobilising forces in the decisive victory over the imperialist Italians at the battle of Adwa in 1896.

reality of Ethiopia and explains why, in a country where cinemas populate most urban centres, movies are produced mainly in Amharic for an urban based population.

At the same time, cinema is understood in this thesis as an inherently modern phenomenon wherein the spectacle of the movie, traversing space and time, constitutes a social event in a *translocal* space, a space in which global exchanges in goods, ideas and people occur (Hansen 1999; Larkin 2008). Cinema is imbued with intrinsic features of modern society (for example the commodification of leisure-time). Cinema in Ethiopia has, for a long time, resided within the margins of a predominantly orthodox society, but with the advent of local productions dominating big screens, the position of cinema within society has shifted dramatically. It was only in 2002 that the licensing stipulations were updated to allow films of all formats to be screened in cinemas; prior to this a film could only be awarded an exhibition licence if it was on a 35mm celluloid film reel. Consequently, local video and digital productions in Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia,[5] proliferated exponentially. This popular, low-budget and commercially-led cultural phenomenon has dramatically changed the meaning of cinema in the country, with local films usurping the place of the once ubiquitous foreign (Hollywood action, Bollywood and Chinese Kung-Fu) movies. The appeal of local productions has inspired increased numbers of cinemagoers, which in turn has fuelled the construction of cinemas in the country at a rate not seen since the Italians sought to use cinema as a tool of conquest and subjugation during their brief five-year occupation of Ethiopia from 1936 to 1941.[6]

National, Transnational and World Cinema

In 1993 Marsha Kinder wrote of the need to "read national cinema against the local/global interface" (7). Kinder's intervention led to a more focused interrogation of the prescriptive notion of "national" cinema, which had long been an assumed mantle in Film Studies, and one that became unable to account for the "actual cinematic experiences of popular audiences" (Higson 2002, 53). In response, an ever-increasing

[5] Despite Amharic being the official national language of Ethiopia the most recent estimates from 2007 place the percentage of the population able to speak Amharic at around 30% which is roughly the same percentage of the population able to speak one of the various dialects of the macro language Oromo. The next most used languages are Tigrinya and Somali, each spoken by roughly 6% of the population. Other common languages spoken by smaller proportions of the population are Afar, Guragé, Hadiyya, Sidamo, Wolayta, with around seventy five other languages still spoken in Ethiopia today.

[6] From 2002-2015 there have been at least 20 privately owned cinemas established in Addis Abäba compared with only three being built in the sixty-year period (1941-2001) after the Italian occupation.

body of research has been published on 'transnational cinema' and 'world cinema'[7] that resulted in the launch of a dedicated academic journal in 2010 aptly named, *Transnational Cinemas*. As discussed in Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim's article appearing in the first volume of the journal, many such studies have been concerned with European, American and Asian cinematic connections (see for example Lu 1997; Nestigen and Elkington 2005). The valuable contribution of this trend in transnational inquiries has been to broaden and globalise the parameters of Film and Screen Studies, in a move that has witnessed an ever expanding array of culturally diverse and disparate films becoming the subject of evolving critical frameworks. There are, however, several gaps in this body of work, some of which my thesis aims to address.

Noah Tsika's (2016) edited Close-Up in *Black Camera: An International Film Journal* brings together scholars working on African Screen Studies in order to explicitly highlight the "Marginalization of African Media Studies" in a response to their experiences of marginalisation at the 2015 international conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) Film and Screen Studies. This thesis aims to address the gap between transnational studies and national (specifically Africanist) studies of film and screen by taking an Ethiopian conditioned perspective in order to stage an investigation into the manifestation of melodrama and genre in the Ethiopian context and their local/global dialectics.

With regards to the commercial Amharic cinema in Ethiopia, it is difficult to call it a 'national' cinema due to the fact that it is bereft of government support and uses Amharic to address its audiences. As previously noted, the industry is closely tied to the specific context of Addis Ababa, where the majority of films are produced and where its most lucrative market has emerged, and has become structured around a cinemagoing culture in Addis Ababa. This Addis Ababa centric industry formation has given rise to a commercially viable Amharic cinema that is popularly sustained through films that commonly articulate their inclusion in mainstream conceptions of Ethiopian nationhood. However, despite producing nationalistic representations that often reinforce a national cultural hegemony there does remain space through which internal

[7] For example: *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture, and Politics in Film* (Dennison and Lim 2006); *Screening World Cinema: A Screen Reader* (Kuhn and Grant 2006); *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader* (Ezra and Rowden 2006); *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (Durovicová and Newman 2009).

ethnic and cultural exchanges as well as external interests (often from the diaspora) occur.

The idea of the 'transnational' in Film Studies became, to some accounts, the antithesis of the 'national' but has since risked falling into the same pitfalls of being too prescriptive and overly generalised. As Higbee and Lin point out, "the national continues to exert the force of its presence even within the transnational filmmaking practices" (2010, 10). The 'national' and the 'transnational' in reality are not opposites but contingent on one another. Whilst it no longer makes sense to describe 'national cinemas' as independent, homogenous or unitary industries, so too we cannot talk about the 'transnational' as the epitome of heterogeneity or as a form of cultural reclamation spreading a superior ideology. Instead, both are sites of continuous and shifting exchanges. The idea of the 'transnational', therefore, should be approached with as much caution as the 'national' as it does not free us from, but instead can contribute to the casting of a similarly alluring mirage. In this sense, this thesis goes against the trend of 'transnational cinema' by presenting a case study that is resolutely dependent on projecting and feeding off a mainstream national imagination, showing how both the local and the global have to be kept simultaneously in focus to maintain its local popular appeal.

As stated by Elena Oliete-Aldea, Beatriz Oria and Juan A. Tarancón, "although national cinemas may be seen as engaging in the formulation of national identity with clear cultural and physical borders, the narrative and aesthetic resources and the cultural and historical determinants on which the meaning of actual films ultimately rest are inextricably global *and* local" (2016, 2). This is further complicated as decentred, contested, inconsistent and fluctuating notions of any nation or national identity cannot be detached from the cinematic representation of films which "do not simply represent the stable features of a national culture, but are themselves one of the loci of debates about a nation's governing principles, goals, heritage and history" (Hjort and MacKenzie 2000, 4).

Debates on 'world cinema' have similarly reflected the dichotomies between 'national' and 'transnational' cinemas. As described by Annette Kuhn and Catherine Grant, "world cinema… is not so much a contested term as… a perfunctory, contradictory and catch-all one" (2006, 1). The term has been used as a marker commonly associated with

festival films from outside Europe and America which in turn creates a dichotomy between 'arthouse' film festival cinema and 'popular' cinema. The 'cultural turn' of this thesis and its Ethiopian centred perspective positions the popular films of commercial Amharic cinema as the main field of investigation; festival films have appeared, but have circulated only in the peripheries of Ethiopian cultural production.

Perhaps the most salient example of how national, transnational and world cinema studies have converged, is in the scholarship on melodrama and film genres and their manifestations across various cinema cultures. As noted by Oliete-Aldaea, Oria and Tarancón, "In the case of cinema, narrative and aesthetic conventions have evolved within the framework of fairly formulaic (or generic) practices that have always been negotiated in the encounter between the global and the local" (2016, 2-3). The localised Amharic genres which have popularly emerged in Ethiopia are reflective of transnational genre conventions as is evident, for example in romantic comedies and thrillers, whilst at the same time also being specifically attuned to local circumstances. These localised genres may be derived from local sources and/or globally recognisable formulae. Such a globally recognised form of dramatic expression in cinema has been developed in relation to melodrama. Kuhn and Grant (2006) describe it as the most pervasive and internationally recognised of dramatic forms as scholars have increasingly studied it with regards to its relationships with specific cultural manifestations and sensibilities in various contexts around the world. Ravi Vasudevan's 1989 essay on melodrama in Indian cinema pioneered such studies and was followed by Wimal Dissanayake's edited volume: *Melodrama and Asian Cinema* (1993). Building on studies that note the presence of melodrama in films produced by other popular film industries in Africa such as in Nigeria (Larkin 2008; Haynes 2016) and Ghana (Garritano 2013), this thesis interrogates the relationships between melodrama and genre as well as local/global pressures in the Ethiopian context in an attempt to make a substantial contribution to broader and interconnected debates that persist in contemporary Film Studies.

Melodrama

Contemporary studies in melodrama display an acute awareness of the pejorative assumptions surrounding the term and, emerging from studies in theatre, film and television have often taken revisionist approaches to reclaim melodrama's value in relation to its "transcultural and transmedial aesthetic" (Buckley 2018). Moving away

from definitions of the "Hollywood family melodrama" (Elsaesser 1972; Schatz 1981) or melodrama as a genre as discussed in 1970s film scholarship and closely associated with the films of Douglas Sirk, research on the melodramatic mode has opened-up melodrama to its multicultural transmutations (see Chapter 2). Peter Brooks' (1976) seminal work on the subject was the first to go into detail as to the cultural significance of melodrama. However, since questioning melodrama's relation to 19th century French literature (as was Brooks' aim), contemporary melodrama studies have given rise to a wide-ranging exploration of melodrama's multiple and diverse historical and cultural sources (see Gledhill and Williams 2018).

Christine Gledhill's most recent investigation discusses the intimate ties between melodrama, modernity and social change as grounded in the changing practices of European theatre at the beginning of the nineteenth century (2018). In a similar 'cultural turn' as I propose in this thesis, Gledhill builds on Raymond Williams' (1973, 63–65) rethinking of culture as an everyday "felt sense of life" in which an individual's "feeling" conditions personal considerations of the world and their position in it. As a result people are forced to confront their personal relationships with the larger overarching structures of daily life, such as value systems, professional expectations and institutional rules (Gledhill 2018). Melodrama, then becomes an expressive mode that personalises an individual's experiences of modern life. The melodramatic mode arises from the move away from hierarchical structures dominated by church and crown to a society orientated towards an individual's rights as a modern citizen. As Gledhill points out, however, *"*[t]he irony, not lost in melodrama, is that the newly forming, discrete individual becomes mired and imprisoned as under previous hierarchies in the by now abstracted economic and political forces that justify inequalities and inequities in the name of personal freedoms" (Gledhill 2018, x).

This understanding of melodrama positions it at the vanguard of recalibrations in cultural practices that address the everyday concerns of the newly empowered individual in modern societies. First evidenced through the changing practices of European theatre and then later through more inherently modern media such as radio, film and television, melodrama emerges forth from the cracks of ambivalence opened up by processes of modernity and social transformation. Instead of employing mainstream understandings of melodrama and incorporating them into an analysis of Amharic cinema, such has been done to good effect in relation to the cinemas of Nigeria

and Ghana (see Larkin 2008: Garritano 2013; Haynes 2016), this thesis aims to interrogate the very understanding of what the melodramatic may mean in a context such as Ethiopia where such a word in Amharic does not exist.

Recent debates on the history of melodrama in different cultures help identify that melodrama's specificity lies not solely in its narrative structures or style as a specific genre but as a dramatic force – "a mode of aesthetic articulation distilled from and adaptable across a range of genres, across decades, and across national cultures" (Gledhill 2018, xiii). Buckley proposes the model of melodrama as a "distillate form" to explain how different traditions and genres from a myriad of cultural and artistic practices and origins combine, not because of revolution and social rupture, but because of a need for synthesis and continuity with the past (2018). There is an eminent need, therefore, to fill in the gaps of melodrama's past in other contexts where it becomes expressed through cinema in localised ways (see Chapter 3).

Zhen Zhang (2012) and Hannah Airriess (2018) explore in more detail the ways in which melodrama is articulated in their respective focus on Chinese and Japanese cultural production and how broader concerns of modernity are articulated and translated to appeal to different cultures. Zhang identifies a "vernacular melodrama" (2012), a term adopted from Miriam Hansen's "vernacular modernity" (1999), to describe the melodramatic mode as an exemplary practice of vernacular modernity in the ways it "respond[s] to, and reflect[s] upon processes of modernization and the experience of modernity" (60). Indeed, Hansen's sophisticated description of classical Hollywood's propensity as vernacular modernity also apply to melodrama's transnational credentials. Speaking of Hollywood, but equally applicable to melodrama, Hansen explains Hollywood's global reach was such because "it meant different things to different people and publics, both at home and abroad. We must not forget that these films, along with other mass cultural exports, were consumed in locally quite specific, and unequally developed, contexts and conditions of reception" (1999 68). In effect implanting the idea of melodrama in exchange for classic Hollywood cinema as the first "global vernacular" (Hansen 1999, 65), Airriess takes it one step further than Zhang, arguing that melodrama is a "preeminent mode of vernacular modernism" (2018, 80).

For Airriess, melodrama is more than a mode/form amongst many through which the "vernacularization"[8] of modernity occurs and precedes cinema as the earliest "global vernacular mode" (2018, 80). By detailing the melodramatic tendencies in Japanese serialized literary fiction that emerged during the turn of the century, Airriess builds on the approach of Buckley to gather a more detailed history of melodrama in different contexts and across different media proposing melodrama's inherently modern and transnational credentials. This process of historicising the emergence of melodramatic expression in specific cultures remains absent in the African context. Although discussions about melodrama in studies of African popular cinemas are insightful, for example Brian Larkin's 2008 and Jonathan Haynes' 2016 references to the melodramatic tendencies of Northern and Southern Nigerian films and Garritano's identification of melodrama as key in Ghana (2013), there remains little interrogation of the cultural specifics of such melodrama.

The history of melodrama's links to cultural modernisation in Europe and America should not be blindly transposed onto other cultural contexts. William Rothman, in his overview of the contributions in *Melodrama and Asian Cinema* (Dissanayake 1993) points out that this exact problem has occurred in relation to the blind transposition of French theatrical melodrama to the American woman's film. Rothman explains, "although the bourgeoisie's wish to differentiate itself from the aristocracy as well as the working class may or may not plausibly explain the rise of theatrical melodrama in France, it is no part of an explanation in the American case, since America had no aristocracy when it embraced melodramatic theatre" (1993, 268-269). Pointing to the necessity of conversation between scholars from/researching different contexts during the same periods, Rothman criticises the restrictions that have emerged from Brooks' historical and theatre based research on melodrama that has effectively discouraged comparative studies on other historical moments and developments of melodrama across the globe (1993).

Combining film genre theory with recent debates in melodrama and cultural studies, the main theoretical value of this thesis is to consider the idea of culturally specific melodramatic imaginations/styles as integral to the success of commercially oriented film industries the world over. The idea of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination or

[8] Airriess uses Hansen's definition of "vernacular" to imply a "discourse, idiom, dialect, with circulation, promiscuity and translatability" (1999, 60).

Ethiopian-style melodrama is historicised and then tested in an analysis of the major Amharic film genres in Ethiopia. Importantly, this part of the thesis builds upon the arguments that melodramatic tendencies are common across commercial cinemas around the globe, convincingly made by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams throughout their scholarship. The investigation into melodrama brings another level of understanding that connects the multi-layered local, national and transnational iterations of film genres. The distinction between mode and genre therefore is based on the idea that modes, such as melodrama, comedy, tragedy, realism and romance "frequently appear across genres and cover wide-ranging, almost ubiquitous, elements in popular entertainment. […] A film genre is a more precise set of conventions including plots, characters, and settings which portray longstanding dramatic conflicts vital to the culture" (Grindon 2011, 73). In this sense, genres offer changing formulae that adapt and harness dramatic modes, centring them within particular cultural and emotional sensibilities.

Film Genres

A focus on film genre is key to this study as genre not only relates to filmic texts but also has implications for – and effects on – film production, distribution, exhibition and consumption. African film and video film scholar Jonathan Haynes has emphasised the current need "to roll out the full disciplinary apparatus of Film Studies and apply it to [African] video films," with analysis of genre seen as a key element of such a task (2010, 13). My emphasis on the role of genre in popular Amharic film productions is based on the sense that Amharic films, like their counterparts in Nigeria, are "essentially generic" due to market forces (Haynes 2011). A study of genre in Amharic films proves extremely beneficial, not only because this has not been previously attempted, but also because it allows an exploration of a large and broad range of films, offering deeper cultural and textual interpretations as well as analysing how genre is conceptualised within various sectors of the film industry. Analysing the local success of cinema through an exploration of genre brings into focus the recent popularity of Amharic films of particular genres (such as the successful *የፍቅር ፊልም - yefiker film/love film* and *አስቂኝ የፍቅር ፊልም - assikiñ yefiker film/humorous love film* genres), linking the films' capacity to entertain to local conceptions of genre expressed by film industry personnel and audience members. In this sense, genre becomes the lens through which it is possible to contribute to the broader, ongoing rapprochement between Film Studies and Media Studies, since it allows the activation of the traditional tools of Film Studies (such as

close film analysis, and historical analysis) with more recent tools of Media Studies (for example, within the sub-field of media industry studies).

A simple definition of 'genre' is a contract between filmmaker and viewer (Altman 1999, Haynes 2010). Many ordinary people involved in the film industries still use basic generic categories as shorthand to describe what it is they mean and these same categorisations are essential in audience understandings of films. Noted on screening schedules of popular cinemas in Addis Ababa, second only to the name of the movie, is the film's genre or type (in Amharic: *የፊልሙ ዓይነት - yefilmu aynet/the film type* (see Figure 1). The genre type of a movie also appears on posters advertising the movies outside cinemas and on street corners (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. An example of Alem Cinema's film schedule - below the title of the film is the film's genre.

For this thesis, film genre is the lens used to navigate Amharic film texts and their contexts of production, circulation and consumption. The speed of growth in the industry has been such that commercial demands have stymied experimentation and favoured the repetition of proven generic formulae in the pursuit of financial reward. Through this process of navigating and mapping the current cinematic phenomenon in Ethiopia, I focus on interrogating genre origins, their permeable boundaries and evolutions by understanding how seminal films influence – and are influenced by – others and how they engender new genres.

Figure 2. Two movie posters released in 2015. Both posters denote the genre of the film. The poster on the left, is described as *"አስቂኝ የፍቅር ፊልም - 'assikiñ yefiker film/humorous romance film"* whilst the poster on the right describes the genre in English as a "Romance Movie".

The Ethiopian experience of locally produced popular cinema in Amharic, made economically viable through theatrical releases, is young enough (starting in 2002) yet also now productive enough, to exemplify a significant filmic and cultural phenomenon yet to be considered through the prism of film genres. Genres do not appear readily formed. They emerge from narrative structures and aesthetic choices which are subject to constant revision, repetition, innovation, amalgamation and, of course, interpretation by audiences. A genre is nothing, according to Andrew Tudor, but "what we collectively believe it to be" (1973, 139). In Ethiopia, the first commercially viable

Amharic films to be released in cinemas were melodramatic in structure and style, used Amharic dialogue, were set predominantly in Addis Ababa, and quickly garnered the local genre appellation *yefiker film*.

The strength of genre scholarship in mainstream Film Studies in the past couple of decades is in the broader theorisation and contextualisation of genres as discursive tools, communicative transmitters and as mediators between society, culture and competing ideologies and so fits with the 'cultural turn' espoused in this thesis.[9] Film genres, contemporary scholars argue, cannot be determined exclusively through the analysis of the filmic text but require contextualised studies. In her seminal work *Cinema Genre* ([2002] 2008), Moine insists on the importance of contextually integrated studies of genre whereby "genres are designed and recognized – and sometimes denied – by the different agents involved in the world of cinema (producers, directors, critics, ordinary viewers etc.)" (xvi). Beyond the cultural context, an analysis of the film industry and its stakeholders within the production, marketing, exhibition and reception of film, therefore become "just as important to the study of genres as the comparative analysis of filmic texts. (…) From this perspective, a theory of cinematic genres must reconcile both textual and contextual approaches" (Moine [2002] 2008, xvi).

Taking on board Moine's interventions and developing them, this thesis will demonstrate the specific effects of constituent cultures on genre production in a specific, non-western context. Furthermore, by building on the notion of the powerful and moralising tones of the melodramatic mode (Williams 2001), this research will integrate ideas of an Ethiopian-style melodrama alongside a mapping of the system of Amharic film genres. Key to this understanding of melodrama's function across all Amharic film genres will be an understanding of a culturally conditioned Ethiopian "melodramatic imagination" (Brooks 1976) which attributes specific meaning to thematic and aesthetic choices common across all genres and in relation to "those institutions and practices which characterize the local cinematic regime" (Hutchings 1995, 74).

Despite being influenced by research on classical Hollywood film genres, this study is concerned with the exploration of genre in Amharic films produced in Ethiopia. As such, it aims to investigate how genres operate, are formed and understood within the

[9] Influenced by the scholarship of Rick Altman (1999), Steve Neale (2000), Barry Keith Grant (2007), and Raphaëlle Moine ([2002] 2008).

Ethiopian context. Broadly speaking, if one is to recount a short list of genre terms used to label films in Amharic, repetition of seemingly corresponding terms appear: *yefiker film* (love film), *yefiker drama* (love drama), *assikiñ yefiker film* (humorous love film), *yefiker comedy* (love comedy), *romantic comedy*, *comedy*, *lib anteltay film* (suspense film), *lib anteltay yefiker film* (suspenseful love film), *yefiker suspense film* (love suspense film) and *yebeteseb film* (family film).[10] The Amharic word *fiker* – love – is used to describe multiple yet distinct genres, and often becomes an add-on to other genre terms. The multiple meanings of the word points to the centrality of love as a theme in Amharic films - a love which has become synonymous with the passionate Ethiopian-style melodrama that characterises the style and structure of each Amharic film genre.

Questions that arise from looking at these genre appellations are numerous and will be explored in more depth in the main chapters of the thesis. For example, whether these seemingly concurrent labels each point to a particular element of a genre or whether they have something the others do not. Just because *romantic comedy* is a film genre in Ethiopia does not mean that it is a carbon copy of the Hollywood romantic comedy or that it harnesses the same conventions. A similar analysis into American and Asian versions of the western film genre by Stephen Teo (2017) has proven most insightful and inspirational with regards to local renderings of different film genres in different contexts. Many Amharic films are certainly influenced by foreign films but to read both Amharic romantic comedies and Hollywood romantic comedies as part of a homogenous and universal genre would be to mask sociocultural, historical and ideological differences that are essential to the understanding of each set of generic formulae which, as Moine notes, "always eventuate in specific contexts" (2008, 169).

Concerning the specifics of Amharic film genres to audiences across Ethiopia and the diaspora, it is the Amharic language itself which is the key unifier within the viewing experience with success underpinned by the fact that the films are made specifically for an Ethiopian audience. If then, a competency in Amharic is the common denominator which binds together spectators of popular Amharic films, herein lies the reason why an analysis of Amharic film genres has to be situated within the context of their production and circulation and not rely purely on an analysis of textual conventions. To communicate in Amharic taps into an epistemology in and of itself, rooted in the history

[10] These are only a selection of genre labels used by cinemas and featured on posters and VCD jackets.

of Ethiopia where it has emerged as the official language of the state. The fact that the popular and commercially successful cinema in Ethiopia is locally produced in Amharic and is yet to be exported or assimilated outside Ethiopian cultural spheres of influence and yet dominates the cinema screening schedules throughout the country, leads us to question why this is the case. An exploration of the cultural imaginative constructs of Amharic film genres and spectators' responses to them is crucial to answering this question as well as contextualising analyses of specific filmic texts.

This thesis contains a notion of genre that is at the very epicentre of the ongoing negotiations between the past and the future, and the local and the foreign. Genres are open to foreign influences through the processes of importation, integration and domestication. This is exemplified in Ethiopia in the 1990s when Bollywood films were popular and referred to as *yefiker film*, the precise genre appellation used to describe the first commercially successful and most influential genre of contemporary Amharic cinema with films such as Tewodros Teshome's *ቀዝቃዛ ወላፈን - Kezkaza Welafen/Cold Flame* (2002) and Tatek Tadesse's *ጉዲፈቻ - Gudifecha/Adoption* (2002). At the same time, however, this notion of genre may appear more closed, rooted in a temporally and ideologically specific cultural formula that guarantees the success of Amharic cinema at home in Ethiopia while limiting its ability to be exported abroad.

African Screen Media Studies

The lack of in-depth scholarly study on cinema in Ethiopia has created a key gap not only in mainstream Film and Media Studies but also specifically in the literature on African film,[11] a gap which this research seeks to address. This study, therefore, also aims to offer Ethiopian perspectives in order to foster and contribute to new debates in African screen media[12] that might help to reconfigure the scholarly landscape beyond the dominant model of Nollywood or a more traditional focus on African 'festival' films in studies on African Cinema. The ambition here is to challenge stereotypical assumptions about what defines or constitutes Africa, or African cultural production,

[11] This thesis will understand the term 'film' as including both older celluloid films and the now almost ubiquitous digital films.

[12] African screen media is a term used by Lindiwe Dovey and others to describe African audio-visual productions (2010). The term is useful here as it is inclusive, treating both celluloid and video-film equally, analysing the pleasure, politics and performative aspects of these media through focusing on their "iconography, themes, histories and production, distribution and exhibition contexts" as well as the filmic-text itself (2010, 1).

thereby contributing to diversifying the 'single story' about Africa and revealing how heterogeneous and rich the continent and its cultural productions are.

The early scholarship on African Cinema was closely linked and integrated within the movement to decolonize African screens (Diawara 1992; Ukadike 1994). This scholarship was underpinned by ideological positions influenced by Marxism that argued for a political and educational cinema against the capitalist nature of Hollywood and was therefore closely aligned with ideas of "Third Cinema" (Solanas and Getino 1969). As such, early scholarship was situated within a broad African context, often emanating from places of limited access provided by film festivals such as FESPACO, and in opposition to mainstream Film Studies (see Diawara 1992; Ukadike 1994). The ground-breaking work of this scholarship was in its treatment of African culture through these festival films, signalling the first considerable attempt to investigate African cinema in relation to African culture.

As the rise of video film industries in West Africa during the 1990s became more established and more organised along the lines of professional cultural industries and as technologies and forms developed, so too their films became the subject of increased interest by scholars of African cinemas. The popularity of African films amongst African audiences was something festival films (made by Africans) had rarely achieved, and presented a significant subject of interest that led to both forms being compared within the same critical framework. The approach in this thesis is partially inspired by recent scholarship that does just this, exemplified by Şaul and Austen's (2010) anthology and Dovey's edited special edition in the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* (2010) that analyse international film festival films and locally popular African video/digital film productions within the same broad framework of African Screen Media.[13]

Despite much work in African Screen Media Studies being done over the past decade there are only a couple of systematic works that seriously consider and analyse commercially produced and popular African films as texts worthy of aesthetic analysis. Carmela Garritano's comprehensive, thoroughly researched and illuminating monograph on the Ghanaian film industry: *African Video Movies and Global Desires: A*

[13] In the past few years blockbuster and film festival movies have mostly migrated to be made in digital formats, not on celluloid.

Ghanaian History (2013) details how films project ambivalent images that morally denounce greedy characters while also employing "a visual economy of pleasure that aestheticizes consumption" (11). Jonathan Haynes' 2016 contribution to understanding the commercial film industry in Southern Nigeria, commonly referred to as Nollywood: *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres* uses genre as an organising structure through which films and the industry are explored in a thoroughly insightful method similar to the one used in this thesis. I draw heavily on these works as well as Brian Larkin's earlier *Sound and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (2008) which has inspired many of the research questions in relation to Amharic cinema, none more so than his discussion of melodrama in Nigeria and comparing the alternative aesthetics of films from the Muslim North and the Pentecostal Christian South. This thesis, therefore, highly values the contribution of this scholarship but the magnitude and depth of the work presented by these scholars will be difficult to replicate in the structures provided by PhD research. In this thesis I therefore intend to lay the theoretical groundwork and foundations for more detailed considerations of melodrama and genre in the commercial Amharic film industry in Ethiopia.

The contribution of this thesis to melodrama studies and genre studies builds on the work developed by Larkin (2008) and Haynes (2016) in relation to Nigeria but probes even more pressing theoretical and historical questions about the nature of these two concepts in relation to Film Studies in general and the Ethiopian case study in particular. Furthermore, considering the lack of localised film genre studies in other African contexts outside of Nigeria it is possible to draw interesting differences and comparisons from the system of Amharic film genres that highlight a diversity of cultural products and experiences. The investigation into the culturally conditioned melodrama of Amharic films furthers a new line of inquiry (see Larkin 2008; Garritano 2013; Haynes 2016) that challenges the dismissive attitudes of some previous scholarship on African Cinema, describing popular African cinemas as being *melodramatic* in a generalised and pejorative sense (see Garritano 2013, 5). Such dismissive attitudes of commercial film production in Africa has since become less common in the scholarship, but the attention of many still remains focused on either festival films or West African based commercial film industries and their films. Much of this is due to the accessibility of festivals to academics in America and Europe and the precedent set by the rigorous work of Larkin, Garritano and Haynes and their West African case studies. There is, therefore, a gap in the scholarship of studies that address

alternative experiences of popular filmmaking on the African continent, of which the Ethiopian case study in this thesis is a contribution.

In terms of film culture, Ethiopia offers a distinct case study in Africa. Unlike in most African video-film industries which have favoured a 'straight to VCD'[14] distribution model, cinema theatres still play a central role in society with the Ethiopian industry favouring theatrical releases in the few cinemas that populate Addis Ababa and other urban centres throughout the country.[15] Larkin's study on cinema and cinemagoing in Kano (Northern Nigeria) during the colonial period and other recent studies highlight the need to broaden the parameters of Film Studies in order to understand the social and cultural impacts and meanings of cinema, moving beyond assumptions of cinema as a 'universal language'. Here, it is important to consider the impact of historical and cultural factors as well as, very specifically, the popularity of different genres in attracting people to the cinema and to film production in Ethiopia.

Towards a 'Cultural Turn' in Film and Media Studies

The primary contribution of this thesis within Film and Media Studies, and within African Screen Media Studies, is to emphasise the need for a 'cultural turn' in which melodramatic tendencies and genre cannot be analysed separately from the culture(s) from which they emanate. In tracing the emergence of an Ethiopian-style melodrama and local Amharic film genres since the inception of the commercial film industry in Ethiopia (in 2002), this study offers an example of a system of genres (or a generic regime) influenced by global trends and yet made for and moulded by local production and consumption practices. The exploration of film genre in this context will also pay attention to melodrama as the most dominant mode in commercial filmmaking. There will be an interrogation of the position of melodrama and an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination in relation to film genre in a context where both terms are foreign. Understanding film genre and melodrama in terms of their local and cultural-historical development within a fledgling commercial film industry such as in Ethiopia, challenges longstanding core assumptions surrounding these terms as constructed through mainstream Euro-American-centred studies.

[14] Video CD (VCD), also known as Compact Disc digital video, was created in 1993 and came before the DVD. The VCD was the first format used for distributing films on 120mm optical discs. Each VCD can hold roughly one hour's worth (800MB) of audio/video content which means feature length video films are usually divided into two separate compact discs.

[15] There are around thirty cinemas in Addis Abäba with approximately an extra twenty in smaller towns and cities across Ethiopia.

Methodology

An emphasis throughout this research is on the translatability of languages (and cultures) from, in this case, Amharic to English. Language is a crucial component of any culture. In Ethiopia, Amharic is used to express different cultures in the Amhara region (Wello, Shewa, Gondar, Begamdir, Gojjam) as well as a national Ethiopian culture. But culture is much more than just language and film cultures are much more than just the projections and amplifications of audio-visual codes. Despite a crucial part of this research being focused on the textual analysis of films and their constituent genres, the context of film production, marketing, exhibition and consumption play an equally important role in the understanding of Amharic film genres and so an investigation of paratextual elements, such as posters and other promotional content, also informs how films are experienced in Ethiopia.

Furthering an emphasis on understanding the impact of culture on film experiences, the thesis builds on Garritano's use of "contextual criticism" (2013, 8) whereby culture conditions everything from our understanding of sounds and symbols to our base emotional responses to, and epistemological interpretations of films. Garritano adapts her methodology from Julianne Burton's (1997) work on Latin American film that attempts to "demonstrate how interacting contextual factors impact upon the film text itself and the interpretation of that text at a given point of reception" (168). As Garritano goes on to explain: "contextual criticism posits a dialectical relationship between the cultural form and its many contexts and investigates how those contexts shape the text and how the text affects its context" (2013, 8). In order to organise films within a structure that differentiates them according to the context from which they emerge, Haynes' (2016) genre study of Nollywood is the example. Using a similar approach, films and their genres are explored along the lines that have been inscribed by local producers and consumers in Ethiopia.

A close analysis of film texts, both comparatively in relation to films associated with the same genre and in terms of how films engage the sociocultural conditions of their production and consumption requires an interdisciplinary method of film analysis combined with an ethnographic and media industries approach. It is this media industries approach that is crucial to the methodology. More than context, a media industries approach is about having strong links and connections with the industry and

using these networks to inform and further the research. I have collected Alem Cinema's free monthly film schedule brochures intermittently from 2012 up until my fieldwork in March 2016. These schedules provide detailed information on the films being screened (including their genre) at Alem and also feature interviews with film professionals and other film related articles. I have a relatively complete list of all the films screened in Alem Cinema in 2014 and 2015 because of these brochures and they have helped me corroborate information compiled in the 10th Ethiopian International Film Festival's *New Cinema* (Teshome 2015) publication that has a relatively accurate and detailed "Ethiopian Cinema Catalogue" of some 760 films. Nevertheless there are some important omissions and inaccuracies in this catalogue which I have been careful to avoid repeating by validating all information after watching and detailing the credits of films mentioned in the filmography of this thesis and by clearing up any other inconstancies in interviews. It is my previous experiences of the Amharic film industry and through the contacts I had established before undertaking this PhD, that have enabled me to better negotiate and develop this research in relation to the fast changing experiences of cinema in Ethiopia.

Personal Experiences of Relevance to the Research

Prior to commencing this research on genres in Amharic cinema in September 2014, I already had a foothold and understanding of cinema in Ethiopia due to my avid film consumption, having made good acquaintances with Ethiopian filmmakers such as Yidnekachew Shumete, Paulos Regassa, Mesfin Haileyesus and Tesfaye Mamo, and from earlier writing on different aspects of Amharic cinema (See M.W. Thomas 2013; 2014). My consumption of Amharic and Ethiopian cultural products began in 2010 and has accumulated into its own mass of experience and knowledge which informs my reading about, interaction with, and writing of cinema in Ethiopia. It is my personal interactions with Amharic cinema and the commercial film industry in Addis Ababa that conditions my evolving and ever growing relationship and education of the field, a factor I recognise as instrumental in my methodology. Below is a more detailed account of my personal experiences and its relevance to the research.

My route into studying cinema from Ethiopia has been deeply personal and in recognising this emotional attachment I have done my utmost to be academically rigorous and balanced in my analysis of films and research of the industry. In acknowledging this personal attachment, I offer an account of my experiences with

Amharic cinema in an attempt to outline the opportunities that have been afforded me and my research. I was able to access privileged avenues of participation offered to me during my undergraduate studies at SOAS (in the form of a module on South African Cinema) and then through my role as "Ethiopian Film Advisor" at Film Africa 2012. My early and somewhat naïve foray into the Ethiopian Television (ETV) archives in Addis Ababa during my first attempts at exploring film in Ethiopia were met with bureaucratic and financial barriers. For all the time I spent searching for these 'lost classics' (all of which are still in desperate need of recovery and restoration), I had ignored the booming cinema culture amassing under my very nose as people bustled into the multiple queues that form outside Ambassador Cinema, visible from the upper floors of ETV's headquarters.

Even though I was a consumer of popular Amharic movies, and the fact that I had enjoyed the practicality of cinemagoing in Addis Ababa during my days of courtship with the woman who became my wife, this vibrant and near-enveloping movie scene had not featured on my critical radar. My experience had reflected the scholarship, as it too had previously drifted from its context of production and reception, echoing what Carmela Garritano explains as "a critical methodology that locates meaning within the world of the film text" (2013, 8). Lindiwe Dovey expands upon this point further stating, "this kind of methodology often overlooks or downplays the contexts of production, distribution, curation, exhibition, and reception of films" (2015, 10).

Embedded within this neglect of context, my earliest attempts at scholarly writing on Amharic films were fixated on 'festival films' such as *አትሌቱ - Atletu/The Athlete* (2012) or with older celluloid 'classics' such as Haile Gerima's *ምርጥ ሶስት ሺ አመት - Mirt Sost Shi Amet/Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976) (see M.W. Thomas 2013 and M.W. Thomas 2014 respectively). Although I attempt to link film form and context, this early work is predominantly limited to the formal analysis of the filmic text, which appears as a more arcane, yet still fundamentally important activity of Film Studies, itself engrained within the discursive practices of academia. In fact, it was only after my enrolment as a postgraduate student of Film Studies, that it occurred to me that festival films of 'African Cinema' and the popular Amharic films lighting up auditoriums throughout Ethiopia were not so dissimilar in both form (in some instances) and function (in most instances).

My MA dissertation was later revised and published in *Black Camera: An International Film Journal*, much inspired by the works of Lindiwe Dovey (2013), Jonathan Haynes (1997; 2006; 2010; 2011), Brian Larkin (2008) and Carmela Garritano (2013). Although this contribution was limited in scope with relation to the methodologies and theorisations of African Screen Media, it nonetheless helped to recalibrate the critical radar and draw attention to popular Amharic films, whilst also attempting to draw together this more recent filmmaking phenomenon with older celluloid and 'film festival' film practices (see M.W. Thomas 2015). Here, both textual and contextual analyses and comparisons are made between two seemingly divergent practices of filmmaking. Crucially, however, I began to understand Amharic film and screen media as "not 'mere' technologies, institutions, or texts, but 'cultural practices' that envelop these and other elements in the 'broader fabric' of a particular social order or mentality, including the 'lived experience' of those who produce, define, and use them" (Trotter cited in Dovey 2016, 161). These endeavours have been fostered with the help of Alessandro Jedlowski, Aboneh Ashagrie and our many contributors in the form of the first book-length study on screen media in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa entitled, *Cine-Ethiopia: The History and Politics of Film in the Horn of Africa* (M.W. Thomas, Jedlowski and Ashagrie 2018).

Representing the next step in the scholarship, this collection of essays and interviews engages with Ethiopian scholars and film industry insiders while exploring films produced in other languages within the country and region. Whereas African screen media has faced a dilemma of "de-materialization over time, where texts have been divorced from their contexts of production, distribution, exhibition, and reception" (Dovey 2015, 10), I keep the film industry at the forefront of my analysis. Due to the barriers erected by the material conditions of knowledge production in America and Europe, I keenly participate in attempts to cultivate the study of Ethiopian screen media from within contexts of production and reception and through the work of local scholars and film professionals. As demonstrated with this brief discussion of my previous scholarship, my own personal experiences and academic development has closely followed that of African Screen Media Studies over the past decade. By drawing together the material conditions of knowledge production and by opening up the scholarship to old and new forms of film and screen media production, I aim to contribute to present and future debates in African Screen Media Studies. Beyond this, by showing the overlaps but also disjunctures between films that are popular locally

compared to those in international film festivals, I can help contribute to broader fields such as film festival studies and studies on film genres.

As the Ethiopian context is crucial in my understanding of Amharic films, the first year of my enrolment as a PhD student was devoted to excavating the history of cinema in Ethiopia by piecing together disparate Amharic and English sources. These sources included a small but invaluable number of articles in academic journals, passing references in larger monographs devoted to media and/or culture in Ethiopia, the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* entries "Cinema" and "Film", archive materials from Amharic newspapers and state sponsored institutions, and online articles. These printed/digitised historical sources only addressed certain events, aspects, or periods of cinema in Ethiopia briefly and so my aim in curating them was to add a depth, consistency and continuity to this history. Nonetheless, there remain many undocumented details pertaining to a more complete understanding of the history of cinema in Ethiopia. In order to address the lack of primary sources in this first year, gaps during the periods lacking in detail were filled by undertaking interviews with personnel who were involved in cinema in Ethiopia at those times such as with Abebe Beyene who was previously employed by the Ethiopian Film Corporation from the 1970s to 1990s, the veteran actor and director Debebe Eshetu and one of the earliest video film producers Tesfaye Mamo. At the end of my first year, while managing to amass a fuller history of cinema in Ethiopia by combining both ethnographic and historical methodologies, my thesis was never intended to be a historical study. Genre emerged at the end of the first year as the best lens through which to study the transformations in the commercial industry while also allowing an engagement with close film analysis of a meaningful kind.

Soon after this breakthrough, and despite all of the compelling work on film genres in mainstream Film Studies, it became clear that the experience of the locally produced and consumed commercial cinema in Ethiopia could not be fully grafted onto an existing theory of genre, the majority of which is based on the experiences of Hollywood. The difficulties I had with the theory were not only to do with its inability to address the culturally indebted terms used to name Amharic film genres or even with the rapidly changing nature and specific characteristics of the Amharic film industry, but with the particular application of the term 'melodrama'. In reference to my previous experiences of cinemagoing in Addis Ababa, discussions with Ethiopian film

professionals and the important scholarship of Peter Brooks (1976), Christine Gledhill (1987) and Ravi Vasudevan (2011); in global parlances melodrama was more than just a genre. Instead, melodramatic tendencies appeared to be evident across a broad range of narrative screen media produced in different places throughout the world. So then I was not only concerned with understanding the nature of Amharic film genres in the Ethiopian context but I became acutely aware of their modes of affect that tie together the system of Amharic genres into a culturally distinct "melodramatic imagination" (Brooks 1976).

Early in 2016 I spent two months (February and March) in Addis Ababa to do fieldwork, seeking to better understand the nature of the Amharic film industry and the role, if any, of genre within the Ethiopian context, leaving my books behind in exchange for my sound recorder. As my research draws on ethnographic and media industry methods and because the vast majority of the commercial film industry in Ethiopia is centred in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital was the obvious choice to base my work. My base of operations in the familiar surroundings and loving care of my in-laws meant I was able to dedicate my time to research with acclimatisation and daily living costs never being an issue. Due to already having prior contacts with film industry personnel, I spent the first few days speaking to contacts, catching-up with developments in the industry and organising meetings and by the end of the first week had already began recording interviews with filmmakers.

In order to understand Amharic film genres within the context of their everyday usages in Ethiopia, my field research targeted three broad stakeholder groups: film producers, film exhibitors and film consumers. Due to prior contacts I had with Ethiopian filmmakers (who often combine the roles of producers, directors and screenwriters) and the relative lack of outside attention to their work, this group proved the most willing interviewees. These filmmakers included people new to the industry such as Biniyam Tefere, the recipient of the best student film award at the 2016 Gumma Awards in Addis Ababa, to Tewodros Teshome who is arguably the biggest investor in the commercial film industry in Ethiopia (who produces, directs and acts in his own films as well as owning the largest cinema chain in the country). In this period I conducted seventeen semi-structured interviews with filmmakers in person, each lasting roughly between 30-60 minutes (some even longer) and recorded with a sound recorder after gaining permission from interviewees. I allowed for interviewees to offer their own

experiences, knowledge and feelings about the film industry in Ethiopia and their particular contributions to it. Only when filmmakers mentioned genre would I ask them for more details on the subject and I gave no prior indication to my interviewees that genre was the subject of my research. This angle of questioning was, in essence, the same for my questions to film exhibitors and consumers and allowed me to understand Amharic film genres through a posteriori knowledge.

There proved to be more obstacles to gaining information from film exhibitors and consumers in Ethiopia, which has meant that qualitative data gathered from these two sectors is less complete than from filmmakers. Whereas filmmakers are usually their own bosses and individually run small production companies, cinema owners are often businessmen/women who rarely visit their sites of operation or grant outsiders access to sensitive financial information. Even with the case of filmmaker and cinema owner Tewodros Teshome, he was much more willing to discuss the artistic side of filmmaking rather than the business operations of cinema exhibition in Ethiopia. A case in point is the interactions I had with a couple of cinema managers who were open and interested in my research but were not authorised to disclose any information to me until after my questions had been put into writing and then answered, in writing, the following week. The whole task became even more diluted by the insistence my questions be asked in English (although I had written them in Amharic) only for their answers to be in Amharic and often not relate to the English questions they themselves insisted upon.

I encountered the most challenges, however, in attempting to understand the cinemagoing culture in Addis Ababa and decisions made by Amharic film audiences/consumers. My research methods included participant observations, 'vox-pop' interviews with audiences queuing outside cinemas prior to film screenings and group discussions at weekly meetings with the Alatinos film association. This association, open to anyone interested in film, but organised for and by young and/or aspiring filmmakers tends to be critical of the Amharic film industry and popular Amharic films as they often compare them to the international standard of Hollywood and/or arthouse cinema. Nonetheless, they are also highly engaged in the industry and avid consumers of local films. Established filmmakers such as Henok Ayele and Behailu Wassie maintain links with the Alatinos and often present their films and answer questions from those who attend, creating a crucial and fairly open critical

discourse between industry insiders and aspiring industry professionals. In addition to the wealth of information and contacts afforded me through my own attendance at Alatinos meetings, there was a general supportive and collaborative atmosphere that was crucial in taking my research down more nuanced paths.

My media industries approach also included participation observations which were facilitated through my attendance at public film screenings in some of the cinemas of Addis Ababa. During this trip I was fortunate enough to be invited to the film premières of *የፀሃይ መውጫ ልጆች - Yetsehaye Mewicha Lijoch/Sons of Sunrise* (2016) and *ኣትውደድ ኣትውለድ - Atwided Atwilid/Don't Fall In Love, Don't Give Birth* (2016) thanks to Yidnekachew Shumete. Menelik Merid also generously secured me a VVIP[16] ticket to attend the 2016 Gumma Film Awards. Though my attendance of these film events and screenings, along with those organised by the Alatinos, I was able to negotiate and better understand some of the strategies employed in order to promote and control avenues of participation in the Amharic film industry. Being a part of the audience watching films and the spectacles surrounding premières and film awards better integrated me to the expectations and feelings felt by local audiences.

The main problem I encountered during my fieldwork, however, was with the audience interviews. The practicalities and logistics of the research were challenging considering the time constraints (in terms of my time in Ethiopia and also the time I had before queues vanished into cinema halls) and the fact that I was one interviewer attempting to cover many short interviews with many different people. These issues were then further compounded by the startled reactions of some queueing cinemagoers after being confronted by a foreign stranger speaking to them in Amharic and asking if they would consent to a quick interview about cinema. The most common reactions included people being more interested in the fact I was speaking Amharic to them. After I introduced what I was doing and after gaining permission to record them it was common for people to answer my questions with a question of their own, such as: "How did you learn Amharic?" So while the ability to speak Amharic opened up my research in many ways with regards to facilitating interactions with filmmakers, producers and exhibitors; when I was more pressed for time attempting to garner quick and simple answers from audiences it became a novel distraction. Needless to say, countless people passed up on

[16] The tickets and seating were divided into VIP (Very Important Person) towards the rear of the auditorium and VVIP (Very Very Important Person) towards the front.

the opportunity to answer a few quick questions by a foreigner speaking Amharic. My research strategy was yet further flawed by the fact that queueing cinemagoers also attract beggars and hawkers selling small items. I therefore represented a particularly attractive target for such people and despite befriending the shoe-shine boys outside the cinema before conducting my research who nobly attempted to stave off unwanted attention, as I progressed I was slowly amassing an ever growing crowd of people drawn to my presence. I can only express my gratitude to those who were intrigued enough and showed a willingness to participate in such an exercise. Such audience research deserves greater organisation and resources than I was able to afford it during this fieldwork. My own data from this exercise outside Cinema Empire amounted to nearly 50 recorded responses, some of which are more audible than others and which only give me a small glimpse into audience tastes, opinions, behaviours and demographics in Ethiopia.

To carry out a full scale survey of cinema audiences in Ethiopia is surely a task for a larger and more specific remit than my PhD research permitted. Nonetheless, the qualitative data I did gather does offer preliminary insights for my thesis which regards audiences as crucial to the formation, mutation and interpretation of film genres. Overall, however, this multi-method approach has allowed me to access a far more rounded and grass-roots level of understanding into Ethiopian experiences of cinema than would have been possible without this ethnographic and media industries centred fieldwork. Although, with hindsight, I would now update my methodological approach to better accommodate research on audiences and exhibitors in Ethiopia, I feel this whole experience has enriched the research immeasurably and enlivened my subsequent reading and thinking on the thesis.

Structure of the Thesis

Initially, there is an historical mapping of film exhibition, production and reception in Ethiopia, relating it to broader socio-political and economic changes in the nation in order to provide an overview and frame through which the research can be properly contextualised. The historical overview of cinemagoing and film production in Chapter 1, framed as a modernising moment in Ethiopian history, has relied heavily on historical writings from various sources, both academic and non-academic, and has been fleshed out by uncovering primary sources from film institutions that were once active in Ethiopia and by information shared in personal interviews I conducted with film

professionals who were active in past eras. Curating these scattered writings and sources into a loose history of cinema in Ethiopia is not entirely representative or fixed as it focuses predominantly on Amharic cinema. There remains much space for the development of competing and contrasting historical genealogies of minority cinemas in Ethiopia, based on vigorous academic scrutiny, which is to be encouraged. Positing such a history of cinema in Ethiopia it is hoped will stimulate discussion and debate reflecting the diversity and 'liveliness' inherent in Ethiopian films and the people who create and experience cinema from Ethiopia. For a more substantial and collaborative effort in such areas and a starting point for further research see *Cine-Ethiopia: The History and Politics of Film in the Horn of Africa* (Thomas, Jedlowski and Ashagrie 2018).

Just as Chapter 1 provides an historical context, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 then position this study within more theoretical debates concerning melodrama and genre in relation to Film Studies. As this research aims to intervene in the wider scholarship and general thinking surrounding melodrama and genre in mainstream Film Studies, Chapter 2 presents a review of the existing debates in melodrama research and the conceptualisation of the melodramatic mode most useful for this study. Chapter 3 builds on this understanding of melodrama and the historical context of melodrama's existence in modern and pre-modern Ethiopia, elaborating upon and identifying a culturally conditioned Ethiopian-style melodrama. Chapter 4 then discusses the literature on genre in Film Studies grounding the study of melodrama and genre in social and cultural terms, building on the 'cultural turn' identified in recent genre scholarship.

In Chapter 5 an understanding of the commercial Amharic film industry acts as the key to uncovering the importance of genre in the Ethiopian filmmaking and film consumption context. This builds on the scrutiny and concerns raised in the previous chapters of studies that overlook cultural contexts by championing textual analysis. Chapter 5 goes on to demonstrate the sociocultural specific rendering of film genres in Ethiopia, specifically concerning the contexts of marketing, exhibition, production and consumption of Amharic films. Chapters 6 and 7 develop this media industries approach in order to analyse the system of Amharic film genres through both textual and contextual analyses of specific films and their constituent genres. Chapter 6 is specifically concerned with the two most prominent genres in Amharic cinema, the *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker film*. A historical perspective is taken in order to examine

the emergence of these genres and how they came to dominate Ethiopia's big screens, leading a surge in Amharic film production and cinema building in the country. Acknowledging the historical contexts in which these local Amharic genres developed, allows for an understanding of both local and foreign influences in genre conventions and formal features of films. By defining the multiple meanings of the term *fiker* (love) in relation to its pervasive use in naming different Amharic film genres, ideas about the specific melodramatic tendencies of Amharic genre creation in the Ethiopian context become more assertive.

Chapter 7 then analyses the relationships between the two most prevalent genres and other Amharic film genres. Taking each genre and its associated films in turn, the thesis builds a more complete picture of how and why genres emerge and their position within the historical development of the Amharic film industry and the contexts of their production and reception. From this more detailed analysis, the formal conventions of Amharic film genres can be better appreciated along with how their relationships to other genres places them within a culturally informed genre system governed by a specific Ethiopian melodramatic imagination that renders most genres as primarily defined in relation to the different emotional responses they elicit. Analysing how different Amharic genres challenge social norms through genre specific modes of affect while providing cultural familiarity, emphasises the ability of localised genres to be progressive while ultimately reinforcing, preserving and developing notions of cultural continuity in a nation beset by political and social provocations. The commercial Amharic film industry, its Ethiopian-style melodrama and system of Amharic film genres deserve more credit for chronicling Ethiopian social history since 2002. Commercial Amharic films offer continuing cultural and moral mediations through sustaining a self-image of Ethiopia as irrepressible and highly self-conscious, while managing to inspire laughter, teach of love and psychologically thrill Ethiopian audiences.

In this thesis, therefore, I ultimately argue that localised genre systems such as the system of Amharic film genres in Ethiopia are crucial to the commercial viability of their associated film industries (i.e. the Amharic film industry) precisely because they harness a cultural specificity – in this case expressed through a distinctively Ethiopian inflected "melodramatic imagination" – that speaks directly to the sociocultural circumstances of Ethiopian audiences. Only by delving deeper into how film genres

resonate with local stakeholder groups can we begin to uncover their importance in sustaining popular film industries in different contexts throughout the world. The inherent instability and ‘liveliness’ of these genres can further be attributed to the multiple layers of meaning and endless possible interpretations films inspire in their audiences. This not only allows for cross-cultural exchanges and adaptations but also for genres to participate in and respond to specific sociocultural changes as and when they happen in any given time and space, a crucial aspect that in turn fuels their commercial potential and the longevity of generic cycles.

CHAPTER 1

The History of the Moving Image and its Multidimensional Manifestations in Ethiopia

> [T]he rarity of bibliographical resources on Ethiopian cinema […] complicates the task of the researcher who tries to set up a precise chronology of Ethiopian cinema's development. […] [F]ilm practitioners and scholars who witnessed the development of Ethiopian cinema agree only on a few key dates and films, leaving wide space for controversies and debate.
>
> Alessandro Jedlowski (2015, 170–171)

Roughly 115 years from the time when the first attempt was made to establish a cinema in Ethiopia – in 2012 – a 7-dimensional movie show simulator[17] opened in the capital city, Addis Ababa (billed as the first 7D cinema in Africa). The time in-between the establishment of these exhibition spaces was witness to a long and complex history of cinema in the country. In terms of film culture, Ethiopia offers an alternative case study compared with other African countries which have favoured a 'straight to VCD' distribution model, cinemas in Ethiopia still play a central role in society with the commercial Amharic films favouring theatrical releases in the fifty-odd cinemas in Addis Ababa and other urban centres throughout the country.[18] Larkin's influential study on cinema and cinemagoing in Kano (Northern Nigeria) and other recent studies highlight the need to broaden the parameters of Film Studies in order to properly understand the social and cultural impacts and meanings of cinema, moving beyond assumptions of cinema as a 'universal language', to explorations of cinema as a hybridised site of distinct global and local exchanges and meanings (Dovey and Impey 2010; Garritano 2013; Jancovich *et al.* 2003; Jedlowski 2012; Larkin 2008). At a time, then, when scholars note the decline of cinemagoing across the globe due to the onset of the digital revolution in the new 'information age' (see Iordanova and Cunningham 2012), it is important to ask why it is that cinema-building, movie-making and cinemagoing are enjoying a renaissance in urban Ethiopia.

[17] This simulator seats twelve people per showing with each film lasting roughly ten minutes each.
[18] At the time of fieldwork (in 2016) there were around thirty cinemas in Addis Ababa with approximately an extra twenty in smaller towns and cities across Ethiopia.

Cinema is understood here as an inherently modern phenomenon wherein the spectacle of the film, traversing space and time, constitutes a social event in a translocal space (a space in which global exchanges in goods, ideas and people occur). Cinema is imbued with intrinsic features of modern society, such as the commodification of leisure-time. Cinema in Ethiopia began life being vehemently opposed by anti-modernising sectors in a largely conservative society whilst remaining an important trend setter and facilitator between global cultures and more open-minded people. With the advent of local digital productions dominating the big screens in the early 2000s, the position of cinema within society shifted dramatically, shedding its risqué status in order to speak specifically to the growing urban populations in the country. After licensing stipulations which prevented the screening of DVDs and VHSs in Ethiopian cinemas was lifted in 2002, local video and digital film productions in Amharic proliferated exponentially. This popular, low-budget and commercially-led cultural phenomenon has radically changed the meaning of cinema in the country, usurping the once ubiquitous foreign (mainly Hollywood and Bollywood) films. The popularity of local productions has inspired increased numbers of cinemagoers, which has in turn fuelled the construction of cinemas in the country at a rate not seen since the Italians sought to use cinema as a tool of conquest and subjugation during their brief five year occupation of Ethiopia from 1936 to 1941.[19]

The more extensive research on other media industries in Ethiopia, such as Meseret Chekol Reta's *The Quest for Press Freedom: One Hundred Years of History of the Media in Ethiopia* (2013) and studies by Gagliardone (2011 and 2014) and Gartley (1997), omit cinema and film from their focus on mass media. As will become evident, there is little work published on cinema in Ethiopia that is based on systematic, academic study. The following historical overview of cinemagoing and film production brings together what little scholarship there is on the subject in an attempt at curating scattered writings and mapping a more coherent history. The various works of historians Richard Pankhurst (1965 and 1998) and Paulos Ñoño (1992) have been crucial in explaining the introduction of cinema in Ethiopia with information provided by a publication by the Addis Ababa Cinema Houses Administration (AACHA) (2007), which administers the government-run cinemas. Ruth Ben-Ghiat's (2003; 2015) works on cinema in Italian occupied Ethiopia are captivating and detailed studies that address

[19] From 2002-2015 there has been at least 20 privately owned cinemas established in Addis Ababa compared with only three being built in the sixty year period after the Italian occupation from 1941-2001.

cinema's capacity for entertainment, propaganda and even subversion during this turbulent period in Ethiopian history. Anecdotes from Michael Lentakis' memoir (2005), recalling going to the cinema during this period, have proved insightful and support Ruth Ben-Ghiat's more rigorous research. The contributions entitled, "Cinema" and "Film: Ethiopia and Eritrea in Film", in the various volumes of *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (2003-2014) have helped nuance the early history of cinema in Ethiopia and are key sources which discuss the first film productions in the country. The majority of the history from the Derg period has been drawn from the Ethiopian Film Corporation's Derg era publication, *ከፊልም ማዳበሪያና መቆጣጠሪያ ዋና ክፍል ኦስከ ኢትዮጵያ ፊልም ኮርፖሬሽን/From the Film Development and Control Board to the Ethiopian Film Corporation* (1986/7), with other information made available during interviews. The history of video and digital film production set out in the thesis is also greatly indebted to interviews with industry insiders and professionals and the work of Tesfaye Mamo (2006) and Fikadu Limenih (2013) in particular. This research has also been influenced by a few unpublished BA and MA theses (in Amharic and English) at Addis Ababa University along with the many articles and blog posts which are helping to fuel the contemporary debate surrounding the film industry in Ethiopia today. Most recently, there have been a few publications in academic journals which have contributed foundational work and important preliminary studies on filmmaking in Ethiopia (Jedlowski 2015a and 2015b; Jedlowski and Thomas 2017; Thomas 2015; Tadesse 2016).

Cinema in Ethiopia Before, During and After the Italian Occupation

Cinema was introduced into Ethiopia through the modernising aspirations of Menelik II. Menelik attempted to establish a modern Ethiopian nation-state after the victory over the Italians at the battle of Adwa and subsequent recognition of statehood in the Treaty of Addis Ababa, 1896 (Marcus 1995). Ethiopia's position as the only free native African state, surrounded by colonising European regimes urged Menelik to modernise, establishing a telephone network, railway, piped water system, radio, modern hospital, bank, newspaper and parliament, to mention a few of the developments under his reign. Despite it being difficult to pinpoint the exact time cinema started in Ethiopia, Menelik's curiosity about cinema allegedly arose after he held discussions with Stévenin, a Frenchman who was one of only a few European traders to operate in Addis Ababa in the 1890s (Michel 1900, 95-101). The first film screening in Ethiopia, mentioned by Paulos Ñoño ([1984 E.C] 1992) in his seminal work on Menelik II's

reign, was shown to Menelik and his ministers in the great hall of his palace on the first of *Miyazya*, 1889 E.C.[20] (April 9, 1897). This film is said to have depicted Jesus walking on water which provoked the ministers to pay homage to the images by bowing in veneration (Paulos 1992, 337). The only likely film that coincides with these dates is the five minute long *La Passion du Christ/The Passion of Christ* (1897), a 12 scene filmed Passion play performed by the Paris based Société Léar acting troupe which is understood to be the first film to depict Jesus (Bakker 2009, 13). Making this connection even more plausible is a study linking the producer of this film, Albert Kirchner, who also went under the auspices of "Léar" associated with a company named Léar & Co. based in Cairo around the same time (Bottomore 1996).

Paulos goes on to explain that Stévenin was concerned with how the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church would react to cinema, but Menelik was unfazed in his admiration and promotion of cinema (1992, 336). The first attempt at establishing a commercial, public cinema was on the very outskirts[21] of Addis Ababa in around 1890 E.C. (1897/8), by a Frenchman[22] from Algeria (Pankhurst 1968 and 1998; Paulos 1992; Bonnano 2003). His endeavour, however, is said to have been unsuccessful precisely due to the negative reaction, stemming from the Ethiopian Orthodox clergy, associating cinema with the Devil's work (Mérab 1921; Pankhurst 1968; 1998; Paulos 1992; Bonnano 2003). The Ethiopian public dubbed cinema "የሰይጣን ቤት" (*yeseytan bet*/devil's house) and the Orthodox clergy were quick to warn people not to attend, leading to the subsequent bankruptcy of the proprietor, who, before leaving the country, sold his projector to the Italian Minister, Major Ciccodicola (Pankhurst 1998; Paulos 1992). Ciccodicola promptly presented the projector as a gift to Menelik in an attempt to improve Italy's status within Ethiopia after the defeat at Adwa (Paulos 1992). Menelik's enthusiasm for cinema increased as he took it upon himself to project religious films in his great hall at his palace, slowly accustomising influential guests to cinema, making it more difficult for them to speak of it as an invention of the Devil (Paulos 1992, 337).

Unlike the mainly entrepreneurial beginnings of cinema in Euro-American histories as a commercialised entertainment product of vaudevillian shows and fairground spectacle,

[20] E.C. denotes where the date is in the Ethiopian Calendar and will be in square brackets. Where possible the corresponding date in the Gregorian calendar will follow.
[21] Near where present Tewodros Square is today, the Wafa Cinema occupies the same site as this first cinema and is still referred to as "*yeseytan bet*" by many locals.
[22] Meseret Chekol Reta, however, states that the first cinema opened in Addis Ababa was by an Armenian in the early 1900s, a reference corresponding more with the second attempt by the Baicovich brothers.

in Ethiopia, cinema's origins can be understood more in terms of its use as a pedagogical tool, upheld by the Emperor to persuade Ethiopian society, and the powerful Orthodox clergy in particular, to accept modern technology. The literal demonisation of cinema, high costs and immoral aura attributed to it, however, only made it accessible to the few modernising elites of the country such as *Ras* Mekonnin and Tekle-Haymanot of Gojjam[23] (and later his son, Haylu Tekle-Haymanot) who, along with the Emperor, were reportedly sedulous cinemagoers (Pankhurst 1998).

The religious dimension of cinema is significant in the Ethiopian context, both as a tool used for visualising religious episodes and with the technology being deemed, "the work of the devil". Through the projected visual image, cinema can be seen to be a revelatory instrument used to instruct and enlighten. These visualisations are not too dissimilar, according to the renowned Ethiopian-born film scholar Teshome Habte Gabriel, from the oral stories told in orthodox churchyards when he was a child. Teshome recounts that he was "treated to 1– to 2–hour long verbal visualization of 'revelations' as experienced by such prophets as Ezekiel, Elijah or Jeremiah (incidentally, 'revelations' in Ethiopic [Amharic] stands for *ra'ey*, literally meaning 'seen with the mind's eye')" (Gabriel 2001, 97). Unlike in other African experiences, such as in Ghana, in which Brigit Meyer (2003 and 2015) and Lindsey Green-Simms (2012) explore the religious aspect of video films as they visualise the triumph of evangelical Christian forces over 'traditional' occult spectres, in Ethiopia, cinema's introduction reinforced the entrenched Ethiopian Orthodox Christian beliefs of the ruling classes.[24] Despite the apparatus of cinema being stuck in the quagmire of Christian dualism, Menelik's tactics of harnessing cinema's revelatory powers, exposing to cinema the same conservative Orthodox clergy who had previously associated all foreign technologies with the devil,[25] is testament of Menelik's conviction in the visual power of cinema.

---

[23] The term *Ras* literally means *head* and was used to signify the position of governors of provinces within the hierarchy of the Ethiopian aristocracy. *Ras* Mekonnin (also known as *Ras* Mekonnen Welde-Mikaél) was the governor of Harar and the father of Tafari Mekonnen, who later became Emperor Haile Selassie I. Tekle-Haymanot of Gojjam was the ruler of Gojjam and a famous Ethiopian war hero for his exploits in the Battle of Adwa in 1896.

[24] Orthodox Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia in the 4th century when it was embraced by Ezana of Aksum (ruler of the kingdom of Aksum, located in present day Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, parts of Yemen, Somalia and Sudan), long before Christian missionaries from Europe spread Christianity to other parts of Africa.

[25] Even the first bicycles to be introduced into Ethiopia were named የሰይጣን ፈረስ/*yesaytan feres/the Devil's horse*. The morality and influences of cinema in Ethiopia are still often debated, however it seems that Menelik and other modernising elites were mostly successful in dispelling notions that linked the cinema and other modern technologies with the Devil.

According to Paulos, it was not until 1901 E.C. (1908/9),[26] when Menelik encouraged the Baicovich brothers to install a Pathé projector in Addis Ababa that a second attempt at establishing a commercial, public cinema was made. Whilst Paulos mentions that this business failed after a year due to projector malfunction (1992, 337), Pankhurst cites Mérab's 1921 account that the business was abandoned due to a lack of public interest after the first month (1998). There was not only caution surrounding the perceived devilish magic of the cinema, but the concept of paying for something you cannot physically consume or use was perceived as money spinning chicanery (Ethiopian Film Corporation 1986/7). Pankhurst mentions that a Greek migrant made a third and more successful attempt at the original site of *yeseytan bet* (also at this time known as Pathé Cinema) near Tewodros Square (Figure 3), which was quickly taken over by the proprietor of the Hôtel de France,[27] M. Terras, whilst Cinema Empire was later established in Piassa where the current Ethiopian Electric Power Corp. building is located (1998; Ethiopian Film Corporation 1986/7).

Figure 3. '*yeseytan bet*' or Pathé Cinema near present day Tewodros Square in 1935 (Rikli 1935, 49).

The Hôtel de France also had a cinema hall and, as well as in Addis Ababa, M. Terras gave cinema shows in Dirre Dawa and Djibouti (Pankhurst 1998). The train link between Djibouti and Addis Ababa allowed M. Terras to easily access the French distribution network, meaning that most films in this period originated from France

[26] Pankhurst alternatively puts this date a year later at 1909/1910).
[27] The Hôtel de France was one of the first hotels to be built in Ethiopia, soon after the construction of Taitu Hotel in 1898 E.C. (1905/6), these first hotels, along with their attempts at establishing cinema, were a function of the country's urbanisation and modernisation (Gebremedhin 2007).

(Ethiopian Film Corporation 1986/7). Between 1924 and 1925, the Addis Ababa Cinema Houses Administration (AACHA) note that M. Terras screened silent films at a rate of one *alad* (old money, ½ Menelik thaler)[28] for a chair and one *mahalliq* (old money, 1/16 of a Menelik thaler) to sit on a stone, making cinema accessible only to the wealthy new urban population of traders, skilled labourers and university students, as well as accommodating the aristocrats, intellectuals and foreigners of Addis Ababa (2007, 40; Ethiopian Film Corporation 1986/7). The high price of a single ticket was the equivalent to buying a sheep, which meant the cinema was unaffordable for most but keenly enjoyed by those who could afford it (be they male or female, Christian or Muslim) even though many still perceived cinema as posing a cultural and religious risk – as was apparent when women would regularly be seen covering half their face during screenings as a defence mechanism (Ethiopian Film Corporation 1986/7). It should be noted here that women have always been permitted to go to the cinema unlike in other African cases such as in Muslim areas of Nigeria (Larkin 2008). The popularity of cinema in Addis Ababa also began to increase around this time due to the attraction of the first talkies, screened in 1927, along with the opening of two more cinemas in the 1920s around Arada and Menelik Square called Le Perroquet and Mon Cinéma (AACHA 2007; Reta 2013).

Cinema became more established in Addis Ababa during the period of Teferi Mekonnin's regency beginning in 1916 due to the continued commitments to modernise Ethiopia. Along with the rapid urbanisation and development of a thriving cosmopolitan capital city and the general accommodation of urban Ethiopians to other modern inventions such as the train, motor vehicles and cameras; cinema steadily developed a devout following. According to Arefaynie Fantahun, the first Ethiopian-made film was shot by an Ethiopian by the name of Tedla in this same year, documenting Empress Zewditu's coronation (Arefaynie 2006). Foreign dignitaries and film crews were invited to the more regal coronation of Teferi Mekonnin as Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1930, the same year that the population of Addis Ababa passed 100,000 (Pankhurst 1965). Due to the rise in foreign migrants, especially from Greece, Armenia, India and France[29] and the establishment of foreign diplomatic missions, there was also an increase in

[28] The Menelik thaler was often regarded as interchangeable with the Maria Theresa thaler (dollar) of Austria formally used throughout Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Arabia and Ethiopia.

[29] This steep influx of foreign migrants coincided with the commencing of work on the French-backed Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway in 1897, the brainchild of Menelik's Swiss adviser, Alfred Ilg. The high numbers of foreigners came as government and railway employees or private entrepreneurs, many of whom later came to settle in Addis Ababa (Pankhurst 1965, 309).

demand for modern entertainment such as the cinema. The increased commodification of leisure time further led to a tax on entertainment set out in a decree by Haile Selassie on August 5, 1932, regulating cinemas, theatres, concerts and meetings (Pankhurst 1965, 533). Although Haile Selassie was said to be "fascinated by film and cinema and understood how important film could be" (Haars *et al*. 2014, 317), particularly in constructing his image as a modern and benevolent leader, the Emperor explicitly supported the theatre, believing it more accessible for propaganda and educational purposes at home. As it was fashionable at the time to follow the trends of the Emperor, and as the local theatrical productions were in Amharic and celebrated Ethiopian culture, thus being more accessible than the foreign images, sounds and mechanisms of cinema, the theatre (and not the cinema) established itself as the favourite and most successful art and entertainment form amongst most of the wealthy urban population (see Ashagrie 1996).

The cinema landscape in Ethiopia experienced a tremendous upheaval (along with much of the country) in 1936 after all the cinemas were burnt down (along with most of downtown Addis) when Fascist Italy took control of the city (AACHA 2007; Lentakis 2005). Despite the city suffering severely, the Italians sought to make Addis Ababa the capital of their new colony, Africa Orientale Italiana (AOI)[30], as it symbolised the birth of a new Italian Empire whilst inheriting the apparatus and high stature of the old regime. By this time, however, Addis Ababa was much more than the "non-urban city" or even "nearly blank slate on which they [the Italian planners] laid out their grand designs" (Fuller 2007, 197). On the contrary, as we have seen with the early history of cinema in Addis Ababa, the city had grown and cautiously adapted to social changes brought on by Ethiopia's engagement with modernising ideals. Indeed, Menelik and his successors (particularly Haile Selassie) had encouraged and integrated a mix of populations from all over the Ethiopian Empire and Europe; these people spoke a wide variety of languages, such as Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya Gurage, Greek, Arabic, Armenian, French, English, Italian and Russian; and many religious groups were represented in Ethiopia, including Ethiopian, Greek, Armenian and Russian Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Roman Catholicism and non-monotheist religions. This all created a far more cosmopolitan city than most European capitals. Addis Ababa was hardly the

[30] Italian East Africa was an attempt by Italy to combine its previous colonies, Italian Eritrea and Italian Somaliland after it had occupied the Ethiopian Empire.

static social entity Italian planners had supposed it to be in 1936 when the city fell, failing to comprehend "the city's boomtown atmosphere" (Fuller 2007, 199).

It was at this time that the dynamics of cinema and cinemagoing in Ethiopia changed radically as the Italians adopted the large scale use of cinema as a crucial instrument of propaganda, aimed at their own nationals as well as the "natives" (Bonnano 2003). The Italians re-built the old cinemas, and such was the proliferation and strict state control of new cinema building by the Italians in occupied Ethiopia, Mia Fuller explains that cinema was promoted in Addis Ababa "as though they [the Italians] had first brought it there" (2007, 198). Salvatore Ambrosino's research on the subject describes the Italian obsession with promoting cinema as films became "boom business in Italian Africa" (cited in Ben-Ghiat 2003, 54). Ruth Ben-Ghiat furthers this research, explaining,

> By March 1939, there were forty cinemas in Ethiopia with a total of 30,000 seats; by 1940, this number had grown to fifty-five cinemas with 60,000 posts. The Supercinema Teatro Italia in Addis Ababa held 1,200 people alone, and by 1940 plans were under way for structures that held up to 2,400 people. Racial politics dictated separate seating areas for Italians and Africans, and as the number of theatres grew, colonisers and colonised increasingly saw films in separate venues, although local notables had places reserved for them in Italian cinemas (Ben- Ghiat 2003, 54-55)

The built space of cinema, therefore, became imbued with an aura reflecting the power dynamics of colonial supremacy (see Figure 4), with even the infamous Italian collaborator, Ras Haylu Tekle-Haymanot,[31] building his own cinema, Cinema Ras Haylu, in the Addis Ketema district of Addis Ababa (Ethiopian Film Corporation 1986/7; AACHA 2007). Cinemagoing was popularised by the Italians throughout Ethiopia in this era, not only due to the increased number of urban, built cinemas but also because the Italians provided state-funded travelling cinemas which toured rural Ethiopia, projecting their propaganda where the majority of the Ethiopian population lived, drawing crowds in their thousands (Ben-Ghiat 2003; 2015).

[31] *Ras* Haylu Tekle-Haymanot, son of *Ras* Tekle-Haymanot, conspired with the Italians when they entered Addis. He was held in esteem by the Italians, to the extent he was awarded the Star of Italy amongst other honours by the Italian Government with *Ras* Haylu and his family being personally exempt from the repercussions of Yekatit 12 (a massacre of Ethiopians in Addis Ababa following an attempt on the life of Italian Viceroy Rodolfo Graziani in 1937).

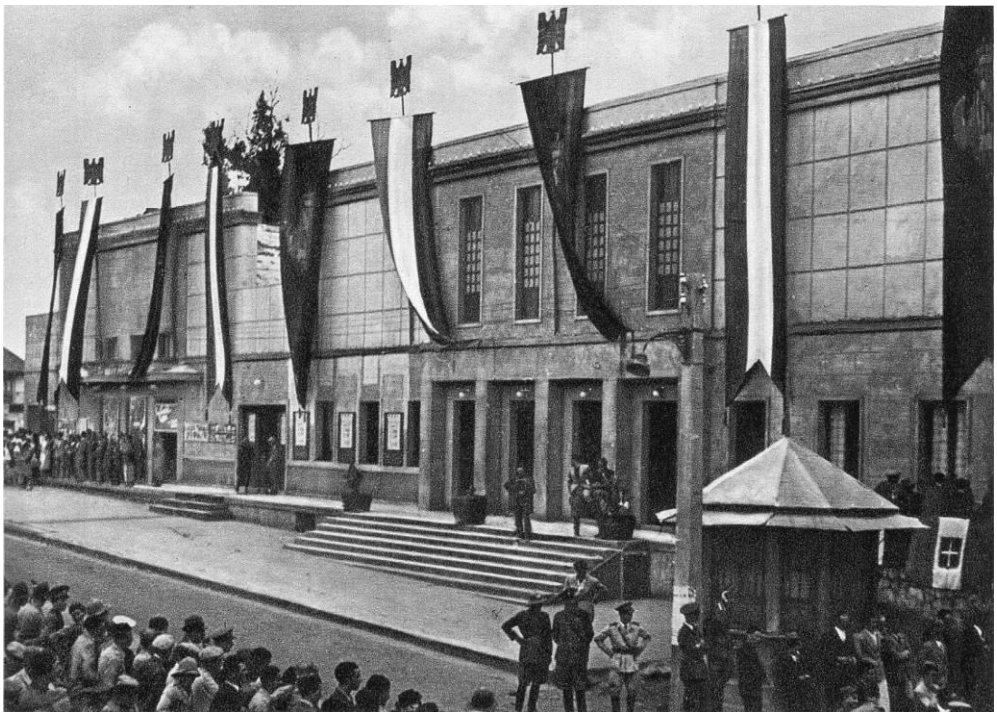


Figure 4.The 1937 grand opening of Supercinema Teatro Italia in Addis Ababa (Jose Antonio).

Ruth Ben-Ghiat's work explores many impacts of cinema under Italian-occupied rule (2015). She highlights the dichotomy between the Italians' concept of the power of cinema as a tool of conquest, fascist propaganda and white supremacy, and the interpretation of cinema by Ethiopian spectators positioned in an alternative sociocultural context, enjoying the spectacle and even subverting[32] the narratives of films (Ben-Ghiat 2003; 2015). Ben-Ghiat concludes that because of the Fascist Italian film policy being under-funded and unrealistic, "films would be ineffectual agents of collective change" (2003, 59). This idea resonates with Lentakis' experiences of cinema in Italian-occupied Addis Ababa as he mentions being shown "films of *their* army and industry, but *we* were most interested in watching the cartoons. These [cartoons] of course were a tremendous improvement over what we had been watching" (Lentakis 2005, 58, my emphasis).

Despite the fascist Italian regime's intentions for cinema as propaganda, it seems that, along with other Italian legacies in Addis Ababa, it had a greater impact on furthering the modernising mission by reaching more urban and rural audiences. Lacking the financial commitment to set up a local film industry in Ethiopia and due to the

[32] There have been similar analyses of African responses to colonial cinema particularly in relation to the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (Sanogo 2011).

popularity and cost-effectiveness of Hollywood films compared to the relatively small size of the Italian film industry, the Italians opted to screen a majority of American films (Ben-Ghiat 2015). These films, as a result, had a greater influence on Ethiopian society than did Italian films. It is perhaps the influences rooted in American materialist society, deemed immoral and 'un-Ethiopian', which dominated the understanding of cinema within the Ethiopian cultural imagination in the years which followed.

After Haile Selassie returned from exile in 1941, cinema and the Italian controlled distribution and exhibition structures suffered near-collapse as it was no longer supported by state sponsors. Furthermore, in 1943 proclamation No. 37 was passed and became the Entertainments Censorship law which granted government legal power to censor and collect fees from films and theatrical works. The two main criteria by which censors judged works were "public security and decency" (Reta 2013, 158). Cinema in Ethiopia was, once again, left to private, business-minded foreigners who had to forge links with global distribution circuits. Despite cinemas being run by foreigners, tickets became much more affordable which helped sustain a strong Ethiopian cinemagoing culture and is reflected in the previous Italianised names quickly replaced with Ethiopian ones, for example Cinque Majo (situated in the building now occupied by the AAU Science Faculty) became Cinema Ijersa Gorro whilst M. Edo (the first proprietor of Cinema Empire) returned Supercinema Teatro Italia to Cinema Ethiopia (AACHA 2007). M. Edo later left for Djibouti, leaving the cinema in the hands of Djibouti nationals Hussein Kassim and his son Nadin, who continued to screen films from 1949, whilst Cinema Empire was administered by Armenian nationals until 1966 when an Italian couple from Asmara took over the cinema's management (AACHA 2007, 40). The Cinema Marconi, which had been planned by the Italians, was later completed in 1955 by Haile Selassie's administration to mark the Emperor's silver jubilee, and named Haile Selassie I Theatre (changed to the Ethiopian National Theatre in 1974), predominantly used for theatre and the promotion of Ethiopian music (and today a popular venue for film premieres). The other major cinematic spaces built during Haile Selassie's reign were the 1,447 seater Ambassador Theatre, Cinema Addis Ketema, Cinema Addis Alem and Drive-in Theatre (Ethiopian Film Corporation 1986/7). The renovated Hager Fiker Theatre (1954) and other theatres primarily hosted stage plays but on occasion also screened films (AACHA 2007). By 1978 there were eight permanent built cinemas operating in Addis Ababa with seven operating throughout other large urban Ethiopian centres (with an extra seven in operation in Asmara); all of

these cinemas screened popular American and Indian films, and to a lesser extent Egyptian and European films (Warren and Warren 1978).

The Early History of Film Production in Ethiopia

It was only during the 1960s that feature film production began within Ethiopia. Prior to this, newsreels and documentaries were shot predominantly by European cameramen travelling in Ethiopia; the earliest on record was shot by Ralph P. Cobbold in 1901 (Haars *et al.* 2014). Other reels by international film crews from British Pathé and Italian Instituto LUCE (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa) were produced in high numbers in the 1920/30s with a few Italian feature films in the late 1930s partly shot in Ethiopia/Eritrea.[33] The important Soviet documentary *Abissinija* (1935/6) was also shot around this time by Vladimir Yeshurin and Boris Zeitlin of Soyuzkino Chronika, depicting Fascist Italian war atrocities, including a mustard gas attack and its victims and the bombing of a Red Cross field hospital, while also capturing an Italian bomber falling at Kakala.

The first Ethiopian produced feature length film was, *ሂሩት አባቷ ማነው? - Hirut, abatwa mannew?/Hirut, who is her father?*, produced by Ilala Ibsa and directed by the Ethiopian-born Greek director Lambros Jokaris in 1964 (see Figure 5). The film tells the story of a rural girl's journey to Addis Ababa in search of her father and her consequential employment and life as a prostitute, trapped in the Ethiopian capital (Ilala [1956 E.C.] 1964). Lambros Jokaris, in partnership with Ilala Ibsa, established the National Film and Publicity Company, which was forced to cease its activities after the distribution of *Hirut* due to bankruptcy and the company's inabilities to repay the debts it incurred in producing the film (Bonnano 2003). The film's high costs stemmed from the hiring of a foreign technical film crew and post-production being carried out in Italy. *Hirut*, however, was hugely popular within Ethiopia (its only known area of distribution), being seen by an estimated 100,000 people (Warren and Warren 1978).

[33] Some of these films were: *Il grande appello* (1936), *Sentinelle di bronzo* (1937), *Sotto la Croce del Sud* (1938) *Luciano Serra pilota* (1938), *Abuna Messias* (1939) and *Piccoli naufraghi* (1939). These films often featured long shots of local peoples as well as the landscapes of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Despite many major characters being performed in blackface, the Ethiopian actress, Birke Zeytu-Telke, played a major role in *Abuna Messias*.

Figure 5. Original posters for *Hirut* (screenshots from the documentary *Tizitachen BeEBS*. Season 1, Ep 9, "Cinema Ethiopia").

The lack of production facilities and trained technical staff in the country began to change with the introduction of television in 1964 as it fostered technological infrastructure investments and training opportunities (Reta 2013). Haile Selassie used these developments to promote Ethiopia as a location for foreign film productions in the 1970s, culminating in a mixture of disparate, foreign feature films partly or fully shot in the country. There was the epic *Una stagione all'inferno/A Season in Hell* (1971), depicting French poet, Arthur Rimbaud's later life in Ethiopia with Debebe Eshetu playing Menelik II (Figure 6). Debebe also features with Zewditu Asla in the surreal murder-mystery, shot completely in Ethiopia, called *Afrika* (1973). Debebe plays a crucial supporting role in *Shaft in Africa* (1973) which also prominently features Addis Ababa and the Ethiopian highlands. *Shaft in Africa* proved to be a big hit in cinemas throughout Ethiopia despite Haile Selassie walking out half way through its Ethiopian premiere due to perceived obscenities. Roughly a third of Pier Paolo Pasolini's critically acclaimed *Il fiore delle Mille e una note/Arabian Nights* (1974) was shot in Eritrea. Apart from *Shaft*, it is unlikely any of these other aforementioned films were screened in Ethiopia. Instead it seems that Haile Selassie was keen to promote Ethiopia as a location for foreign films to maintain Ethiopia's mythical image but also for economic gain. Indeed, many of these films cultivate a representation of Ethiopia to outsiders as a land of mythical beauty steeped in exoticism.

Figure 6. Debebe Eshetu as Menelik II in *Una stagione all'inferno* (screenshot).

The second Ethiopian-made feature film, Michel Papatakis' *ጉማ - Gumma/Blood Money* (1974), also featuring Debebe Eshetu, was a popular success in Ethiopia, billed as the first Ethiopian colour film (Figure 7). The film, set in rural Ethiopia, follows the story of a young man who, after accidentally killing his closest friend, is condemned to forfeit his life to the bereaved family. In keeping with tradition, he sets out in search of "blood money" in order to compensate the family for the loss of their son. The technical aspects of the film's production, and the post-production of the film were carried out by Europeans, highlighting the lack of professionally trained film personnel in the country at the time. Emperor Haile Selassie himself was in attendance at the film's première with the film positively received due to its exploration of Ethiopian traditions.

Michel Papatakis was amongst the first of three generations of Ethiopian film professionals to train in the Soviet Union, whilst Solomon Bekele Weya, maker of the short film *Rotten Existence* (1968) and who became prolific in this period, was trained in France. After Haile Selassie was toppled in 1974 by the Communist Derg regime, cinema again became a key tool of state propaganda. Unlike under the Italian occupation, however, the Derg regime nationalised all aspects of the film industry, showing a commitment to produce their own films from within Ethiopia. The Minister of Culture, Desta Tadessa, one of the few Moscow-trained film professionals in the country, established the Film Development and Control Board[34] (FDCB) within the Ministry of Culture and Sports Affairs in 1976 (Abebe Beyene, interview, 2014, July

[34] This is an English interpretation by the author of the Amharic name: ፊልም ማዳበሪያና መቆጣጠሪያ ዋና ክፍል.

28). The FDCB was created solely for propaganda purposes; it sponsored personnel to be trained abroad and focused primarily on screening documentaries in the cinemas throughout the country. The first and only major project to be completed by the FDCB was the 16mm colour docu-drama, *3002: Wondimu's Memories* (1976), directed by Teferi Bizuayehu who, like Desta, was trained in the Soviet Union. The film was made in homage to the 1974 revolution and was the first fully Ethiopian-made film (in terms of crew and funding).[35]

Figure 7. A poster for *Gumma*.

The Derg's rise to power brought about strict censorship, for a time banning all foreign films apart from a few Russian films such as the romantic Russian/Japanese co-production *Moscow My Love* (1974) playing at Ambassador Theatre in 1974. The ban, however, spelt financial disaster for cinemas as attendance numbers plummeted. After meeting with film importers, the Derg quickly lifted the ban[36] which opened up cinemas to American and Indian films again whilst Hong Kong Kung-Fu films also arrived (Dilalew 2008). Despite this U-turn, the Derg maintained strict censorship aimed at rejecting and restricting films that depicted criminal acts, strong violence, subversive political messages and debauchery (Shah 2007). The Soviet influence was also

[35] *3002* was also shown at Festac'77 enabling Teferi Bizuayehu to escape the Red Terror purge, carried out by Mengistu Hayle-Mariam, killing political opposition in the country including Desta Tadessa and his family (see Cowcher 2018). Teferi Bizuayehu was granted asylum in the United Kingdom.
[36] The first film to be screened after the ban was lifted was the 1973 Hindi film *Bobby*, which opened to a full house in Cinema Ethiopia and reinvigorated cinemagoing in Ethiopia (Shah 2007).

maintained as cinemas such as Ambassador Theatre held Soviet film weeks during which classic soviet films were shown such as *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) headlining a 1979 event.

The tight controls the Derg maintained over cinema signalled Ethiopia's participation in the Cold War iconography and reinforced the Soviet Union's attempts to create a 'socialist cinema', which had the effect of promoting Ethiopian films on a global stage. The Ethiopian Film Centre was established in 1978 which moved the FDCB's centre of operations to Ambassador Theatre, creating an institution entirely dedicated to film production for the first time in Ethiopian history (Ethiopian Film Corporation 1986/7). The Ethiopian Film Centre was equipped with both production and post-production equipment with the final editing and printing of film completed in London (Abebe Beyene, interview, 2014, July 28). The Film Centre produced around 24 documentaries including Michel Papatakis' feature documentary *ትግል ዶል ፥ ዶል ትግል - Tiggil Dil, Dil Tiggil/Struggle Victory, Victory Struggle* (1978) which was awarded "the honorary diploma of the 11th International Film Festival in Moscow" (Nikolayeva 1986, 158).

Later, in 1986, the Ethiopian Film Corporation was established, adding feature film production to its mandate, whilst also gaining full post-production capabilities, apart from the printing of films which was still carried out in London (Abebe Beyene. interview, 2014, July 28). By the mid-1980s, the Derg claimed to have allocated around forty-nine million Ethiopian Birr (around twenty-eight million US Dollars according to the 1986 exchange rate) to film production, distribution and exhibition, of which nineteen million birr was spent on capital expenditure (around eleven million USD) (Ethiopian Film Corporation 1986/7). This high spending is evidence of the regime's strong commitment to the production and power of films with around forty short/medium length documentaries made and twenty-five cinemas operating in the country (Ethiopian Film Corporation 1986/7, 19).

Only three feature length productions, however, were produced by the Ethiopian Film Corporation since its establishment in 1986 until its liquidation in 1999. These films were, *በህይወት ዙሪያ - Behiywet Zuriya/Around Life* (1989), which was adapted by Birhanu Shibiru from an Ethiopian television drama tracing the tragic life of its

protagonist, Almaz[37] and አስቴር - *Aster* (1992) by Solomon Bekele Weya. *Aster*, like *Behiywet Zuriya* is a family drama that follows the ordeals of a female protagonist (Aster). When Aster's relationship turns abusive it forces her to take drastic measures in order to escape. *Aster* is often noted as being the first truly Ethiopian-made fictional feature film as the cast and crew were all Ethiopian nationals (Fikadu 2013). Both *Aster* and *Behiywet Zuriya* were screened in cinemas and widely popular throughout Ethiopia (Abebe Beyene. interview, 2014, July 28). The third feature film, ፈረንጅ - *Ferenj/European Foreigner*, a co-production by the Ethiopian Film Corporation and a French production company known as Medaco is more obscure. Little is written about the film apart from the fact that it is a 35mm bilingual (French and Amharic) colour film starring two of the most prolific, early Ethiopian stage actresses, Asnakech Werku and Nigatwa Kelkay (Fikadu 2013, 185). Again the film centered on the life of Arthur Rimbaud and his life in Harar, but was never screened in Ethiopia.

The Video/Digital Revolution

Foreign films have featured prominently on television since the formation of Ethiopian Television (ETV) in 1964. During Haile Selassie's reign, a slot in the daily service, which aired for roughly six hours every evening, was dedicated to foreign films mostly from America (Reta 2013). During the first eight years of the Derg regime, however, all Western films were banned, at which point films from the USSR were featured prominently (Reta 2013). As these films were often documentaries and in foreign languages Reta states that the majority of the "Ethiopian audience could not relate to them" (2013, 205). In order to combat this, ETV produced local dramas and programs which proved popular successes and were key to the development of production technicians trained on-the-job (Reta 2013). Reta also notes that the demand for films was finally realised when the Derg regime lifted an embargo on the import of certain films from the West "that were not considered subversive to the mission of the revolution", these films along with the Soviet films made up 37 percent of the daily service's airtime (Reta 2013, 204). The high profile of foreign films featured in the daily programming of ETV is evidence of the strong demand and high exposure Ethiopian television audiences had to foreign films since the establishment of ETV.

[37] The plot follows the life of Almaz who throws her husband, Abebe, out onto the streets after she finds out he is having multiple affairs. Just when Almaz's life is beginning to improve, after she starts a relationship with a lawyer, tragedy befalls her family.

The advent of analogue video-technologies in Ethiopia in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the consequential successful distribution of pirated Hollywood and Bollywood films on VHS for rent, or for screening in informal video-viewing houses, created infrastructural and economic incentives for local video producers. As in other African contexts around the same time, local video and music distributors saw the economic potential of locally produced and commercially orientated video films (Garritano 2013; Larkin 2008; Haynes 2007, 2016). First attempts at local video film production were typically the recording of stage productions, such as *የክትነሽ - Yekitnesh* by Wibshit Werk-Alemahu with one of the first video features, *መሰናክል - Mesenakil/The Obstacle* by Abreham Tsegaye and his theatre group *አፍለኛው ቲያትር - Afleññaw Tiyatir/The Prime of Life Theatre* in 1982 E.C. (1989/90). The early development of video film production, therefore, in some aspects similarly mirrors events in Nigeria, mentioned by Karin Barber (2003) and Biodun Jeyifo (1984), with many of the first Yoruba video filmmakers drawing inspiration from theatre.

Local video film features in Ethiopia, like in Ghana and Nigeria had low production values, but many proved to be relatively well made[38] due to collaborations with trained television and celluloid film professionals, who had gained experience working under the Derg regime. Tesfaye Sinke, for example, was trained under the Ethiopian Film Corporation and directed the 1985 documentary *አዲስ አበባ - Addis Ababa* and then later directed one of the earliest video films, *ፀፀት - Tsetset/Remorse* that was premiered in Addis Ababa in 1990/91 (and later toured America in 1993/1994). Perhaps more well-known was the transition from celluloid to video film production (and then ultimately to TV) made by Birhanu Shibiru, director of the aforementioned *በሀይወት ዙሪያ - Behiywet Zuriya/Around Life* (1989) under the Ethiopian Film Corporation and then later with his video feature *የሞት ፍቅር - Yemot Fiker/Death's Love* (1996/97). Birhanu Shibiru later moved into television, working on the highly acclaimed popular drama *ገመና - Gemena/Family Confidences* first airing in 2009, spanning almost two years and often credited for raising the status of television production in Ethiopia and nurturing the careers of many successful film and TV professionals.

[38] Many thematically interesting video films were made in the 1990s such as Demere Tsigie's, *የነቀዘች ሀይወት - Yenekezech Hiywet/Her Worn-Out Life* (1998); Tesfaye Mamo's, *ፍቅር መጨረሻ - Fiker Mechеresha/The Edge of Love* (1994); Abreham Tsegaye's, *የጀንበር ጥላ - Yejenber Tila/The Sun's Shadow* (1994) and *የልብ ቀለበት - Yelib Kelebet/The Heart's Ring* (1996); Kidist Bayeliñ's, *ሀይወት እንደዋዛ - Hiywet Indewaza/A Life Not Taken Seriously* (1998) and Beminabu Kebede's, *ፍዳ - Fidda/Recompense* (1999).

The aforementioned film actor of the 1970s, Debebe Eshetu also made his own foray into filmmaking with his 1996 video film ሥጋ ያጣ መንፈስ - *Siga Yata Menfes/Bodiless Spirit* written by Demere Tsigie who has since established himself as both a screenwriter and director of many notable Amharic films.[39] *Siga Yata Menfes* most markedly features an indomitable performance by the renowned *krar* player, actress and cultural personality Asnekech Worku, with the film also enjoying a tour of America. The period immediately after the fall of the Derg in 1991, however, meant that a vacuum appeared in film funding and training with the biggest formal training institution, the Ethiopian Film Corporation, formally dissolved in 1999. The few private training institutes that emerged in the following years (such as Tom Photography and Videography Training Centre and Master Films and Communication) only gave short courses on a few technical aspects of filmmaking, typically directing, lighting and camera operating leaving young aspiring Ethiopia filmmakers no access to full-time technical film training programmes and reliant on filming weddings for their livlehoods.

During this time cinemas suffered and even closed, with licensing stipulations forbidding anything other than 35mm film screenings in cinemas, forcing cinemas to continually screen old celluloid Hollywood and Bollywood films (apart from the occasional premiere of locally produced video films which needed explicit government approval). There was, instead, a proliferation of cheap, one-birr-per-head video-viewing houses across Addis Ababa and other urban centres in Ethiopia which became instantly popular with the ever-growing numbers of rural migrants into the cities, on top of an already large population of poor, largely male urban youth (Dilalew 2008). The Addis Ababa Trade and Tourism Bureau, charged with granting licenses to video-houses, estimated that in the early 1990s there were roughly 250[40] such places. These video-viewing houses showed a wide range of films, from freely pirated local productions to pirated Hollywood and Bollywood films, as well as accommodating the sudden influx of pornography in the country. In the face of the video-viewing houses and the licensing stipulation preventing screening VHS and DVDs in the cinemas, locally made video-productions and cinemas struggled for economic viability unless they had implicit

[39] As well as writing and directing the video film የነቀዘች ህይወት - *Yenekezech Hiywet/Her Worn-Out Life* (1998) and more recently ሰደት - *Sidet/Exile* (2007) and አብስትራክት - *Abstract* (2015) Demere also wrote ጉዲፈቻ - *Gudifecha/Adoption* (2002) and ንጉስ ናሁሴናይ - *Nigus Nahusenay/King Nahusenay* (2006) among others.

[40] This number was recorded at 98 in 2008 due to forced closures for a myriad of offences such as not paying taxes. The government's crack-down on video-houses instead of cinemas may have also had an influence on the subsequent rejuvenation of cinemagoing in the country (Dilalew 2008).

government support (Tesfaye 2006).[41] Even when regional governments gave permission for certain films to be screened, as with Tesfaye Mamo's *ፍቅር መጨረሻ - Fiker Mechereshа/The Edge of Love* (1994), the lack of state funding and relatively low penetration of VHS players threw up more obstacles for local filmmakers.

The licensing stipulation which prohibited screening video or digital films in the cinema was lifted in 2002 after a few early successful screenings of films by filmmakers who successfully lobbied the government. Particularly notable is the 2002 releases of Tewodros Teshome's, *ቀዝቃዛ ወላፈን - Kezkaza Welafen/Cold Flame* and Tatek Tadesse's *ጉዲፈቻ - Gudifecha/Adoption* (2002) which proved to be the first significantly commercially successful locally made film, ushering in the first boom period in the local film industry and an era of *yefiker film* melodramas. The success of such films spurred cinemagoing in Addis Ababa in particular, with government-owned cinemas screening local productions (relegating foreign films to the most unpopular morning show-times, if shown at all), progressively reconfiguring the cinematic experience in Ethiopia towards popular local digital film productions in Amharic.

Due to the re-birth of the Ethiopian film industry and the industry's hostile stance towards piracy (which it sees as being associated with the video-viewing houses), built cinemas presented the most legitimate space for screening features. The industry in Ethiopia therefore preferred cinematic (or theatrical) releases aimed at a narrower demographic (the growing urban middle classes, both male and female). This is unlike the mostly straight-to-video distribution models adopted in equivalent film industries in other parts of Africa, such as in Nigeria and Ghana.[42] After the success of the early *yefiker film* genre (melodramatic in narrative and style) that often revolved around the dilemmas of love in urban families, the *assikiñ yefiker film* (romantic comedy) genre has also become notably prevalent in recent years. The large patronage attributed to romantic comedies has developed, in part, due to an increasing number of cinemagoers hailing from the younger generations of the growing urban middle class, including prominent numbers of females.

[41] In the early 2000s the cinema business in Addis Ababa was deteriorating to such an extent that there were only four cinemas in operation – all of them were state-run (although at this time theatres such as Hager Fikir, Ras Theatre and the Addis Ababa City Hall would also occasionally screen films).
[42] Although recently these industries are also preferring theatrical releases due to problems of piracy (Haynes 2014).

It is necessary here to emphasise the commercially-oriented structure of the contemporary Ethiopian (Amharic language) film industry. Interestingly cinemas assert a lot of power due to each private cinema having its own selection committee which are in turn often "criticized for their lack of transparency" (Jedlowski 2015, 177). Due to the romantic comedy genre being regarded as a blueprint for commercial success, cinema proprietors as well as producers, scriptwriters and directors are made acutely aware of the economic risks involved in experimenting with other themes and genres (Jedlowski 2015). Haynes' statement about Nollywood, that "individualizing a film takes both time and money, complicating a system that works fast because everybody knows what to do" (2011, 74) resonates with many Ethiopian experiences of film production in the mid-2000s, highlighting the significance of genre to the industry. More recently, however, this trend has begun to shift as a greater variety of genres emerges and as groups of artistically committed and driven filmmakers (such as Yidnekachew Shumete, Paulos Regassa, Kidist Yilma, Sewmahon Yismaw, Abraham Gezahegn and Hermon Hailay amongst others) achieve critical acclaim for their features. Many filmmakers also offset the commercial risk of the film industry by profiting from documentary filmmaking funded by the many NGOs that operate in Ethiopia and by making television commercials.

Adding to the increased visibility of the Ethiopian film industry has been the creation of the Gumma Film Awards in 2014 and other similar film awards since. These film awards, often funded by wealthy benefactors and lacking in transparency, celebrate the industry by recognising and nurturing an Addis Ababa centred star-system. The Gumma Film Awards, in particular, also helps raise awareness of cinema's history in the country by distinguishing pioneers of Ethiopian cinema with the Lifetime Achievement award, which in 2014 was given to Michel Papatakis, in 2015 went to the aforementioned actor, Debebe Eshetu and in 2016 went to one of the first female film actresses, Askale Ameneshewa. The growing media attention and wider public interest in Ethiopian productions are further fuelling the industry with new television shows now dedicated to reviewing new film releases as well as a couple of television documentaries discussing the significance of certain aspects of the film industry. Furthermore the proliferation of film festivals in the country is also a sign of the increasing awareness and interest in issues relating to film and the role films can play within society.

Chasing Shadows: Piecing Together a History of Films Projected in Ethiopia

Hollywood films and genres were popular in Ethiopian cinemas since the time of the Fascist Italian occupation up until the commercial Amharic industry properly established itself in the early 2000s. As well as Hollywood films, Bollywood films proved popular in Ethiopian cinemas over the decades, with Cinema Ethiopia building its contemporary reputation on being the only cinema to show Indian films on their first run in the country. Cinema Ethiopia primarily screened Indian films up until the early 2000s, with the Indian importer of Bollywood films in Ethiopia, Ramendra Harjivan Shah (2007), explaining that both young and old were drawn to films such as *Mother India* (1957), *Gunga Jumna* (1961), *Waqt* (1965), *Aradhana* (1969), *Don* (1978), *Laawaris* (1981) and *Disco Dancer* (1982). Shah recalls the popularity of these films was such that the security forces had to be called in occasionally to stave off the swathes of crowds trying to enter the cinema (Shah 2007). As in Tanzania, Bollywood films were as popular as, if not more popular than, Hollywood films (Fair 2010). If the popularity of martial arts films from China in the late 80s and 90s is also taken into account it can be noted that there has not simply been an "Americanization" (Zeleza 2003) in Ethiopia and Africa but multiple cultural influences from both within Africa and further afield which prompts deeper investigations into the cultural hybridity of films and the cultures they represent.

Although new privately-run cinemas were quickly established in Ethiopia and screened only Amharic films, access to Hollywood and Bollywood productions did not disappear overnight and indeed films are still readily available through satellite television and through hawkers selling pirated versions on the street. It is, however, difficult to ascertain the full extent of how foreign films influence the Ethiopian context and so are drawn upon as comparative segues where relevant in this thesis. Many popular filmmakers echo director and scriptwriter Behailu Wassie's words when he explains: "when I watch Hollywood films I am not surprised by their ideas, but what amazes me is that they make the film into a puzzle with many complex narrative strands. It shows how far they are going, and some youngsters aspire to make films like [Martin] Scorsese or [Quentin] Tarantino and I respect this, but mine are simple in structure and aim to communicate a clear message" (Behailu Wassie, interview, 2016, March 8). Conversely, other filmmakers such as Henok Ayele (interview, 2016, February 11) and Yidnekachew Shumete (interview, 2016, March 3) cite Hollywood films, and to a lesser

extent Bollywood films (for example Mikael Million [interview, 2016, February 15]) as sources of inspiration and contributing factors for their involvement in the industry.

I will now explore in a bit more depth the foreign films that played to Ethiopian cinemagoers from the 1950s up to the 2000s in order to position following discussions of an Ethiopian-style melodrama and the system of Amharic film genres in relation to both local and global imaginaries. As the research did not unearth any records or box office receipts of films exhibited during this time period, here I piece together a rough history, chasing the shadows of past projections and garnering information from interviews with filmmakers and by interpreting how cinema was written about in popular Amharic novels of the past as a form of reception analysis.

Writing in the late 1970s for the journal *Horn of Africa*, Herrick and Anita Warren (1978) explain that cinemas in Ethiopia "all showed American, European, Egyptian and Indian films. The patterns of film distribution are quite inflexible and are not open to innovation. The particular distribution circuit of which Ethiopia is part, originated in Europe" (57). Although they do not mention which films have been shown the Warrens cite an Addis Ababa cinemagoer as complaining that foreign educated Ethiopians like him were "starving for good movies…*serious* movies…but we cannot ever hope to see them in the theaters" (1978, 57). It seems that genre films were the most common films to be screened, the Warrens mention in particular a well-known exhibitor depending on "American adventure films" (1978, 57).

Photographic evidence from renowned photojournalist Alfred Eisenstaedt's 1935 and 1955 visits to Ethiopia support the notion that mainly genre films were shown in these periods. In his 1935 photos we see the *yeseytan bet* (Pathé Cinema) and two separate films advertised in French alluding to the cinema's inclusion in a French distribution network (see Figures 3 and 8.). The films advertised are the "thrill" comedy *Never Weaken* (1921) starring Harold Lloyd and the science fiction film *Midstream* (1929). These posters in French may well have played a role in cementing, and indeed a conscious advertising strategy to play on the cinema's association with fear, thrills and the work of the devil, particularly as *Midstream*'s French title is *A Moi… Satan!* (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Outside Pathé Cinema (*yeseytan bet*) in 1935 (Alfred Eisenstaedt/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images).

Film posters photographed outside Cinema Ethiopia by Eisenstaedt in 1955 advertise the screenings of the crime dramas/film noirs *Three Steps North* (1951) and *Dramma nella Kasbah/The Man From Cairo* (1953), and the Italian melodrama *Noi peccatori/We, Sinners* (1953), these films feature strong Italian connections and are an indication of the links many exhibitors and distributors still had with Italy after the occupation. The adventure/action films, *Bengal Brigade* (1954), *The Bandit of Sherwood Forest* (1941) and *Captain Video, Master of the Stratosphere* (1951) also appear in these photos each representing the various spectrums of the adventure/action genre, respectively a swashbuckler picture, war movie and a sci-fi film. Another image depicts an Egyptian musical diffuse with melodramatic tendencies called *Habayibi kthyr/Much-Loved* (1951) (see Figure 9), with all of these images supporting the claims made by the Warrens that genre films, particularly action and crime dramas/film noirs and even musicals were the norm.

Figure 9. Outside Cinema Ethiopia in 1955 (Alfred Eisenstaedt/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images).

Many references to Hollywood films and actors are made within a multitude of Amharic novels throughout the twentieth century. The most prevalent response to Hollywood films in these novels is a moralistic and didactic one, viewing romantic and social elements in American films as being in conflict with traditions in Ethiopian society, and displaying a particular anxiety around the influences of Hollywood in down-town Addis Ababa and on the Ethiopian youth. In the novel መሰላል - *Meselal/Ladder*, by Mengistu Gedamu ([1959 E.C.] 1966/7), the young protagonist El-Tex (whose name alludes to Texas, a setting synonymous with cowboys and westerns) imitates the Hollywood stars in both his mannerisms and dress after frequenting the cinema situated in the "በረሃ - *bereha*" (the nickname of the area where the red-light district in Addis used to be). El-Tex is depicted as an honest but unpatriotic man who becomes corrupted by his American experiences. Filled with self-importance after returning from studying in America and after marrying an English woman, El-Tex turns his wife into a "ladder" in order to use her wealth and connections to get ahead, with the novel critiquing the way Ethiopians take advantage of foreigners and foreign ideas for their own ends.

A similar image is conjured by the novel *ሴተኛ አዳሪ/Seteñña Adari/Prostitute* (1962), with prostitutes such as "Lete'igzre changing her name to Liz […] saying it's from the great American cinema actress, Elizabeth Taylor" and "mimicking the lives and looks of actresses" (Inanu Agonafir 1962, 31). The female narrator whose circumstances have forced her into prostitution also describes the more experienced women having learnt English from the cinema. When these women accompany their female friends to the cinema, it is their ability to interpret the films which prove to be "the light in the dark" (32), with experienced filmgoers enlightening their less experienced companions. These novels give a strong sense of the effect that Hollywood films had on people at the time, encouraging "middle-class aspirations" and inspiring cinemagoers "to imagine themselves as international, bourgeois subjects – stylishly dressed, well-spoken, and, most importantly, modern", not unlike the effect that they had on South African audiences of the same era (Dovey and Impey 2010, 60). The cinema is often noted to be particularly popular amongst groups of young women, both today and in the past, with lessons of love, emancipation of youth and the modern, cutting edge fashion styles of Hollywood attracting them (Fantu 2016). However, it was these same ideological themes of Western individualism, consumer capitalism and raw carnal desire, innate in the ideology of Hollywood's melodramatic imagination, which proved controversial when films were exported to places such as Ethiopia and perceived as propagating forms of moral impoverishment and spiritual desolation.

Where Hollywood films often polarised opinions in Ethiopia, Bollywood films proved successful in drawing together larger and more diverse audiences across generational, ethnic, religious and class divides (Shah 2007). The Ethiopian filmmaker, writer, director and actor Mikael Million states how Bollywood films inspired him to become involved in making films, particularly referring to the "human and moral messages" the films convey (Mikael Million, interview, 2016, February 15). The theme of love in society, represented by Bollywood films from the 1950s onwards, was dealt with differently to Hollywood films of the same era, positioning the extended family as key to any narrative resolution with youths ultimately convincing older generations of the virtues of marrying for love (Fair 2009). Instead of a flagrant disregard for (or even absence of) parents and the family, as often seen in Hollywood films of the era, Bollywood films shown in Ethiopia resonated with the moral, cultural and perhaps most importantly spiritual sensitivities of both Orthodox Christian and Muslim Ethiopia.

Despite many Ethiopians not being familiar with Hinduism, the religion was often read as a traditional element in films as opposed to the 'Westernisation' and secularisation represented by Hollywood. Major Bollywood themes, such as generational struggles, class divisions and a changing conception of love (Nandy 1998; Dwyer 2000; Vasudevan 2000) crucially reflected issues experienced in Ethiopian society. As Laura Fair notes when explaining the popularity of Bollywood in Zanzibar: "Indian films addressed global generational tensions, yet resolved them in ways that affirmed local moral codes" (2009, 66). These observations are similar to what Brian Larkin notes in Hausa society where Bollywood is favoured over Hollywood as the "images of modernity they [Indian films] offer are mediated through a concern for maintaining traditional social relations and so they run parallel to, similar yet different from, the modernity offered by westernization" (1997, 433). That being said, Cinema Ethiopia was still screening the moralising Hollywood romantic comedy *A Blast from the Past* (1999) alongside the Bollywood "action" (*Times of India* 2016) film *Chamku* (2008) in 2015 (Fantu 2016). It is particularly action films or romantic comedies/dramas from Hollywood and Bollywood that are screened in the morning slots of the three government-run cinemas while the Matti Multiplex continues to run a successful business on screening recent Hollywood blockbusters. These Hollywood films, however, only take up part of the screening schedule for this three-screened multiplex with an Amharic film also usually showing on screen 2 or 3. The fact that Amharic films compete with Hollywood films in the most expensive and American-like cinema in Ethiopia points to the popularity of the local commercial industry in the country. It is these commercially oriented Amharic films, which have emerged into a distinct system of genres that capture the imaginations of most Ethiopian cinemagoers in Addis Ababa as they borrow from global film genres and local sources that this thesis shall discuss in depth in the following chapters.

Conclusion

As this historical overview has mapped out, cinema occupies a complex and unsettled position within the Ethiopian social and cultural imagination. The numerous regimes that have governed the country from the late nineteenth century up until the present have all been acutely aware of the power of cinema. In Ethiopia, as in most countries throughout the world, the debate concerning the position of cinema in society and its role in the country's culture has been highly contested since cinematic technology was introduced under Menelik II. Alternate regimes have presided over differing strategies

concerning the control of cinema, ranging from heavy state intervention and strict censorship (as during the Italian occupation and Derg periods) to more nuanced relationships to cinema. Unlike in the common Euro-American trajectories of cinema emerging through commercial structures, the commercialisation of local film production in Ethiopia has only recently flourished. Instead, cinema (and in more general terms, media) has typically been valued by the state for propaganda purposes (Reta 2013; Gagliardone 2011; Gartley 1997), further limiting the space for filmmakers to experiment. Even more interestingly for future studies, are two somewhat separate phenomena:[43] the ever expanding catalogue of film festival films made (in the most part but not exclusively) by members of the Ethiopian diaspora; and filmmaking in other languages spoken in Ethiopia such as Oromo and Tigrinya. Both present interesting examples of filmmakers and films bridging apparent divides in artistic quality, cultural specificity and popularity (M.W. Thomas *et al*. 2018).

Following on from this historical narrative of cinema in Ethiopia, Chapter 2 turns to the issues of melodrama, exploring its relationship to cinema and modernity more broadly and similarly casting melodrama studies in an historical light in order to better ground the rest of this thesis in film theory. This theory importantly intervenes in the contemporary moment of the commercially viable Amharic film industry in Ethiopia, acting as a theoretical interlude where, upon continuation in Chapter 5 the structures of production, distribution, exhibition and consumption will be explored in detail and in light of the discussions on melodrama and genre in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

[43] "Separate," due to these films' lack of (as of 2017) commercial viability in Ethiopian cinemas.

CHAPTER 2

Film Studies and Melodrama

> Today we have begun to see melodrama as a kind of affective meme, a self-replicating pattern of sensation and feeling that moves successively from the surface of culture to the behavioral patterns of the body and mind. In this view, modern culture hasn't merely adopted melodrama, it has become melodramatic.
>
> Matthew Buckley (2018, 16)

For this thesis, an investigation into melodrama is pivotal in order to understand the fundamental melodramatic undercurrents across the genre system of commercial Amharic cinema. Melodramatic tendencies are often identified in a pejorative sense in the Ethiopian example, as exemplified in Lucy Gebre-Egziabher's (2006) early account of the first commercially successful Amharic films as characterised by "over-dramatic" acting, "filled with melodramatic music" (7). The pejorative nature ascribed to melodrama is also a common feature in Anglo-American film criticism since the post-war period as realism and the avant-garde were praised for their artistic integrity and credentials over the mass produced popular culture of commercial film industries such as Hollywood. The value of recent melodrama scholarship, however, has been its focus on historicising melodrama across different media in the diverse cultural contexts of an increasingly globalising world. As Annette Kuhn and Catherine Grant point out, "it is melodrama, or rather the melodramatic imagination, that emerges as the most pervasive, and most thoroughly scrutinized, of generic modalities across world cinemas" (2006, 7). This chapter explores ideas of melodrama as a genre in Film Studies, observed in relation to classic Hollywood cinema of the 1940s and 1950s, and how another trend emerged in the 1980s that saw melodrama as a transnational and transmedial dramatic mode tempered by processes of modernisation. In particular, a comprehensive account of melodrama scholarship is necessary here in order to contextualise and better analyse the Ethiopian case study in addressing "the failure in Film Studies to discuss the relationship between the melodramatic mode and genre" (Gledhill and Williams 2018, 5) and what may be meant by a "melodramatic imagination" (Brooks 1976).

Melodrama scholarship – like melodrama itself – has traditionally been relegated to the periphery in the arts and humanities. This was particularly the case in Film Studies as

the discipline sought to validate its own intellectual credentials in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A lack of interdisciplinary study during this period of academic legitimisation detached film melodrama from a prior focus on the topic in theatre studies (Gledhill 2018). As such, film melodrama became the subject of a narrow set of definitions that constrained it to the realms of a single genre, namely the 'family melodrama' of the 1940s and 1950s (Gledhill 2018). This formulation of melodrama was further developed by feminist film scholars who, in emphasising melodrama's emotional qualities, positioned this new genre as necessarily gendered by a women's culture responding to patriarchal control (Mulvey [1977/78] 1987). This focus, however, precluded considerations of melodrama's broader and more pervasive significance across commercial cinemas and their genre systems, and across gendered boundaries too.

In response, a more contemporary strand of melodrama criticism in Film Studies promotes an interdisciplinary approach strongly associated with the work of Peter Brooks in *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (1976). Building on Brooks' work, Michael Walker (1982), Christine Gledhill (1987) and Linda Williams (2001), amongst others, analyse how the term 'melodrama' has been used to identify the cross-generic conventions and features of Hollywood, denoting an "expressive mode of aesthetic articulation that shapes the operation of generic worlds" (Gledhill and Williams 2018, 5). Melodrama's cross-generic permutations in film were first noted by Thomas Elsaesser ([1972] 1987) as he characterised all silent-era film dramas as essentially melodramatic. Christine Gledhill (1987) then critiqued the use of melodrama in defining an explicitly gendered genre by harnessing similar arguments to describe supposedly 'male' genres *also* as melodramas, particularly the gangster film and western. In the boldest attempt to extrapolate what once was an established genre in Film Studies, Linda Williams (2001) has proposed melodrama as the dominant mode of commercialised American fiction, be it literature, theatre, film or television. In light of these two opposing strands in Film Studies, the following section traces the development of melodrama scholarship in order to understand the relationships between genre and melodrama.

Melodrama as Genre in Mainstream Film Studies

Melodrama became mainly conceived of in pejorative terms from the beginning of the twentieth-century until the 1960s when it was first granted serious consideration within

literary criticism and through the establishment of Theatre Studies. While research on theatre sought to reemphasise melodrama's widespread significance as a popular form (Booth 1965, Grimstead 1968), film criticism was conversely concerned with distancing itself from melodrama for fear of compromising the intellectual and artistic credentials of Film Studies. As a result, studies seeking to identify the authorial vision and style of directors such as Alfred Hitchcock and Howard Hawks attempted to validate Film Studies by reading the mise-en-scène of such popular films in a "humanist-realist tradition" (Gledhill 1987, 5) arguing for the cultural value of some films over and above melodramatic mass entertainment.

Stemming from earlier film research that focused on certain directors as auteurs, early studies on melodrama as a genre similarly identified a small group of films and their directors as epitomising the genre. The emergence of genre criticism (the subject of Chapter 4 of this thesis) in the late 1960s and early 1970s was largely in response to auteur studies, putting cinema in context as a popular and mass-produced medium. Within this research emerged a new critical focus on recovering melodrama as an identifiable genre as John Mercer and Martin Shingler explain how "[i]n much the same way that film scholars had defined and demarcated the genre of the 'western', film theorists and historians identified the constituent features of the Hollywood family melodrama, providing a credible form of generic categorisation" (2004, 9). This attempt to make melodrama credible by considering it as a genre in a narrow selection of films was summed up early on by David Morse:

> In general, melodrama is a term of little critical value; it has been so corrupted in common usage that to give it a more specific field of reference is a task which almost verges on the impossible. On the other hand, it ought to be attempted because of the important role that melodrama has played in American culture and because of the influence it has exercised over the American cinema. (1972, 16-17)

Immediately, here, Morse identifies both the wider implication of melodrama on American cinema and culture in general (discussed in the following section) and the scholarly impulse to reify the object of study.

A major point of reference for, and forerunner of, melodrama scholarship in Film Studies was Thomas Elsaesser's article, "Tales of Sound and Fury, Observations on the Family Melodrama" ([1972] 1987). Coining the term 'family melodrama', Elsaesser was the first to explicate melodrama through the films of Douglas Sirk, Vincente

Minelli and Nicholas Ray, establishing an auteur-based canon for future studies of the melodrama genre (Neale 2002). As with other film genre studies of this era (discussed in Chapter 4), Elsaesser focused his study on American experiences of film in Hollywood's studio era (1940s and 1950s) and employed a textual analysis of films by directors mentioned above, and particularly Sirk, to show how they harness a sophisticated aesthetic that destabilises bourgeois American ideology (see Elsaesser [1972] 1987, 53; 61-62). Concurrently, Elsaesser also historicises melodrama within theatrical and literary trends and genres of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe to explain how melodrama as a "mode of expression" ([1972] 1987, 43) *and* genre arose from eras marked by social ruptures.

Although Elsaesser's intervention led to a flurry of scholarship debating the Hollywood family melodrama, this same scholarship in the 1970s failed to engage seriously with Elsaesser's recognition of historical melodramatic forms in the theatre and novel. Subsequent accounts by Nowell-Smith ([1977] 1987), Kleinhans (1978) and Rodowick ([1982] 1987) among others, directly referenced and built on Elsaesser's genre-defining term, 'family melodrama', contributing to the mainstream definition of melodrama in Film Studies as a specific genre theoretically recognised by critics as attached to issues of ideology and class. Nowell-Smith ([1977] 1987), for example, draws on Elsaesser's work to place greater emphasis on establishing the radical, anti-realist potential of melodrama's stylistic excess. Focusing on the films of Minelli and Sirk, Nowell-Smith identifies a stylistic excess and overflow of the mise-en-scène in their films. The films of these directors were then read as epitomising melodrama as an ideological genre influenced by Marxist and Freudian thinking on class ideology and Oedipal conflict. Scholars influenced by such ideological thinking, therefore, used detailed textual analyses to understanding melodrama's excessive mise-en-scène (for example as overflowing with props) as a representation of the human psyche entrapped by the impulses of consumer society and thus causing a break from realist tendencies (Nowell-Smith [1977] 1987). In summing up the ideological approaches of Nowell-Smith and Elsaesser, Laura Mulvey highlights that their "argument depends on the premise that the project of this ideology is to conjure up a coherent picture of a world by concealing the incoherence caused by exploitation and oppression. In this view a text which defines unity and closure is quite clearly progressive" ([1977/78] 1987, 75). In response to this idea that melodrama harbours a covert ideological rupture identifiable only through

specialised textual analysis, Mulvey sees the genre as portraying openly feminist credentials.

The ideological orientations of film scholarship that theorised melodrama as a genre during this era was extended by the feminist work of Laura Mulvey. In her publication 'Notes on Sirk and Melodrama' in *Movie*, no. 25, Winter 1977/78 (and anthologised in 1987), Mulvey sees Sirk's melodrama of the 1950s as "a safety valve for ideological contradictions centred on sex and the family" as she delights in "dizzy satisfaction in witnessing the way that sexual difference under patriarchy is fraught, explosive and erupts dramatically into violence within its own private stamping ground, the family" ([1977/78] 1987, 75). This work investigated the affinity between gender and genre more acutely as Mulvey made distinctions between melodramas with male protagonists and by extension a male perspective; and those that harness a female point-of-view through female protagonists. As Gledhill explains, "where film theory saw in melodrama's exposure of masculinity's contradictions a threat to the unity of the (patriarchal) realist/narrative text, feminists found a genre distinguished by the large space it opened to female protagonists, the domestic sphere and socially mandated 'feminine' concerns" (1987, 10). This identification of melodrama with women and the previously ignored women's film (deemed Hollywood's simplest form), conflicted with the neo-Marxist investment in female characters in family melodramas as objects of a dominant patriarchy. Instead, for Mulvey there is a distinction to be made within the melodrama genre and even within Sirk's films produced at Universal, concerning women protagonists, and those produced by Albert Zugsmith that provide insights into "man as victim of patriarchal society" ([1977/78] 1987,77). Ultimately, then, Mulvey's gendered approach to melodrama further highlights melodrama's ideological implications in American society.

The construction of the family melodrama as a genre in Film Studies was considered sufficiently stable and demarcated in 1981 for Thomas Schatz to devote a chapter to it in his study entitled *Hollywood Genres*, along with the western, the gangster film and the musical, among others. According to John Mercer and Martin Shingler:

> Schatz's project was the consolidation of the research that had been carried out by a range of genre critics, theorists and historians, each of these genres having been well-researched and critically established by this time. His incorporation of a chapter on the family melodrama indicates that, for Schatz at least, by the early 1980s the family

> melodrama had the same kind of generic status within Film Studies as the western and the gangster film. (2004, 9)

Reconstituting melodrama as the "Hollywood family melodrama", here, Schatz set out a seemingly coherent history of the genre from the 1920s up to the 1960s as a hysterical text of excess building on the genre's ideological implications as proposed by Elsaesser, Nowell-Smith and Mulvey. The issue with Schatz's chapter, reflecting the scholarship on the family melodrama in general, was that the genre's analysis was overly concerned with, and dependent upon, films made in the 1950s and specifically those directed by Douglas Sirk. As such, Schatz concludes his discussion on the family melodrama in a curiously auteurist fashion by championing Sirk as the melodramatist *par excellence* (1981). Writing about Sirk in this manner led Schatz even to conclude that Sirk was in "style and attitude fundamentally at odds with many, if not most, of the other melodramatists" (1981, 246). Although Sirk's films were identified as exemplifying the genre, this idea was contradicted by the recognition of the unique and "complex genius" of Douglas Sirk as a director. For Schatz, the form and content of Sirk's films carry so much critical weight that they become representative of the family melodrama genre in general while also representing exceptional qualities that separate them from more standard Hollywood melodramas.

Whereas much genre criticism in the early 1970s was concerned with defining and grouping films into an identifiable taxonomy (as discussed in Chapter 4), the scholarship on melodrama was more concerned with commenting on its ideological implications for middle-class America. In his understanding of melodrama as a progressive genre, Nowell-Smith, for example, does not seem concerned with *what* exactly melodrama is, referring to "the genre or form that has come to be known as melodrama" ([1977] 1987, 70). Elsaesser also refers to melodrama as a genre *and* mode, with both scholars building their arguments around their dual definitions of the term. This meant that melodrama became an *assumed* genre not properly conceived in relation to industry definitions or as recognised by audiences. With reference to Rick Altman's ideas on film genres, such approaches lacked definitional credibility "because film genres are by definition not just scientifically derived or theoretically constructed categories, but are always industrially certified and publically shared" (1999, 16). These early works of scholarship on melodrama, nonetheless, helped establish some of the key tenets and films that are commonly referred to in mainstream Film Studies accounts of melodrama (Neale 2002).

Melodrama scholarship in the 1970s has had a lasting impact, giving rise to a standard account of melodrama as a genre in mainstream Film Studies. Thomas Schatz's chapter on the family melodrama affirmed the approaches and basic ideological assumptions of previous scholars. Assigning a privileged position to Douglas Sirk and his films from the 1950s in the pursuit of defining the Hollywood family melodrama as a genre, also ultimately led to Sirk being celebrated as the maestro of melodrama in general. Mercer and Shingler rightly point out that,

> [c]onsequently, Film Studies came to adopt a model of melodrama that, in many crucial ways, was actually set apart from other forms of popular film melodrama. It is important to remember that this model was determined by a specific set of interests, for example ideology, psychoanalysis and feminism. It is just as important to recognise that these interests influenced the way its key directors and films were adopted as representative of the genre as a whole. Had another set of interests prevailed at this time, different filmmakers and a different group of films would have been privileged, constituting a different model. (2004, 11-12)

Although Schatz's chapter on the Hollywood family melodrama neatly distils the scholarship on the genre from the 1970s, Elsaesser's work left open other pathways for research into historical accounts of melodrama in general and into the idea of melodrama as a 'mode'. Indeed, many questions remained unanswered by this 1970s melodrama scholarship, including: why is only the family melodrama characterised by excess and not other genres? Are choreographed action sequences, musical numbers, gripping suspense and slap-stick comedy routines any less excessive than family conflicts? If excessive melodramatic tendencies inform a range of genres then how can the family melodrama be seen as any more disruptive to a bourgeois ideology than any other? Equally, if the woman's film is characterised by having female protagonists and providing a female perspective, can films from other genres that also have female protagonists be classified as a woman's film under the rubrics of this melodrama? Locking melodrama down as only a genre overlooked broader understandings relating to its historical usage in theatre and as a pervasive cross-generic and cross-media dramatic *mode*. It is in later film research, building upon Elsaesser's earlier contribution, that scholars finally invoke an interdisciplinary account of melodrama, historicising film melodrama within modernity itself.

Melodrama as Mode

By the end of the 1970s, scholarship on film melodrama had reached an impasse. Paradoxically, Elsaesser's proposal of "two directions" ([1972] 1987, 43) for the study of melodrama had resulted in the establishment of a single standard definition of melodrama in Film Studies. Elsaesser himself noted that the pursuit of a second approach to melodrama was constrained by the unavailability of films and the fact that his was not a strict historical piece, effectively side-lining an investigation of melodrama as mode because "any discussion of the melodrama as a specific cinematic mode of expression has to start from its antecedents" ([1972] 1987, 43). The necessary recognition of melodrama as *mode* responds "to the manifold overflow of melodrama" (Zarzosa 2013, 20). This overflow of melodrama was first discussed in Film Studies by Elsaesser (1972) as he identified melodramatic traits across the genres of early Hollywood. Echoing Elsaesser's work, Brooks (1976) further historicised and identified melodramatic traits across mediums.

The most enduring attempt at a critical re-evaluation of melodrama was carried out by Peter Brooks in *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (1976). Although a work of literary and theatre criticism, Brooks coins the term 'melodramatic mode' in direct opposition to studies of melodrama as genre. He defines the melodramatic mode not "as a theme or set of themes, nor the life of the genre per se, but rather … as a mode of conception and expression, as a certain fictional system for making sense of experience, as a semantic force field" (Brooks 1976, xvii). According to Brooks, this melodramatic mode emerges as a consequence of the desacralisation of society in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution. This 'mode', therefore, attempts "to locate and to articulate the moral occult" (1976, 5), a modern secular belief system that replaces the sacred.

In grounding his study of the melodramatic mode in a specific place and time, Brooks' focus on a period in history after the French Revolution aided his explanation of the fiction of two French novelists instead of melodrama more broadly. Consequentially, the positioning of melodrama as emerging in revolutionary France has come to colour "the whole of the melodramatic spectrum with the specific qualities of one of its historical manifestations, turning the question about the persistence of melodrama into a question about the cultural transposition of an eminently European form" (Zarzosa 2013, 24). This has resulted in melodrama's diverse cultural permutations and

commercial underpinnings often being precluded by scholarship that assumes Brooks' specific historical findings as universal historical fact. Relying on recent interdisciplinary studies that carefully trace melodrama's history across media and cultures, the impact of Brooks' work can better be regarded for its "claim that melodrama has become a necessary mode within modern consciousness" ([1976] 1995, 202). Brooks' use of the term 'melodramatic mode', however, is not entirely clear as he uses multiple other terms to describe his object of study, such as: "a mode of conception and expression", "a semantic force field", "a certain fictional system for making sense of experience", "melodramatic imagination", "an aesthetic", "a sense making system", "a cultural form" and "an outlook" (Brooks 1976, xiv-xviii). So, although it is clear that Brooks identifies the melodramatic mode as more substantive in scope than genre, the use of the term 'mode' remains a rather vaguely defined concept.

Brooks' understanding of melodrama as symptomatic of modernity and located in the French Revolution's upheaval of hierarchy was indebted to earlier literary and theatre studies by Eric Bentley (1964), Michael Booth (1965), Robert Heilman (1960; 1968), David Grimstead (1968; 1971) and the aforementioned work on film melodrama by Thomas Elsaesser (1972). Film Studies has since provided one of the most fertile grounds for the conceptual growth of melodrama as a mode with Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams' most recent anthology *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media and National Cultures* (2018) encouraging a more interdisciplinary approach to melodrama as a "transcultural and transmedial aesthetic" across modern narrative cultural production (Buckley 2018, 15). The premise of this most recent volume argues for an "unbinding[,] rendering the real power and endurance of the melodramatic mode" (2018, 11). Drawing upon Brooks' ideas, early in her scholarship on the subject, Gledhill conceived of melodrama as "an aesthetic and epistemological mode distinct from (if related to) realism, having different purposes, and deploying different strategies, modes of address, and forms of engagement and identification" (1986, 45). This conception was a radical shift from her prior genre-specific approach, published two years previously, in *The Cinema Book* (Cook 1984). And although her work into this "uncharted field" (Gledhill 1986, 45) was ongoing, the shift in critical thinking became more substantiated in 1987, with the arrival of Gledhill's first edited anthology *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (1987).

Gledhill's chapter 'The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation' in *Home is Where the Heart is* (1987) acts as a point of renewal for melodrama scholarship. Finding prior scholarship in Film Studies curtailed by its introspective critical framework and closed methods of textual analysis, Gledhill proposed a new interdisciplinary methodology. Although sympathising with the rest of the contributors of her anthology that build on the mainstream notion of melodrama as genre, Gledhill's approach offers a more wide-ranging cultural and aesthetic investigation of melodrama's populist nature. Reconfiguring melodrama beyond the confines of genre as prescribed by Film Studies, Gledhill draws upon Brooks' study by conceiving of melodrama as posing "pressing questions of a wider history of cultural institutions" (1987, 13). Gledhill's deconstruction of melodrama's usage in Film Studies under the subheading 'Melodrama and Cinema: The Critical Problem' effectively critiques the insularity of the discipline in general. Furthermore, her interdisciplinary conception of melodrama is substantiated by historical and cultural bearings that signal a radical departure from the standard Film Studies approach.

Following Gledhill, it was Linda Williams in her essay 'Melodrama Revisited' (1998) who most explicitly and substantially built upon Brooks' approach to melodrama as a mode. Focusing on American cinema, Williams presented a "revised theory of a melodramatic mode – rather than the more familiar notion of the melodramatic genre" (Williams 1998, 43). Williams takes an unequivocal position against the genre approach by arguing for melodrama to be recognised as *the* mode of filmmaking in American cinema in general:

> Melodrama is the fundamental mode of popular American moving pictures. It is not a specific genre like the western or horror film; it is not a 'deviation' of the classic realist narrative; it cannot be located primarily in the women's films, 'weepies' or family melodrama – though it includes them. (Williams 1998, 42)

Similarly informed by the arguments of Brooks, Williams also describes melodrama as expressing and supporting the virtues of particular moral stances in their narratives, notably evident through revealing dénouements. Ultimately the revisions Williams stages in her work position the melodramatic mode as omnipresent in popular American cinema, continually adapting and evolving throughout the cinema's history. Steve Neale (2000) supports Williams' position in his research of early Hollywood trade discourses, noting that in the period spanning the 1930s-1950s, the term melodrama (or its variants "meller" or "melodramatic") was mentioned in reviews of over 1,500 films in the

industry journal *Variety* in combination with other film genre terms. Fittingly, Neale describes melodrama as "both a fundamental progenitor of nearly all Hollywood's non-comic genres, and a fundamental source of many of its cross generic features, devices and conventions" (2000, 202). It is precisely this idea of melodrama as a "cluster concept" (Singer 1992, 1) where "[i]nstances of 'melodrama' run the gamut from horror films to thrillers to westerns, from women's films to war films to action-adventure in general" (Neale 2000, 202) that has come to characterise the mixed, varied and often contradictory scholarship on the concept. Thus, the old theatrical-based forms, values and changing politics of melodrama are always updated, or even disguised through naturalistic tendencies more associated with realism to continue to provide a melodramatic experience.

Williams positions melodrama's deeply emotional sensibilities at the centre of its definition as mode. For her, melodrama is crucial for audiences to feel sympathy for protagonists who are at some level presented as victims and the bearers of moral virtue. Williams, like Gledhill before her, sees this as the result of pathos (Williams 1998). This pathos can be read as a direct consequence of the representation of extreme emotions, such as in the family melodramas and 'weepies', or it can be channelled through action sequences, such as rescues, escapes, stand-offs, fights, chases, or competitions. For Williams, "[i]n cinema the mode of melodrama defines a broad category of moving pictures that move us to pathos for protagonists beset by forces more powerful than they and who are perceived as victims" (1998, 42). In its emotional affect and revelation of morality, this melodramatic mode may apply to all Hollywood films (Williams 1998). Despite this broad definition, Williams crucially removes the emotion and pathos of melodrama from a specific gendered (female) perspective and applies it equally to action films and male subjects, arguing that they also "pivot upon melodramatic moments of masculine pathos" (1998, 48). This is a very progressive argument that posits that "strong emotions that can move audiences to tears are not the special province of women, but of the melodramatic 'feminisation' that … has been a persistent feature of American popular culture at least since the mid-nineteenth century" (Williams 1998, 48). The centrality of pathos as a function and instigator of tears in both men and women is considered by Williams as a key marker of the emotional attachments that the melodramatic mode employs.

Williams' attention to emotion in melodrama marked a clear advance in the discourses of affect in Film Studies that still lacks serious discussion in many quarters. Williams, like Gledhill, builds on the work of Brooks and calls for a change in conception of melodrama from genre to mode, stating that "film criticism may do well to shift from the often myopic approach to the superficial coherence of given genres and toward the deeper coherence of melodrama" (1996, 62). Although not questioning or exploring possible cultural alterations or manifestations of melodrama as theorised by Brooks, with regard to post-Revolutionary France and the desacralisation of society, Williams places her emphasis on the personalised emotional undercurrents of American cinema. Melodrama, then, regardless of generic differences in form and content is characterised by how films engage pathos and action; it "is not that they deal with a set of specific themes, have certain kinds of characters or use a specific iconography but rather that they reveal a particular approach whatever the themes being dealt with and whatever the types of characters are involved" (Mercer and Shingler 2004, 94). This mode, therefore, employs characters who convey clear and obvious emotional positions and who lack psychological depth in order to pit absolutes against each other, constructing a polarised but revelatory moral world articulated through the actions and attitudes of protagonists.

The conceptualisation of melodrama as mode rather than as predetermined genre allows for a much wider cross-media and cross-generic theorisation of the term. In the furnace of ever shifting social, aesthetic and technological circumstances, according to Gledhill and Williams, melodrama "adapted to processes of cultural modernisation and transnational circulation … [and] continues to inhabit contemporary aesthetic forms worldwide in a diversity of ways" (2018, 11). Melodrama, then, to these two prominent thinkers, appears as an affective mode that helps shape narrative media content and aesthetic form by commercially exploiting human emotions and feeling. Both Gledhill and Williams persuasively argue for this conceptualisation of melodrama, enabling scholars to address many of the value-laden binary oppositions that characterise much Film Studies scholarship such as the positioning of the avant-garde against the popular; Hollywood cinema against 'world' cinema; transnational cinema against national cinema; and melodrama against realism. As such, melodrama as a mode can combine with other modes such as realism, tragedy and comedy as forms of (dramatic) expression that are not all-encompassing but fragmentary and even sometimes fleeting depending on the dominant mode of any given text.

Defining melodrama as mode does not, however, exclude the conception of melodrama as genre. The melodramatic mode, as defined by Agustín Zarzosa, works "as a modulating system that alternatively dilates and contracts the scope of a community: melodrama dilates the scope of a community by dramatizing the capacity for individual suffering outside the limits of a community; it contracts the field of a community by imposing an abstract character to suffering happening within these limits" (2013, 16). The melodramatic mode for Zarzosa, then, is not a cross-cultural monolithic form of modernity but instead it is the 'mode' through which suffering is expressed. This expression of suffering is different across cultures and genres. So for Zarzosa:

> The melodramatic mode requires a series of elements to redistribute the visibility of suffering. The narrative and stylistic elements we usually associate with the melodramatic genre (villainy, persecution of virtue, reversals of fortune, visual metaphors, emotionalism, and exaggeration) do in fact serve to redistribute the visibility of suffering. However, this redistribution may be expressed through the configuration of a different set of elements–that is, through any other genre. In other words, even if the melodrama genre may provide the clearest, most efficient configuration of the melodramatic mode, no correspondence exists between the melodrama genre and the melodramatic mode. (2013, 16)

Melodrama as mode, therefore, intersects with and characterises multiple genres including a possible melodrama genre. Modes are not necessarily more abstract than genres but they do have a more primary function in the dramatisation of human experience. As Brooks, Gledhill, Williams and Zarzosa all argue to differing degrees, the melodramatic mode corresponds to "the apparent randomness and atomization of life in a capitalist world" (Gledhill 2000, 234). As such, the modality of melodrama represents something beyond victimhood or suffering and can be attributed to a deep emotionality through which modern anxieties are expressed and imaginatively explored through positive and negative situations.

The drawback of scholarship on the melodramatic mode derives from difficulties in the definition of 'mode' and the assumptions of its cultural historical specificity taken from Brooks' perceptions of melodrama as originating in post-Revolutionary France. There was little definitional clarity of what Brooks meant by 'mode' and this issue occurs even in Gledhill and Williams' most recent contribution to this field of study: "[w]e define mode as a general form of expressiveness using the drama of light and dark, staging, color, music, speech, intonation and, importantly, plot" (2018, 4). Building on the work by Zarzosa (2010; 2013) and Buckley (2018) on the subject of melodrama, I

see melodrama as inhabiting a modern consciousness, but its dramatic "mode is not [inherently] a cultural form of conceiving the world or a structure of feeling" (Zarzosa 2013, 16). For Zarzosa this conception of mode avoids the "problem of cultural translation to the extent that the melodramatic mode involves no specific idea but the geological shifts in the visibility of suffering" (Zarzosa 2013, 24). In purely theoretical terms, then, the melodramatic mode, for Zarzosa, seems to have one primary function across all cultures: expressing and redistributing elements of suffering in society. As I have already stated, this focus on suffering and victimhood seems to me too narrow for such a broad mode as melodrama that is more emotionally encompassing in nature, and able to inspire joy and happiness as much as suffering. The issue here is that cultures invariably perpetuate their own sensibilities, characteristics and languages through melodrama. It is not surprising, therefore, that a film with a melodramatic narrative, depicting Ethiopian characters speaking in Amharic and set in Addis Ababa may resonate strongly with Ethiopian audiences and seem foreign to others.

If in theory the melodramatic mode can be applied in any context, in practice each society is discernibly organised along lines of culture and class that encourage particular emotional and epistemological interpretations. As Dissanayake argues in relation to Asian melodrama,

> most Asian cultures valorize human suffering as a pervasive fact of life and that salvation is a liberatory experience emanating from the insights into the nature and ineluctability of human suffering. Hence the metaphysical understanding of suffering becomes the condition of possibility for participating in the meaning of life. Suffering and the ensuing pathos are commonly found in Western melodrama as well; however, their place in and significance to Asian film melodramas are considerably different. (1993, 4)

A similar idea of suffering also resonates strongly in Ethiopia as Adam and Eve's original sin still occupies a central position in the doctrine of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which remains a key and powerful nationalist and cultural institution today. Recognising these cultural distinctions will be considered in more depth in Chapter 3, but for now this point demonstrates that human emotions are unavoidably conditioned by the contexts we inhabit. Therefore, while the melodramatic *mode* may theoretically be understood "as an apparatus that redistributes the visibility of suffering" (Zarzosa 2013, 4), as a mode of dramatic expression it must necessarily act within cultural contexts. In practice, then, the melodramatic mode does not preclude melodrama's "instrumentality … across a wide range of cultural and national cinema contexts as a

kind of demotic, or vernacular, engagement with modernity; and sometimes, through their address, as linking modernity with national identity" (Kuhn and Grant 2006, 7). It is the cultural and national cinema context of the Amharic film industry in Ethiopia that concerns this thesis. Although primarily concerned with the system of Amharic film genres that this industry has given rise to, the melodramatic tendencies that pervade these films reflects a wider cultural impulse which speaks directly to Ethiopian experiences and imaginations. This, therefore, needs to be given due attention prior to a discussion on Amharic film genres as it is through their deployment of a culturally nuanced melodrama that seems to be the key to attracting local audiences. It is the idea that the melodramatic mode is a dramatic mode of affect that deploys a range of intense emotions in reaction to the processes of modernisation – apparent across cultures, genres and mediums – that gives the study of melodrama great relevance in the globalised and media saturated world of today.

Conclusions

As this chapter has demonstrated, melodrama is neither a stable nor a singular concept in Film Studies but it offers insights for comparative work concerned with its appearances across different cultures, media and genres. From early research concerned with melodrama as a specific genre emblematic of certain filmmakers in the post-war period, to its later conception as a pervasive mode in commercial American cinema, the scholarship has now begun to seriously consider the implications of its transnational nature (Grant and Kuhn 2006; Glehill and Williams 2018). Discussions of melodrama as a genre were important in forwarding feminist approaches in Film Studies, while the concept of the melodramatic mode has emphasised its role as a "matrix for the experience of modernity" (Airriess 2018, 81). The pervasiveness and mutability of melodrama's central element – the powerful emotive tones struck by intense fictionalised feeling – are evident across media, cultures and genres and deserving of more research.

Acknowledging the assumptions surrounding melodrama and melodrama scholarship helps move research beyond pejorative connotations, confining it to a singular genre envisioned by feminist and antirealist/neo-Marxist notions of melodramatic excess in Film Studies *and* helps to displace it from a narrow period in Europe after the French Revolution ascribed by Brooks. Opening up melodrama's relationship from the majority of studies that focus on Europe and America enables investigations into experiences of

modernity and melodrama in diverse contexts throughout the world. Following the example set by Ravi Vasudevan with regards to India, "if we are to theorise the validity of the melodramatic mode … it must be in such a way as to reformulate the terms of the modernity within which melodrama emerges" (2011, 42).

The following chapter mounts a first attempt at tracing the cultural specificities and historical roots of melodrama in the Ethiopian context to add an alternative perspective to the scholarship and to understand its relationship with commercial Amharic film. In so doing, I am also responding to Wimal Dissanayake's assertion that: "[a]ll cultural artefacts are products of specific histories and cultural formations, and melodramas exemplify in concrete ways the diverse casts of mind, shapes of emotion, vocabularies of expression, imaginative logics, and priorities of valuation of different cultures" (1993, 2). I argue that it is the cultural specificity of melodrama in the Ethiopian context that underpins the commercial viability of the Amharic film industry. If the melodramatic mode is understood as the shaping of different materials that unleash individualised emotions in calling for and responding to the socioeconomic changes that power modernity, its specificity lies in *how* this mode is articulated across cultures, genres and different time periods (Gledhill 2018). As discussed in this chapter, the melodramatic mode, as with the comedic, tragic and other dramatic modes, may well have the same functions across cultures, but this does not mean that the articulation of these modes foregoes the problem of (cultural) translation. Thus, Chapter 3 discusses how melodrama is culturally conditioned in the Ethiopian context.

CHAPTER 3

Melodrama Ethiopian-style

> If melodrama is quintessentially 'Western' or 'American,' how might we reconcile the claim that melodrama is fundamentally a cultural form of modernity and different cultures and cinemas may engage in parallel or alternative forms of its melodramatic imagination?
>
> Zhen Zhang (2012, 28)

> What happens if we accept melodrama's commitment to emotionality not as excessive but as key to its aesthetic structure and cultural value?
>
> E. Deidre Pribram (2018, 237)

In Chapter Two we have traversed the different general understandings of melodrama: as a specific Hollywood genre of the 1940s and 1950s; as a mode of dramatic expression dependent on heightened affect; and as a form of vernacular modernity, translatable across cultures undergoing processes of modernisation. Nonetheless, few important questions remain. In line with this thesis' advocating a cultural turn regarding the study of film genre and local popular cinemas, I am concerned with how the melodramatic mode or "vernacular melodrama" (Zheng 2012; Airries 2018) achieves its localisation and translatability across different cultural contexts. Since cinema became popular worldwide, it was early Hollywood films that first dominated the global market. They did this in part through creating a melodramatic appeal by striking intense emotional notes while advancing notions of individualism (Gledhill 2018). As sites of commercially oriented film production emerged in different cultural contexts, Christine Gledhill describes "a cultural oscillation as melodrama is pulled in different temporal directions between past and future and towards different generic configurations and emotional scenarios for differently situated audiences" (2018, xix).

The Amharic film industry in Ethiopia and its system of Amharic film genres, then, can be seen as a direct result of melodrama inhabiting "diverse moral, religious, and political systems to generate its aesthetic-emotional experiences" (Gledhill 2018, xxii). This builds on Gledhill's earlier account of melodrama's contemporary persistence, by considering melodrama as a "public space of social imagining within a culturally

conditioned aesthetic framework" (2000, 232). Such aesthetic frameworks are culturally conditioned by producers and consumers who both adhere to a specific sociocultural worldview or imagination. An Ethiopian filmmaker in Addis Ababa making an Amharic film, shot in familiar Ethiopian settings and employing professional Ethiopian actors, for example, is likely to adhere to a similar set of cultural preconceptions held by local Ethiopian audiences. These imaginations are perpetually evolving and respond to political and social change. The geographical and cultural closeness between producer and consumer, therefore, enables a more direct participation within Ethiopian society and culture.

The idea of the melodramatic imagination has attracted little, if any, serious in-depth consideration in melodrama studies since Peter Brooks used the term in the title of his monograph in 1976 and Thomas Elsaesser suggested the term in reference to melodrama's existence across history and media in 1972. In using the term in this thesis, my understanding of 'imagination' hinges on the global and local flows of media representations and communications technology through which people formalise their own identity and view of others. As Shani Orgad explains, an "imagination must be nourished by personal experience, but also, fundamentally, by collective cultural representations" (2012, 3). In Ethiopia, the commercially driven Amharic film industry is a key cultural producer that thrives off addressing collective Ethiopian sensibilities that resonate with Ethiopian experiences at home and in the diaspora. "In order for imagination to play its role in the coordination of emotional commitments, different persons must be able to nourish their imagination from the same source" (Boltanski 1999, 50). I argue that the commercial Amharic film industry, through its utilisation of the melodramatic mode, provides a preeminent source in sustaining an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination. The melodramatic imagination takes on nationalist dimensions due to the economic and socio-cultural pressures on films to speak to the common experiences of audiences. The Ethiopian melodramatic imagination utilised through a melodramatic mode in Amharic commercial cinema, therefore, is largely introspective and nationalist. It is concerned with mediating between global imaginations of modernity and globalisation, and the ethnically diverse cultural imaginations that contest the national hegemony in the country. To borrow Orgad's description of a global imagination, likewise, an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination "is enabled through, cultivated by, and emerges via an ongoing process of symbolic construction of the real and the possible in [melodramatic] image and narrative" (2012,

3). This, in Ethiopia, is conditioned by films achieving a level of popularity that draws enough paying audiences to cinemas in order to sustain the economic viability of the industry.

Thomas Elsaesser (1972) and Peter Brooks (1976) both employ the term "melodramatic imagination" in their seminal contributions to the study of melodrama referring to what has been discussed in the previous chapter in terms of the melodramatic mode. In understanding the melodramatic mode as the formal expression of intense and public emotionality (responding to the effects of processes of modernisation) in textual representation, I see the melodramatic imagination as referring to the broader culture in which people live. Instead of seeing melodrama's intense emotions as excessive and beyond the realms of rationale and cognition, they can be recognised for their cultural significance. In this sense, melodramatic imaginations behave as cultural imaginaries that condition emotional articulations and responses within specific sociocultural and historical milieus. Building on E. Deidre Pribram's (2018) work, it can be understood that "[a]n audience's felt moments of recognition are acts of emotion stimulated by aesthetic practices of melodrama and other popular cultural forms, arising out of shared, lived experience and knowledge. Such acts of emotion, when recognized, allow us to accept, appreciate, admit, or deny that which we suddenly apprehend as familiar" (Pribram 2018, 242). Audience members, therefore, live, feel and negotiate the emotional anxieties and social conflicts of modern life through melodrama just like melodramatic characters. This places audiences in the foreground as the mediators of melodrama and helps explain why local commercial cinemas emerge in specific cultural contexts where they appeal to a specific and dominant culturally conditioned view of the world. This chapter explores in more detail the ways in which melodrama in Amharic cinema has been conditioned by Ethiopian culture and history both in its modern and pre-modern occurrences.

An Ethiopian-style Melodrama in Amharic Cinema

Heavily influenced by theatre practitioners and professionals working across different artistic and cultural mediums, Amharic cinema balances modern forms of entertainment along with didactic moralisations, melodramatic in nature, that address the real social circumstances of their Ethiopian audiences. This dual capacity to entertain and instruct is key to Amharic cinema's popular appeal according to film industry stakeholders, such as Kebede Mesfin (interview, 2016, March 4) Tewodros Teshome (interview, 2016,

February 18), Henok Ayele (interview, 2016, February 11), Behailu Wassie (interview, 2016, March 8), Mohammed Miftah (cf. Fikadu 2013, 197) and Haymanot Alemu (cf. Fikadu 2013, 198). Behailu Wassie reveals the moralising tendencies of successful Amharic films when he says:

> The structure of my films is simple so that the message is clear for my audience. This is definitely influenced by the folk stories (*teret*) my father used to tell me. They introduce the characters and establish the story, then they create action and build suspense, and then we reach the resolution that always carries a moral teaching, and this is definitely how most successful films are structured here in Ethiopia. (Interview, 2016, March 8)

Behailu's words resonate with those of the Ethiopian-born film scholar Teshome Habte Gabriel, who refers to the "visual revelations" of the traditional oral stories performed in his local church. Amharic films commonly address such higher virtues, employing visceral expressivity and moralisations similar to those of other narrative and cultural traditions in Ethiopia. Furthermore, melodrama is the term that one arrives at that best encompasses the common features of popular Amharic films such as a focus on the erosion of family and community due to social changes like urbanisation. The central premise of many films also revolves around the difficulty of attaining romantic fulfilment in this rapidly changing society. Narratives exhibit contrived plotting often exemplified in the coincidences protagonists endure and enjoy that ultimately conclude with a moralising hope for future generations. Expanding on his previous quote, Behailu Wassie also explains how successful Amharic films in the commercial industry interact with, what I call, an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination in the way that they educate and entertain by engaging with the concepts of love, poverty, salvation and mercy as understood within Ethiopian culture and society:

> You cannot only concern yourself with the satisfaction of your body. Just like my view of my country is not just the land or river, it is coming from your soul, your relationship with culture, society, and humanity. Film is like this, it has to have a soul for it to have deep value, but also it has to nourish the body through entertainment and often here this is done through comedy. […]. That is how I understand my country, our films, and our love; we struggle with material wealth but we have strong immaterial [sic] wealth in our culture and society. Another example is the word *timhert*, which means "education", but *mhert* means "mercy", and so these words are also inextricably linked to each other […]. Love is linked with all of this, and it is all about listening to your soul. As love is the major narrative in our films, so too our films are like smoke and cannot be achieved without a fire. So I always try to balance my films to address love, identity, and feeling and be entertaining too. (Interview, 2016, March 8)

It is the notion that "love is linked with all of this" that seems to define the emotional impulse of the melodramatic imagination in Amharic films and forms the basis for a considerable line of enquiry in the chapters of this thesis that analyse their filmic texts.

Love, or to use the Amharic term spoken by Behailu–*ፍቅር/fiker*–is the concept that embodies the most potent emotional feeling that directly engages Ethiopian audiences and an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination. *Fiker* indicates issues of the heart and signifies deep emotional feelings. Like many concepts in Amharic, multiple interpretations are possible, both indicating romantic carnal desire as well as spiritual love. *Fiker* can be translated as 'love', 'devotion' or 'affection' and has roots in the ancient Ge'ez word *አፍቅሮ - afikero/love*. In daily usage, *fiker* has religious and spiritual connotations with one of the many names attributed to the Virgin Mary being *የፍቅር እናት - Yefiker Enat/Love's Mother* as well as embodying romantic notions in the secular sense, deep filial affection and even nationalistic sentiments, as observed in the old term *መፍቀሬ ሀገር - mefikeré hager/patriot*. Many contextually specific socio-political sources have also inflected the meaning of *fiker* with patriotic and nationalistic connotations, such as: Ethiopia's long history of independence with emperors claiming lineage from the Solomonic dynasty; an entrenched belief that Ethiopian people are chosen by God as cited in biblical passages; pride in defeating the Italian colonial army at the Battle of Adwa in 1896; the longstanding popularity of Ethiopian cultural forms (music, prose, poetry, theatre and dance) over foreign cultural imports. From this description, therefore, and building from previous definitions of melodrama, the concept of *fiker* can be seen as a key component to understanding the culturally and historically specific rendering of feelings and expressivity that underpins an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination.

In lieu of the absence of an Amharic translation or even transliterated use of the term 'melodrama', the term *fiker* becomes the concept and term that best engages with this affective dramatic mode as it is through the strength of *fiker* that suffering can be overcome and through which devotion, joy and happiness is inspired. The ubiquitous use of the term *fiker* in the definition and naming of nearly every type of commercial film genre in Amharic cinema – at times seemingly interchangeable with English words transliterated into Amharic such as *ሮማንስ - romans/romance* or *ሮማንቲክ - romantik/romantic* – also conjures the fundamental romantic and melodramatic elements which are a central part of the narrative of most Ethiopian films. In Ethiopia,

apart from the usage of *fiker* in naming genres, between 2005 and 2015 there were also at least 45 films made with the term *fiker* used in their titles, pointing to the pervasive nature of the term in the industry as a whole. Just as *fiker* in the commercial Amharic film industry makes up part of the generic description of multiple genres, so too was melodrama; as evidenced in relation to the naming of genres on the stage and screens at the turn of the century in America in order to widen appeal (Gledhill and Williams 2018). 'Melodrama' does not appear in the Amharic lexicon but '*fiker*' is often used in a similar way in order to widen the appeal of Amharic films and their genres. Their usages share striking similarities to such an extent that a better appreciation of the connotations of *fiker* helps confront the "anxiety to extrapolate Western melodrama theory to the study of films produced in a context where an equivalent to the term *melodrama* might not even exist" (Zarzosa 2010, 239). Therefore, it may be said that when the melodramatic mode is harnessed in Amharic cinema, it feeds off and into an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination which is almost certainly imbued with emotional elements pertaining to *fiker*.

Historicising Melodrama in Ethiopian Modernity and Cultural Production

In order to properly understand and ground the idea of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination in Amharic cinema, it is necessary to explore first melodrama's transmedial and modern antecedents in Ethiopia. The pervasive assumptions of scholarship on modernity, as well as on melodrama (see Chapter 2) are all too often situated within Euro-American experiences and then extrapolated to the rest of the world. This has led to processes of modernisation frequently being regarded as synonymous with Westernisation, and as such assumes universalising tendencies, as has been the case with regards to much of the early scholarship on melodrama. Comparative studies of modernisation have helped explore these issues and have led to the more contemporary understanding that "[n]o two societies modernize in the same way" (Black 1966, 95). The popularity of the concept of modernity, however, much like melodrama, is "not in its clarity and precision as a vehicle of scholarly communication, but rather in its ability to evoke vague and generalized images which serve to summarize all the various transformations of social life attendant upon the rise of industrialization and the nation-state in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Tipps 1976, 62). In order to better understand the manifestation of a melodramatic imagination in Ethiopia, this section responds to Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis' call to regard "the process of modernity within the discursive space of its multiplicity and cultural specificity" (2010, 82). In the

Ethiopian case, this demands that due weight is given to recognising the interconnectedness and simultaneous coexistence of the "modern (objectivist)" and the "nonmodern (mythical)" within an Ethiopian society characterised by staunchly sacred beliefs (Wolde Giorgis 2010).

Influential Ethiopian scholars Bahru Zewde (2002a; 2002b), Mesay Kebede (1999) and Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis (2010) note that Ethiopian modernity has developed within the multiple cultural and linguistic contexts of the country and involved many social actors. An example of this can be observed in the introduction of modern education in the country that drew on both local institutionalised Ethiopian Orthodox traditions of knowledge production and transmission and Islamic educational systems, influenced by Middle Eastern and North African centres of learning (Zewde 2002a). The modernising mission in Ethiopia, however, was ultimately an imperial state-led project that reconstituted modern Ethiopia and provided a sense of nationalist continuity. This was widely believed to have commenced under the reign of Tewodros II, following an era (known as *ዘመነ መሳፍንት - Zemene Mesafint/Era of the Princes* from 1769-1855 [Zewde 2002b]) marked by powerful regional lords using force to vie for control of the throne. In 1855 Emperor Tewodros introduced widespread reforms to the feudal-like structure of the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) Empire that saw Amharic officially used to chronicle the Emperor's reign and the move towards a centralised state system with a salaried bureaucracy and army. The nationalist modernising mission was constitutionally formalised in 1931 by Haile Selassie a year after his coronation. Surrounding himself with foreign-educated advisors who wished to emulate a Japanese-style modernisation and described as 'Japanizers', the primary concern of the new regime under their tutelage was to improve the lives of the average Ethiopian citizen, promote processes of democratisation and to support the principles of modern education and stimulate economic development (Milkias 2011).

Haile Selassie's version of "Modern Ethiopianism" (1967) employed powerful notions stemming from religion and myth in an implicitly nationalist project. This was then disseminated culturally through the state's strict control of media, including through printed newspapers, literature and theatrical productions. Far from concepts of secular rationality, as espoused by Weberian thinking on modernity and Brooks' theory of melodrama, in Ethiopia the modernising mission was led by elites who believed in "the semidivine status of the emperor as a crucial factor for the implementation of projects of

progress" (Bromber 2013, 74). The implications of the implementation of this modernist project by Ethiopian elites and aristocracy was, according to Katrin Bromber, "first and foremost a nationalist project with ideological implications" (2013, 73; see also Milkias 2006). Far from the individualism of American and Western European modernity, in Ethiopia modernity was conceived of as a nationalistic social construct orienting the individual towards the service of king, country and church. Altogether opposite from Brooks' definition of a post-sacred and post-aristocratic society in France, modernity in Ethiopia was conceived by consecutive reformative Emperors (the aristocracy) whose consecrated power was dependent on the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Nonetheless the mythical and sacred underpinning of this modernising project was only deemed credible because of its reliance on the rhetoric of universal progress as espoused from Eurocentric narratives of modernity (Bromber 2013).

Politically and socially speaking, Haile Selassie's return from exile in 1941 led to a revitalisation of the nationalist modernisation of his feudal-like autocracy. It was in this period and through the opening up of the public sphere (Habermas [1962] 1989) through cultural production that the contradictions of Ethiopian modernity became more pronounced as the mix of Japanese inspired governmental and administrative reforms fell short of ideological expectations. Ethiopia achieved progress in terms of gradual industrial growth and urbanisation along with the establishment of modern secondary and university level educational institutions. On an international level, in 1945, Ethiopia also became a founding member of the United Nations through which a successful diplomatic move resulted in Eritrea being federated to Ethiopia. Despite these national achievements, however, it was the personal failure of Haile Selassie to bring about tangible political reform, called for by the educated Ethiopian youth his modern education system had nurtured, that sparked the political unrest of the 1960s and 1970s.

The revised constitution of 1955 was specifically tailored to support the establishment of political institutions that resembled those of modern states. The issue here, however, was that the revised constitution reiterated Ethiopia's first national constitution of 1931, maintaining the feudal-like dual positions of power of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Emperor, whose divine mandate to rule had to necessarily be consecrated by the Church. As such, in 1955, Haile Selassie's power was just as absolute as it was in 1931 as declared in Article 11 of the constitution: "the person of the emperor is sacred, his dignity inviolable, and his power indisputable" (cf. Milkias 2011, 62).

Theatre's position in Haile Selassie's modernising mission was significant as, unlike with cinema as discussed in Chapter 1, the emperor actively promoted theatre as a tool of propaganda to impart his ideas of autocratic modernisation to his public (Milkias 2011). Theatre productions were encouraged in schools throughout the land and as the main trendsetter in Ethiopian society at the time, the emperor's avid support of theatre resulted in many schools opening their own theatre halls. According to Paulos Milkias, Haile Selassie's control of early theatre extended to commissioning talented Ethiopians "to create a series of plays celebrating Ethiopia's uninterrupted 3,000-year independence, Haile Selassie's efforts at modernizing Ethiopia, and the need for dedication to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church" (2011, 388). These theatrical productions can be seen as an early attempt at inscribing an idealised version of modern Ethiopian national identity through cultural activity. Although it is not clear how these plays were performed, they confirm the modern concept of an Ethiopian national identity by rewriting the nation's pre-modern history and by eliding the inherent contradictions between modernisation in Ethiopia and the sacred hierarchy of society. The nationalist overtures of these early Amharic plays supressed modernity and melodrama's ideas of individualism while forwarding modernising credentials of progression for the whole of society, for the good of the nation and as spiritually beneficial.

Theatre soon emerged as one of the preeminent urban cultural activities in Ethiopian society. The cultural power of this theatre was commandeered by the imperial regime to support Ethiopian modernity through nationalist productions. It was this fierce nationalism that characterised "the oldest structure for dramatic performance in Ethiopia … the 'Hager Fiqir Mahber' (Association for Love of Country)" (Milkias 2011, 388). Here, again, the term "Fiqir" or *fiker/love* in the patriotic sense is pivotal in the conceiving of a space dedicated to modern cultural production in the country. Highlighting the role this cultural institution played in the confluence of tradition and modernity in Ethiopian culture in general, Paulos Milkias explains that "[i]t was at the Hager Fiqir that modern Ethiopian music and drama was nurtured" (2011, 390); which was in addition to providing an exhibition site for locally produced films in the 1990s and early 2000s. Although Paulos Milkias notes that "The Hager Fiqir Theatre continued as a popular theatre for the common people of the city [Addis Ababa]" (2011, 388), plays were not just performed in this one urban space. Through the modern

medium of radio, plays and shows were broadcast live on Ethiopian national radio while larger rural crowds eagerly attended the touring performances of the Hager Fiker (or "Fiqir") theatre troupe around the country, exposing large and diverse urban and rural populations to their nationalistic performances.

Although Amharic literature also presented similarly didactic and moralising narratives during this time, only a small percentage of the population was literate, making their potential audience comparatively small (Molvær [1980] 2008). The most prominent Amharic newspapers in this era of modernisation, *Aimro*, *Berhanena Selam* and the daily *Addis Zemen* (that commenced in 1941 and continues to this day), like Amharic literature were all far from the print-capitalism that Benedict Anderson claims ushered in the "revolutionary vernacularizing thrust of capitalism" ([1983] 2016, 39). In fact, all of these newspapers were specifically designed as agents of the government's modernising policies (Reta 2013).

The overriding nationalism of Amharic cultural production during this era, then, effectively posited nationalist emotions of love for country as *the* overriding aesthetic-emotional experience of the melodramatic mode. Modernity had not ruptured the traditional aristocratic hierarchy or the sacred position of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity in society, in fact at this point in history modernity was used to legitimise government policy. Cultural production was tightly controlled in order to thread narratives of cultural continuity through modern dramatic modes such as melodrama even though the plight of individualism had not yet been unleashed.

It was only in 1955 when Article 41 of the revised Ethiopian constitution guaranteed freedom of the press "in accordance with the laws" that the first fully independent newspaper *YeItyopya Dimts/Voice of Ethiopia* circulated and became particularly popular as it "attracted readers with its sensational stories" (Reta 2013, 103). These often crime fuelled narratives dramatised true events that were concerned with the value of a modern justice system in Ethiopia. These stories, then, can be seen to place the individual and not the nation at the centre of narratives and moralisations and, therefore, are more discernibly melodramatic in nature "responding to conditions of a modernity based on deracinated individualism, driven by the abstract instruments of global capitalism" (Gledhill 2018, xxii).

While the melodramatic mode may have been evident in specific print examples in the 1950s, theatres, particularly the Haile Selassie (now National Theatre), still emphasised the coming together of Ethiopian history, religion and drama in productions that directly engaged and sustained the "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) of the modern Ethiopian nation. And as culture was "the necessary shared medium" that Ernest Geller (1983, 37-38) notes, it was theatre that quickly emerged as one of the most popular forms of locally produced Ethiopian cultural activities. The popularity of theatre, as with other Amharic cultural and artistic productions of the time, can in part be attributed to its nationalistic tendencies, however, more identifiably melodramatic elements became increasingly evident during theatre in the 1960s and 1970s in which traditional Ethiopian aesthetic articulations combined with modern stage productions.

Plays were produced during this era that focused on social inequality and ambiguities surrounding the individual's place in modern society, coinciding with the assignment of Tsegaye Gebremedhin as director of the Haile Selassie Theatre in 1960. Writing and producing many of his own plays, Tsegaye Gebremedhin's compositions were much more open in questioning the contradictions of modern Ethiopian society. His plays such as *Yeshoh Aklil/Crown of Thorns, Mumps, A Man of The Future, HaHu Be Sedest Wer, Enat Alem Tenu, Melekket Wearer, Abugida Qayso* and *HaHu Waynem PePu* "depicted the lives of ordinary citizens, oppression of the masses, urban sprawl, and loss of direction among today's youth" (Milkias 2011, 391). The themes, style and personnel of Ethiopian theatre crossed naturally into the medium of film as was apparent in the first Amharic fictional feature *Hirut* (1964). With the female protagonist played by Abebech Ejegu, the film portrays the struggles of a young couple amidst the rapidly modernising and urbanising society in Addis Ababa. Painted as a "cautionary tale" (Milkias 2011, 392) and "emotional story" (Warren and Warren 1978, 57), *Hirut* was indicative of a melodramatic mode being observable in both Amharic theatre and film, and which was in contrast to the nationalistic plays that aimed to elide the contradictions between modernity, traditions, the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church and the State. This melodrama played on the emotional reactions of urban characters and couples as they negotiated the social suffering emanating from an Ethiopian modernisation that could not reconcile economic progress and urbanisation with slow social and political reform.

As a result of the emperor's refusal to reform the relations of power and although positing the trappings of modern society through urban cultural and economic advancements, Ethiopian society still functioned in a largely hierarchical feudal fashion, supported by the nationalist doctrine of the Church. In the end the Church, landlords and the royal family controlled over 90 percent of land as Haile Selassie's new parliament remained beholden to him as he maintained his veto power over the decisions of both the appointed Senate and the elected Chamber of Deputies (Milkias 2011). According to Paulos Milkias the purpose of Haile Selassie's parliament "was to be a palliative for enlightened despotism and centralization, not a source of delegation of authority, which is a precondition for contemporary liberalism and civic society" (2011, 62). The contradictions of this modernising strategy were soon laid bare as many diverse groups became disenfranchised with the economic, social and political circumstances of Haile Selassie's regime. The Marxist revolution, carried out by the military in 1974, toppled Haile Selassie, and in doing so attempted to desacralise society through eradicating the monarchy and disestablishing the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church as the state church. In effect, the hierarchy of aristocracy was replaced by the hierarchy of the Marxist Military Derg regime and the dictatorship of Mengistu Hailemariam. The revolution did not have the desired democratisation or liberalisation envisaged by the students and teachers who pushed for regime change in the 1970s. Furthermore, the push towards secularising Ethiopian society during the Derg era ultimately failed as the Church still held crucial political sway over the tens of millions of Ethiopians who adhered to its doctrine.

Kate Cowcher's (2018) work on the moments leading up to the Marxist revolution and abolition of the monarchy in 1974 positions film and television at the centre of the crises. Following from the plays and film (*Hirut*) that had imagined the contradictions of Ethiopian modernity through the social sufferings of their protagonists and an engagement with the melodramatic mode, Cowcher notes that these cultural and artistic practices "can be understood as part of a wider movement to peel back, to reveal, to reject an imperialist tradition of veiling information from public view" (2018, 53). It is in the opening-up of cultural production to private individuals, underpinned by entrepreneurial spirit and economic incentives, that contributed to the flourishing of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination engaged with the ambivalences of modern life in Ethiopia. Discussing the transmission of a doctored version of Jonathan Dimbleby's documentary *The Unknown Famine* the night before Haile Selassie's arrest, Cowcher

convincingly argues how "[b]y September 1974, Ethiopian television and radio had become repositories for a bevy of anti-imperial messages" (2018, 53). While the original version of *The Unknown Famine* more diplomatically conveyed the imperial regime's plea for international aid, the doctored version screened on Ethiopian television inserted juxtaposing images of the Emperor's opulent lifestyle next to emaciated rural Ethiopians suffering from famine. Cowcher describes how "*The Unknown Famine* had become *The Hidden Hunger*. Any ambiguity about blame was removed; Haile Selassie's long-cultivated image as the nation's benevolent patriarch was destroyed" (2018, 54). Relating this spectacle to the cultural specificity of an Ethiopian melodrama accented by the didacticism and moralisations of other Amharic artistic representations, Cowcher notes: "This was not Eisensteinian dialectical montage. Rather than jolt people out of passivity, *The Hidden Hunger* dazzled its audience into shock" (2018, 54). The shock and spectacle of *The Hidden Hunger*, although not a fictional melodrama, can be seen as employing a melodramatic mode in order to engage the political and discontented emotions increasingly voiced in the Ethiopian public sphere through its juxtaposition of the poor, helpless and starving masses against the opulence of the all-powerful emperor who no longer seems so sacred.

Just as Haile Selassie's regime had attempted to use the theatre as a cultural tool to condition a national imagination and elide the inherent contradictions of Ethiopian modernity under his reign, this film harnessed something much more shocking. It is through the images of mass suffering and poverty juxtaposed by the wealth and opulence of the aristocracy, here, that the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination can be better comprehended. The power of the images and their stark contrast of wealth and poverty is a fundamental aesthetic in Amharic cinema today resonating on an emotional level with an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination. This imagination is made up of elements that are directly influenced by religious and philosophical beliefs cultivated throughout Ethiopia's long history which condition the understanding of poverty and wealth. Understanding the use of the term ድህነት - *dihnet/poverty* is crucial here as the Ethiopian filmmaker Behailu Wassie points out: "in Ethiopia there is a lot of poverty, but I am not ashamed of our poverty. In Amharic *dihnet/poverty* has multiple meanings: one is poor, the other, '*dinet*' is salvation. So when you don't have money your soul is getting stronger" (interview, 2016, March 8). It is in attributing the nation's poverty to the ruler's wealth that Haile Selassie's position becomes untenable in the collective

imaginations of Ethiopians watching a pivotal piece of film. Such shows of opulence and wealth are still marked with negative connotations in Amharic films and the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination today. And since melodrama emerged in theatre in the 1960s to address the social ambivalence resulting from the specific modernising policies of the imperial regime, *The Hidden Hunger* addresses the same imagined national community to produce alternative "'truth effects' legitimizing certain discursive regimes, while rendering others illegitimate, deviant and 'false'" (Orgad 2012, 28). In the end it was not simply images of poverty, but the aesthetic manipulation that placed images of poverty and wealth side-by-side in an Ethiopian context that drew an intense emotional and collective response of shock from the Ethiopian public.

Throughout the Derg era, a reconfiguration of the national cultural imagination was attempted that resembled the first tightly controlled attempts made by Haile Selassie's regime. An attempt to rewrite the 3,000-year history of Ethiopian independence, for example, was the explicit intention of the docudrama *3002* (1976) and its portrayal of a history of lords and emperors from the perspective of the downtrodden masses and their 3,002-year-long struggle against the aristocracy. Despite artists using theatre, film, radio and television as tools of propaganda, Ethiopian theatre in particular is seen to have enjoyed its golden age during the period of Derg control (Milkias 2011). Although to a lesser extent than the deliberately edited shock factor deployed by *Hidden Hunger* that directly addressed an imagined Ethiopian community, some plays directly addressed an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination in the way they configured the affective mode of melodrama to negotiate between the sufferings and injustices of the time. Indeed, Paulos Milkias attributes the popular appeal of many Ethiopian plays under the Derg regime to their ability to contain "hidden information transmitted through the Ethiopian style of Wax and Gold[44] that was unavailable from the propaganda-pumping, state-controlled radio and television" that was mostly pre-recorded (2011, 390). Coloured by the politics of the time and the heightened risks posed in everyday life during a period in Ethiopian history characterised by civil war and mass extrajudicial killings, theatre became an outlet for artistic subversion. This builds on Christine Gledhill's (2000) account of melodrama's contemporary persistence, by considering melodrama as a form

[44] Wax and Gold refers is a poetic device in the Amharic language which signifies double meanings. Although traditionally seen as purely poetic device taught in the monastic schools of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church it has also been used by scholars to analyse double meanings in Ethiopian art and culture (Gabriel 1982; Klem and Niederstadt 2009).

of public address that enables socioemotional imaginings conditioned by cultural specificities. The social themes that were prevalent in state propaganda can equally be seen to have harnessed an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination in the way that they affirmed socialist projects by further scorning their imperial forebears or by blaming problems on ‘counterrevolutionaries’.

It is not surprising that modern cultural and artistic productions in Ethiopia have been, and still are, characterised by and judged on their representations of national culture and didactic engagement with socially relevant issues. Going to the theatre was one of the most popular of cultural activities that has only recently been superseded by, but still has strong ties to, the Amharic film industry that emerged in the early 2000s. Even more recently there has been a surge in Amharic television content production as multiple stations have launched since 2016, and like the vast majority of film professionals, both these mediums draw from the theatre. These links are most apparent at Addis Ababa University where film modules started to be offered by the School of Theatrical Arts in 2015. Notable film practitioners have graduated from the School of Theatrical Arts or attended tutorials in theatrical arts at the Creative Arts Centre when the university was named Haile Selassie I University, such as Debebe Eshetu (see Chapter 1) and numerous filmmakers, actors, scriptwriters and technicians. In her study on female filmmakers in Ethiopia, Eyerusaleam Kassahun (2018) investigates the crucial role theatre has played in facilitating careers for women in film, but this observation is equally applicable to men as well. This connection is so strong in fact that the boundaries between film, theatre, television and radio are relatively permeable, as exemplified in the multimedia outputs of artists such as Tilahun Gugsa and Mekdes Tsegaye and the recent opportunities new Amharic television stations have presented for filmmakers.

Uncovering the position of theatre in the history of Ethiopia, popularised and encouraged by Haile Selassie himself, is important to understanding how recognisably melodramatic tendencies have appeared in modern Ethiopian culture. Theatre was a part of the deliberate and controlled reforms and interventions Haile Selassie used in his attempt to modernise Ethiopia. The emperor encouraged theatre at first as a way of fusing modernity and Ethiopian traditions to promote his nationalist modernising agenda. The strict control the state maintained over cultural production and representation was, however, like the project of “Modern Ethiopianism” itself soon

overcome by the natural forces of modernity the imperial project had nurtured. In Ethiopia, however, the Orthodox Tewahedo Church has remained the purveyor of a common moral order. So while the modernising effects of Haile Selassie's reforms resulted in a collapse of the collective ethical order and hierarchy of Ethiopian society, faith in the nation's morality, fundamental epistemology and history remained resolute. This important point explains the central position of Ethiopian religion in conditioning the socioemotional aspects of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination as melodrama has emerged in the Ethiopian context. This notion fits with Matthew Buckley's (2018) revisionary understanding of melodrama's historical emergence as an evolutionary process attached to specific experiences of modernity. As such:

> it was institutions, public traditions, conventional rules of conduct, and relations of social hierarchy and power–ethical structures, not moral ones–that "no longer provide[d] the necessary social glue and so came to seem arbitrary, restrictive, and obsolete (Brooks 1976, 20). Again, the impression produced is not of rupture, or even novelty, but of convergence, synthesis, and consolidation: the formation of melodrama marks not a loss but a ratification of morality's presence and force and its integration–as a set of elemental conventions–into a larger aesthetic. (Buckley 2018, 25-26)

This "larger aesthetic" is the melodramatic mode of which its "emotion-producing devices – *peripetia* (reversal), *anangnorisis* (recognition), coincidence (fate), *coup-de-théâtre* or *scenes-à-faire* (explosive climaxed)" (Gledhill 2018, xix-xxi) – depend on a cultural engagement with a melodramatic imagination in order to engender meaning and inspire specific emotional responses. The view of modernity in Ethiopia offered here positions modern media and cultural production, particularly in theatre but also in television, film and radio, as the natural transmitters of modernity – an evolutionary process that confounds the limited powers of state control. The melodramatic mode works its way through these cultural media that harness pre-existing traditional narratives and aesthetics as they adapt to the apprehensions and social sufferings and "gradual concentration, intensification of lived experience in an emerging modern world" (Buckley 2018, 28). As such, the history of melodrama in Ethiopia and across the globe inevitably has roots in local traditional cultural forms and epistemologies that project culturally conditioned imaginations.

Tracing the manifestations of Ethiopian modernity through social, political and cultural changes, shows that theatre has emerged as a modern form of culture embedded with nationalist tendencies since the first Amharic plays were performed. As one of the first

forms of modern media to harness Amharic, and through Haile Selassie's vested interest, theatre became a powerful force in the development of collective ideas and perceptions intended to imaginatively reconcile the contradictions of Ethiopian modernity. However, theatrical productions that voiced social anxieties soon appeared on stage by the 1960s. Theatre, then, was a precursor to other modern media such as film, radio and television that have since all contributed to the shaping of a culturally distinct Ethiopian melodramatic imagination. The focus of the following section explores this idea of a specifically Ethiopian melodramatic style and imagination by tracing contemporary echoes of a pre-modern imagined Ethiopian nation as espoused by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and the modern equivalences in commercial Amharic cinema.

Pre-Modern Melodramatic Iterations in Ethiopian Religious Traditions

Modern nationalist Ethiopian culture through which the melodramatic mode is deployed – from theatre under Haile Selassie to contemporary Amharic cinema – is inextricably rooted in pre-modern religious traditions, artistic practices, shared history and social customs. The position of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, in particular, and religion in general, are pertinent to understanding the central role faith and the sacred continue to play in contemporary Ethiopian society and national culture, and that reinforce a nationalist cultural hegemony in the country. This hegemony has been defined by the old aristocracy and ruling elites who used Amharic and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church as entry barriers to what became defined as Habesha culture. Habesha is not a strict ethnic group but neither can it represent all of Ethiopia's ethnic groups as it remains mainly associated with the highland cultures of the Tigray, Amhara, and some Oromo groups. Despite the nation's ethnic federalisation in the 1990s, the idea of Habesha, or being Habesha, continues to be a powerful signifier of identity. Habesha, also linked with subjugation, remains a cultural identifier in the major urban hubs of Ethiopia resonating with the cultural hegemony established during the days of Empire and so not fully reconcilable with contemporary Ethiopian nationalism that attempts to encapsulate over eighty ethnic groups and languages with major Muslim, Evangelical Christian and Ethiopian Orthodox Christian populations as well as other smaller local religions.

The ancient Ethiopian Orthodox Church, in line with Benedict Anderson's reference to the "great sacral cultures" of Islam, Roman Catholicism and Confucianism, was also

"imaginable largely through the medium of a sacred language and written script" ([1983] 2016, 12-13). This sacred language, Ge'ez, remains the liturgical language of Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo churches, and their Catholic counterparts, as well as for the Beta Israel Jews. Ge'ez manuscripts from the fifth and sixth centuries, translated from ancient Greek formed the 81 books of the Ethiopic Bible and along with other instructional materials provided the foundational texts for the developing church in Ethiopia that had become the religion of rulers in the region since the fourth century.

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries ushered in a golden age of Ge'ez literature, accompanied by the rise of the Solomonic dynasty, of which Haile Selassie was the last in a line of emperors to rule over Ethiopia who claimed legitimacy through this ancestry. The *ክብረ ነገሥት - Kebra Nagast/Glory of the Kings* was written in the early fourteenth century and had the purpose of sanctifying the imperial aspirations of the Solomonic dynasty by retelling the legend of the Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon and how her son, Menelik I, born of Solomon's seed, came to acquire the Ark of the Covenant and bring it to Aksum (in Northern Ethiopia). As the Ethiopianist Edward Ullendorff noted, "[t]he *Kebra Nagast* is not merely a literary work, but–as the Old Testament to the Hebrews or the Qur'an to the Arabs–it is the repository of Ethiopian national and religious feeling" ([1968] 2013, 75). The importance of this work endures in contemporary Ethiopia and its significance is made explicit in Emperor Yohannes's letter to the British in 1872 requesting a plundered copy of the manuscript be returned to him as "it contains the Law of the whole of Ethiopia; and the names of the chiefs, churches, and provinces […] for in my country my people will not obey my orders without it" (Budge 1932 cited in Ullendorff [1968] 2013, 75). Ge'ez in this era was already superseded by Amharic as the working language of the Empire but remained the medium through which this ancient Christian Kingdom conceived of itself as "cosmically central" and "linked to a superterrestrial order of power" (Anderson [1983] 2016, 13). Even though Ge'ez was a powerful tool that facilitated the imagining of an Ethiopian community of Christendom, the vast majority of the population could not comprehend the language and so this sacred culture was dependent upon the clerical literati and their strategic mediations between heaven and earth, the divine rulers and their mortal subjects, and vernacular languages (such as Amharic and Tigrinya) and Ge'ez.

The antecedents of a modern Ethiopian melodramatic imagination are evident in the communication of religious moralisations in Ge'ez but also in their Amharic translations today. Amharic is suffused with religious idioms where the literal praising of God is the standard response to everyday greetings and the language has acted as a tool both in the centralisation and standardisation of the Ethiopian national state but also acted as a bridge to the sacred language Ge'ez from which it stems. It is revealing to requote the renowned Ethiopian-born film scholar Teshome Habte Gabriel at more length here as he draws comparisons between the instruction of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the cinema:

> In the church of my childhood, after Mass was said, people used to gather in the churchyards where they would be treated to a 1– to 2–hour long verbal visualisation of 'revelations' as experienced by such prophets as Ezekiel, Elijah or Jeremiah (incidentally, 'revelations' in the Ethiopia stands for ra'ey, literally meaning 'seen with the mind's eye'). The telling of the visions, by the preacher/narrator, were in a way a literal attempt to make visible, through performance, what was fundamentally invisible. This was done without questioning the sanctity of the biblical stories. The visualisations were the vehicles for instruction or delight. Then, when the congregation returned to their respective homes, informal discussions would take place
>
> One such discussion that I distinctly remember is how Ezekiel saw visions of wheels and angels appearing in the sky. It is as if technology goes back in time to meet Ezekiel, and in cinema Ezekiel comes forward in time to meet the technology of cinema, and in both cases reference is made to the turning of the wheels. ([2001] 2011, 97)

The workings of cinema and religious instruction through a sacred Ethiopian lens are clearly drawn together here in a comparison that positions the cinema as a modern medium through which similar revelations can be communicated as similarly described by the filmmaker Behailu Wassie in the first section of this chapter. Whereas the belief in the sacred inspired a great religiously imagined community unified under the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Amharic commercial cinema has gained popularity in Ethiopia through a direct link to similar expressions of national identity and cultural heritage that "offers a manner for the revelation of themes and motifs due to their popularity and repetition" (Celli 2011, 7). The issue of language and imagery is important here as it is the revelatory capacity of these narratives through themes, iconography and allegory that the sediments of cultural specificity are (re)imagined and find value.

Building on the scholarship by Richard Allen (2018), Ira Bhaskar (2012; 2018) and Louis Bayman (2015; 2018), melodrama no longer appears as a fully-fledged moral secular replacement to the sacred traditions that were radically broken as a result of the French Revolution. Instead, and according to Allen, "the melodramatic imagination does not emerge fully constituted in post-revolutionary France, as Brooks suggests; rather, it is recovered or rediscovered from an earlier melodramatic imaginary that was initially constituted from the reconceptualization of the Passion of Christ within medieval Christianity as a mise-en-scène of suffering" (2018, 32). The "pleasures of text, pictorial representation, or dramatic enactment" of a "medieval Christianity of Pathos" for Allen have "melodramatic attributes" (2018, 33), much in line with the delight Teshome Habte Gabriel experiences through religious visualisations. Allen suggests that "the Christianity of Pathos" or its more contemporary rendering – "affective piety" – are highly dependent on cultural and religious specificity in how they harness narratives of human suffering to shape their spiritual and emotional chords (2018). The notion of 'the Christianity of Pathos' may be evidenced in the venerations that Menelik II and some of his contemporaries were alleged to have performed in response to the first film screening in Ethiopia (see Chapter 1). But just as crucially for Ethiopian melodrama today and the conception of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination is the exploration of "the distinctive traditions of affective piety and their divergence and convergence in different film cultures" (Allen 2018, 33). This is not a purely Christian piety either and, indeed, as Allen mentions this affective piety can be seen across a range of religions and cultures from Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The focus on the Ethiopian Orthodox Church here is such as it remains a central (and founding) institution of the nationalist cultural hegemony in the country which is commonly perpetuated in the popular Amharic film industry, as is the case of other national popular film industries around the world that "uphold notions of a unified nation" (Dissanayake 2000, 146).

The Christianity of Pathos as represented in Christ's crucifixion, suffering for the sins of all humanity, is a constant source of empathic identification that inspires emotional responses and a solemn piety in Ethiopia to an extent rarely paralleled in other Christian traditions.[45] The adherence to fasting amongst the faithful, in which no animal produce

[45] The age-old integration of Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities in some parts of Ethiopia, particularly in Wello, is such that it is not uncommon for Christian and Muslim holidays to be celebrated by both.

can be consumed and sexual activity must be refrained from, is epitomised in the 55 days of fasting prior to Fasika (Easter), the longest continual period of fasting out of at least 250 fasting days each year. Feast days and Church services are reminiscent of other virtuous melodramatic tendencies such as in the theatricality and passions of the rituals they perform. There are no less than 33 feasts of the Virgin Mary which indicates the level of veneration attached to the Mother of Christ. Sigdet/Good Friday is the one day in the Church calendar that emphasises suffering unlike any other as adherents attend the most solemn liturgy. Sigdet is characterised by a sense of sorrow and desolation as churchgoers spend all day prostrating themselves to the point of exhaustion confessing greater and lesser sins. Such specificities in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity allude to Allen's description that "[t]he Christianity of Pathos also gives rise to more particular Christian themes, iconography, and allegory in melodrama in a manner that is mediated by the institutional and cultural history of the Christian Church" (2018, 33). In regards to Italian film melodrama, Louis Bayman traces the Christianity of Pathos enacted by the Catholic Church and his depictions have striking similarities with the Ethiopian context. For Bayman:

> Christianity, like melodrama, operates on the basis that pathos has a moral (and dramatic) force, its initial distinctiveness granting an ethical value to suffering[,] […] [c]ompassion, persecution, martyrdom, sacrifice, pity, penitence, charity–each relate the believer to a moral order through his or her capacity to feel. Christianity deals in situations of absolute moral polarity; at the center of its story is a family drama of son, Father, and *mater dolorosa* beset by persecution and undone by betrayal. From accounts of conversions to lamentations, parables, and moral tales, its narratives present states of innocence and sin, nostalgia for a lost paradise and the inevitability of suffering and sacrifice. (2018, 282)

For a better understanding in the Ethiopian context and how Tewahedo Christianity acts with similar melodramatic tendencies, it is worth paying closer attention to the narrative of the *Kebra Nagast* in its retelling of the biblical story of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon and its central position as repository of Ethiopian religious and national sentiment.

The *Kebra Nagast* legitimised the royal Solomonic lineage claimed by countless Ethiopian Emperors who followed the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and validated "Ethiopian forms of worship, and the spiritual supremacy of Ethiopia over Israel" (Hubbard 1954, 39). According to historian Harold G. Marcus it consists of "a pastiche of legends … [that] blended local and regional oral traditions and style and substance

derived from the Old and New Testaments, various apocryphal texts, Jewish and Islamic commentaries, and Patristic writings" (1994, 17-18). The Ge'ez version of the story of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon is framed as a debate amongst the 318 Orthodox Fathers at the First Council of Nicaea as they discuss the contents of the Ark of the Covenant which leads into the central narrative of how the Ark came to reside in Ethiopia (in Aksum).

The central story told is that of the Queen of Sheba (referred to as Makeda), King Solomon, their son Menelik I and the story of how the true Ark of the Covenant came to be in Ethiopia. There is a marked shift in the Ge'ez script compared to the telling of the story in the bible. The major focus is not on the wisdom of Solomon but the nobility and Ethiopian heritage of the Queen of Sheba. No longer is she the seductress but instead the victim of Solomon's trickery who, by an underhand ruse, is misled by the King who in effect rapes her. Upon her departure the night after her virginity has been taken, Solomon gives her a ring so that their child may be identified by him. On her journey home she gives birth to a son, Menelik. Menelik travels to Jerusalem to seek his father's blessing when he is 22 and upon meeting Solomon he identifies himself by the ring. Menelik refuses Solomon's plan to make him the successor to the throne in Jerusalem, insisting that he return home to Ethiopia. Unable to convince his son to stay, King Solomon resolves to send with Menelik the firstborn sons of the elders of his kingdom to escort him back to Ethiopia. Unhappy with this request and unbeknown to Menelik, the firstborns smuggle the Ark of the Covenant from Jerusalem as they depart for Ethiopia. During the journey, Menelik discovers the Ark is with him and Solomon learns of its absence, but before the King can pursue his son, Menelik and his entourage are miraculously flown home to Ethiopia by the grace and power of the Ark. Menelik's arrival in Aksum is celebrated with a huge feast and the Queen abdicates her throne to make way for his ascendancy. Menelik then sets off on a number of military campaigns and with the power of the Ark he is undefeatable. The closing chapters, as Hubbard notes, "are written as polemic against, if not an evangel to, the Jews. These chapters seek to prove by OT [Old Testament] allegories and proof-texts the Messianic purpose of Jesus, the validity of the Ethiopian forms of worship, and the spiritual supremacy of Ethiopia over Israel" (1954, 39).

The narrative of the *Kebra Nagast* clearly resembles some rhetorical melodramatic strategies. We have the Queen of Sheba as a victim of sexual manipulation by Solomon.

This passage, leading to the birth of Menelik, forms a considerable part of the story and is also the contribution unique to the Ethiopic version. As Edward Ullendorff recounts:

> when Solomon gave a banquet in the queen's honour he had the meat specially seasoned. At the end of the evening the king invited the queen to spend the night in his chambers. The queen agreed on condition that Solomon swore to her that he would not take her by force. The king complied with this request–provided Sheba promised not to take anything in the king's house. Solomon then mounted his bed on one side of the chamber and had the queen's bed prepared at the other end. Near her bed he placed a bowl of water. Sheba soon awoke, for the seasoned food had made her very thirsty. She rose and drank of the water, but Solomon seized her hand and accused her of having broken her oath. He then worked his will with her. The king dreamt that a great light of brilliance, the *shekhia*, the divine presence, had left Israel and moved to Ethiopia. ([1968] 2013, 140)

The consequential birth of Sheba's illegitimate child, Menelik I, grows up to become usurper, by proxy, of his father's most powerful artefact and establishes the lineage of the Solomonic dynasty in Ethiopia as the Queen of Sheba sacrifices her own power to make way for her son. Written from the Ethiopian perspective, the *Kebra Nagast* casts the Queen of Sheba as the victim of rape not as a seductress or descendant of demons as other accounts of the tale may have it. Instead she is the sacrificial mother figure whose son, guided by fate, becomes founder of the Ethiopian Kingdom that will supersede all others through divine biblical proclamation and prophecy. The power of this sacred narrative places Ethiopia as the second Zion and repositions the country at the centre in a potent new nationalist/sacred imagined community.

Although a combination of affective piety and nationalist sentiment are clearly distilled through a look at the *Kebra Nagast*, it should not be understood in the same refrain as modern melodrama. Instead it can be seen as indicative of melodramatic tendencies and socioemotional impulses that resonate with a contemporary Ethiopian melodramatic imagination. The narrative of this epoch does have striking similarities with the modern melodramatic mode as it exemplifies the suffering and sacrificial nature of an idealised virtuous mother figure, a victim of the patriarchy, whose son, through fatalistic poetic justice embodies her vengeance and renewal. The main difference with modern melodrama, however, is that the emotional emphasis in modern melodrama is on the everyday experiences of individuals in relation to their own lives and the inherent contradictions of modern societies that have been inculcated, to lesser or greater degrees, into the global market and, therefore, to liberal capitalist tendencies and consumerism (Gledhill and Williams 2018).

The influence of the *Kebra Nagast* and the central position of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is evident in the conventions of nationalist Ethiopian culture and imaginations today often employed in opposition to forces of globalisation. Even in the legal phraseology of the revised Ethiopian constitution of 1955, in the throes of modernisation, Article 2 enshrined, legitimised and renewed this mythological narrative: "the Imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line … [which] descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik I, son of the Queen of Ethiopia, the Queen of Sheba, and King Solomon of Jerusalem" (cited in Ullendorff [1968] 2013, 139). Furthermore, the role of religion in shaping an Ethiopian subjectivity maintains a contemporary potency long since dissipated in most contemporary European cases. The work by Louis Bayman (2018) on the effects of Catholicism in Italian melodrama, however, seem to resonate with the links between perceiving melodrama in modern Ethiopia and its affinity with the affective piety of Tewahedo traditions. As such the link between melodrama and religion in Ethiopia is historically contingent. An Ethiopian-style melodrama has seemingly, therefore, emerged from forms of religious expression, feeling and daily rituals that have inhered in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church traditions since the fourteenth century and as exemplified in the canonical importance of the *Kebra Nagast*.

Conclusions

It is important to reemphasise here that an Ethiopian rendering of a melodramatic imagination is distinct from Brooks' (1976) theorisation as emerging from the processes of modernisation and secularisation in Europe in the 19th century. Unlike Western Europe, Ethiopia has remained a staunchly sacred society where modernity was introduced in a top-down manner through government reform which included the employment and tight control of artistic and cultural media production. Social change, however, could not be easily controlled by a regime unwilling to relinquish absolute and indefinite political control of the nation. The screening of *The Hidden Hunger* on Ethiopian TV capitalised on a moment of lapse in the previously strict control of media and had an immediate impact by harnessing melodramatic tendencies in its Manichean oppositions and stark portrayal of suffering. When political power was secularised and religion persecuted during the Derg regime, modernity and importantly cinema were moulded to suit the collectivist policies of the state and strict control of the arts and media was once again enforced. Inevitably, the Derg regime met a similar fate to that of

Haile Selassie's as the state control on media could not contain for long the suffering of millions of Ethiopian citizens due to civil war and famine.

This chapter has discussed how melodramatic tendencies can be evidenced in both pre-modern and modern cultural texts from Ethiopia that have helped formulate and impacted upon an Ethiopian-style melodrama. Such is the nationalist and religious importance of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the formation of a sacral imagined community that it maintained its potency and centrality during the re-imagining of Ethiopia as a modern nation-state. Due to the specific implementation of modernising policies by the imperial regime, art and media were used as tools to disseminate their ideal of Ethiopian modernity, however, the lack of hierarchical and meaningful political change eventually resulted in social upheaval. As is the case with Italian melodrama (see Bayman 2018), Indian melodrama (see Bhaskar 2012; 2018; Vasudevan 2011) and elsewhere, the sacred in Ethiopian society and culture has remained fully active which "foregrounds a charged language of emotion as the affective drive of individual subjectivity; at the same time, it both amplifies and deepens the implications of the subjective in the social" (Bhaskar 2018, 253). So while being historically grounded in their indigenous cultures, religions that have deep cultural roots such as in the case with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, also offer a divine legitimacy through affective modes that helps mould the norms of society.

There are strong tendencies towards a similar affective melodrama in the commercial Amharic cinema of Ethiopia since the early 2000s and in other cultural mediums such as theatre, literature, television and radio that became more widespread in Ethiopia from the 1960s onwards. Although I believe an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination pervades these other popular cultural and artistic works (and media), in this thesis I look to the Amharic film industry in more detail due to its sudden popular and commercially sustainable rise since 2002 and its ability to engage the imaginations of Ethiopians at home and abroad through an Ethiopian-style melodrama. The emergence and success of commercial Amharic feature films is reminiscent of Gledhill's description of how "the lengthening of the feature film drew on melodramatic structuring of conflict, crisis, and resolution, while incorporating spectacle, comic side-kickery, and pathos. What emerged was cinematized melodramatic modality that generated Hollywood's infinitely diversifying genres" (2018, xviii). It is the appearance of localised Amharic film genres in Ethiopia, then, that helps organise and distil an Ethiopian-style melodramatic

aesthetic articulation into culturally conditioned content and affect defined types which makes them accessible for Ethiopian audiences. In describing the melodramatic mode as "[c]onstituting an expressive mode of aesthetic articulation that shapes the operation of generic worlds", Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (2018, 5) help position localised film genres at the vanguard of culturally conditioned melodramatic permutations across commercial cinemas in different contexts.

The Amharic film industry in contemporary Ethiopia is organised along commercial lines. The inherently competitive nature of the industry, however, is subject to no specialist regulatory body or trade unions apart from exhibition licensing stipulations, resulting in an industry open to exploitation but also highly contingent on popular trends in genre. At the same time the industry is still reliant on the relatively concentrated patronage of urban-dwelling, Amharic-speaking cinemagoing audiences for the majority of its profits which is reflected in the type of images and narratives that appeal to them. The entertainment factor of commercial cinema leads to films that maintain an intensity of action and emotion that often feeds off and into specifically Ethiopian melodramatic imaginations. Crucial to the workings of the Amharic film industry, genres organise the production and marketing of Amharic films into specific groups that deal with different emotional, affective or/and thematic elements which attract the most audiences. Genres add a sense of stability and audience recognition that help elide potentially destabilising elements. They also maintain enough variation, fuelled by the industry's competitive logic of its often informal and unregulated market, for an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination and Ethiopian-style melodrama to be mediated and affected by competing voices. So before more detailed analyses of Amharic films are attempted in the final chapters of this thesis, the next chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) analyse film genre scholarship and the workings of film genres in the Amharic film industry in order to complement the work of this chapter and help better understand how films employ a melodramatic mode and sustain an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination. Just as this chapter has grounded the investigation of the Ethiopian context within the broader theory and scholarship of melodrama, such a revision is also necessary for genre theory in Film Studies in order to properly ascertain the scholarly worth that explorations into the commercial Amharic film industry may provide for broader research in film, media and cultural studies.

More detailed explorations of how the melodramatic mode inspires a distinctly Ethiopian melodramatic imagination and representations is explored in Chapters 6 and 7 through the textual analysis of Amharic films. The *yefiker film/love film* (both tragic and happy), *assikiñ yefiker film/humorous love film* (and other comedies), and even the *lib anteltay film/suspense film*, the three most successful Amharic film genres almost always resolve through moralistic denouements underlining family, society and nation over immoral deeds, corruption and greed. This coheres with the fact that the didactic role of theatre, poetry, literature and music, with Amharic's status as the national language has long been emphasised in the controlling, centralising and modernising policies of consecutive Ethiopian regimes, enabling the appreciation of these arts as a means of expression but also instruction. This further resonates with the transmedial applications of melodrama across the world and a discussion of the Ethiopian case study has shown how melodrama mutates by co-opting distinct cultural sources and beliefs and appears differently in distinct contexts. The key work of this chapter, therefore, has been to appreciate the cultural value of melodrama in Ethiopia. This has involved considering the melodramatic imagination more seriously and both modern and mythical (pre-modern) iterations of an Ethiopian-style melodrama. This discussion has hopefully enrichened melodrama debates and distilled important recent scholarship on melodrama to draw attention back to the ideas of melodramatic imaginations and representations as situated in relation to the cultural, historical and emotional lived experiences of everyday life in our modern world.

CHAPTER 4

The History and Contemporary Currents of Film Genre Scholarship

> The argument that genre is ubiquitous, a phenomenon common to all instances of discourse, clearly must modify the perception, and to some extent also the location, of Hollywood's genres. No longer the sole or even the principle site of genre in the cinema, Hollywood instead becomes just one particular site, its genres specific instances – not necessarily paradigms – of a much more general phenomenon.
>
> Steve Neale (2000, 31)

Genre and melodrama share various connections, whether melodrama is understood as a global genre of film or as a dominant mode in a system of genres produced by a commercially oriented film industry. Whereas Chapter 2 sought to clarify the concept of melodrama, this chapter explores the scholarship on film genre in order to better position an exploration of commercial Amharic cinema in relation to *both* genre and melodrama. Genre, like melodrama, is commonly associated with 'low-brow' formulaic popular entertainment driven by a commercial impulse; however, such assumptions are too readily dismissive of genre's cultural value.

As film theory and criticism developed in the early twentieth century, it reflected the divisions in film practice that were roughly drawn along expressionist and realist lines. Pioneering filmmakers were strongly associated with either of these two camps. Louis Lumière, for example, was seen to highlight the real and raw objectivity of film while Georges Méliès was seen as the pre-eminent example of expressive, fantastical and surreal filmmaking and an innovator of special effects. Expressionist approaches concerned with the affective experience of a "cinema of attractions" (Gunning 1986) were popular until the 1930s when the establishment of the British documentary school along with the influence of 1940s and 1950s Italian neo-realism[46] ushered in a preference for realism in approaches to both film theory and practice (Crosson 2013, 23-24).

[46] It is interesting to note the recent work by Louis Bayman (2018) that highlights the melodrama of Italian films considered as "neo-realist" in a reading that emphasises the employment and co-functioning of realism and melodrama.

The interest in realism arrived at a time when film theory was undergoing a period where contributions from critics sought to underline the artistic credibility of film so as to form the foundation for academic film scholarship. While these early critics recognised genres at work in the cinema, they generally consigned them to the realms of popular culture; thus scholars tended to reject genres and instead favoured valuing films and their directors based on judgments of 'high' aesthetic value. This work was advanced in the 1950s and 1960s by contributors to the pioneering film journal *Cahiers du cinema* including influential French filmmakers such as François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard who at the same time openly acknowledged Hollywood genres as influencing their own films. The co-founder (along with Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Joseph-Marie Lo Duca) of the journal, André Bazin, one of the most influential early thinkers on film and a major proponent of cinema's realist credentials, described "La politique des auteurs", or what became in Film Studies the auteur theory, as "consisting of choosing the personal factor in artistic creation as a standard of reference, and then of assuming that it continues and even progresses from one film to the next" ([1957] 1971, 255). This method of film analysis focused on the filmmaker as artist and its longstanding impact is felt throughout Film Studies. This was exemplified in the previous chapter where the melodrama genre was originally theorised in the 1970s in relation to the films of Douglas Sirk and only a few other directors judged 'valuable' enough by scholars.

Genre theory, in a broader sense, was first developed in literature studies and has spread through arts and humanities scholarship, often through reference to Aristotle's *Poetics* as a foundational text. Aristotle's focus was strictly confined to formal analysis and foreshadowed the grouping of genres by identifying unitary formal conventions. Raphaëlle Moine's comprehensive and lucid contemporary study on film genres in *Cinema Genre* ([2002] 2008) describes Aristotle's work alongside other formalist theories of genre that propose theoretical genres in order to limit art instead of exploring art's variability and flexibility. Moine explains:

> No matter what theory of works a theoretical genre is derived from, it manufactures a kind of 'non-place,' an ahistorical space that is supposed to permit the analyst to invoke 'scientific' criteria in order to escape from empiricism, and from the variability of the categories established by culture. […] In actual fact, theories of literature, like that of cinema, are situated in the history of the arts and ideas, and can only be elaborated by taking them into account. All attempts to define genres involve a choice of theoretical criteria that reflect a historically

> conditioned conception about the artistic object being studied. In making this observation, I do not mean to disqualify theoretical genres, but simply to emphasize that they themselves also embody a degree of historicity. ([2002] 2008, 38)

Moine's critique here also addresses the issues surrounding melodrama as a theoretically proposed genre, as discussed in the previous two chapters. The possible implications of scholarship's inherent historicity are also raised and similarly addressed in the previous chapters with reference to Brooks' theorisation of a melodramatic imagination. As theorisations of the family melodrama were part of broader film genre scholarship in the 1970s, both genre and melodrama in Film Studies became entwined in abstracted debates influenced by psychoanalysis, Marxism and Feminism and less concerned with actual contexts of film production and consumption. In order to build up a clearer sense of how and why genre theory emerged in Film Studies, its different stages and what uses it has today, the following sections trace its development from the early writings of Bazin (and his contemporaries) up to the present day.

Film Criticism before Genre Theory

Before the establishment of Film Studies in the early 1960s, a few early critics were writing about film genres and engaging with enduring issues that were to prove central in the development of a film genre theory in the late 1960s and 1970s. These writings deserve recognition for they anticipate many of the key debates that were to preoccupy film genre theorists such as the centrality of the audience, a focus on American cinema, and an acknowledgment of genre conventions. Crucially, they also went against the trend in scholarship that sought to exemplify cinema's artistic credentials and by discussing genres alluded to the inherent commercial nature of American films. In Peter Hutchings' (1995) historical account of film genre theory and criticism, important lines of inquiry into genre are highlighted in the contributions of André Bazin concerning the western genre; Robert Warshow concerning the western and gangster genres; and Lawrence Alloway concerning American noir and crime genres. In their study *Notions of Genre: writings on popular film before genre theory* (2016), Barry Keith Grant and Malisa Kurtz add the names James Agee and Siegfried Kracauer to this illustrious list of film critics. Both Agee (1949) and Kracauer (1951) discuss the slapstick comedy of Chaplin, Keaton and Lloyd amongst other great silent film comics, placing the genre historically and attributing its demise to the onset of sound and dialogue-fuelled 'talkies'.

Kracauer's 1947 book on German film is considered by Grant and Kurtz to be "essentially a genre study" and they thus laud him as the "first true film genre theorist" (2016, 3). Kracauer's ambitious study is pioneering in its "grouping films according to narrative and stylistic patterns and seeing them as both reflecting and constructing a national identity for viewers" (Grant and Kurtz 2016, 3). Kracauer's objective was to fit films into his preconceived narrative and thematic prescriptions and closed groupings of what he described as instinct and tyrant films (1947). Although critiqued by Grant and Kurtz (2016) for being too rigid in his conceptualisation of these two theoretical genres, this work was pioneering in its attempts to group films according to formal patterns and conventions.

More commonly acknowledged examples of film genre criticism are essays on the western in the early 1950s by Warshow and Bazin, and Warshow's piece on the gangster film in 1948 titled 'The Gangster as Tragic Hero' ([1948] 2016). Instead of formulating theoretical genres that did not exist within the film industry, as was the case with Kracauer's method, the 'western' and 'gangster' film were adopted terms in popular circulation that already had well-established followings by the 1930s. It was the western, however, that attracted the attention of many early film critics with its centrality to film genre debates still thriving today.

Uninterested in identifying the formal conventions of the western film genre, for Bazin, writing in *Cahiers du Cinéma*: "the western must be something else again than its form. Galloping horses, fights, strong and brave men in a wildly austere landscape could not add up to a definition of the genre nor encompass its charms" ([1952] 2016, 95). Rather, Bazin questions the western's international popularity, where "formal attributes by which one normally recognizes the western are simply signs or symbols of its profound reality, namely, the myth" ([1952] 2016, 95). Thus, according to Bazin, the western is not only "cinema par excellence", but also "the American film par excellence" placing the mythic quality of the western within the specific geographical and historical setting of the conquest of the American West. The genre in effect posits "a collection of historical events that signal the birth of a new order and a new civilization […] begotten the myths necessary for the confirmation of history […] to reinvent a morality [in order] to rediscover […] the foundation of the law that would make order out of chaos, separate heaven from earth" ([1952] 2016, 101). Bazin, here, references the western as functioning as an ideal form of cultural myth made up of a system of conventions that

represent the 'objective reality' of American culture and society. Bazin's famous description of John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) as the epitome of the genre, reaching a 'classical maturity', also manages to dodge the question of defining the genre's more general conventions. The film is, instead, exemplified as the ideal form of the western and John Ford is extolled as a true American auteur. Bazin's penchant for hyperbole often leads to a vague, broad and generalised understanding of the western. He does, however, make passing observations about the successful cycles of the American comedy and gangster film and in the essay entitled "The Evolution of the Western" ([1957] 1971), asserts the different historical changes genres necessarily undergo. This historical awareness of genre cycles and permutations has often been ignored or remained problematic in many later theorisations of film genres.

The historical specificity of genres as well as their ideological function is built upon more substantially in Robert Warshow's writings on the western and gangster film published in the *Partisan Review* (1948 and 1954). Writing on the gangster film, Warshow states: "the gangster speaks for us, expressing that part of the American psyche that rejects the qualities and the demands of modern life, that rejects 'Americanism' itself" ([1948] 2016, 228). Here the cultural specificity of genres is explicitly stated and although the idea of a shared monolithic national psyche has been debunked by postmodernism (Grant and Kurtz 2016), Warshow addresses the gangster film in terms of its ideological and imaginary function in American society. Like Bazin's identification of the western as myth, Warshow's essay describes the gangster film as a specifically American cultural myth where the "real city… produces only criminals; the imaginary city produces the gangster" ([1948] 2016, 228). Here Warshow refers to the modern American city as the exclusive setting of gangster films much like how the Wild West became synonymous with the western. This urban setting gives rise to gangster narratives that represent the tensions of capitalist democracy in American society as the gangster protagonist's individual drive for success and resulting high is ultimately followed by a resounding crash due to an inability to break free from fundamental social networks and responsibilities.

Warshow's writings on genre also acknowledged the central position of film producers and the interpretative role of the audience in relation to film genres; a crucial line of enquiry in later genre theory that distanced it from writings on film auteurs. Genres such as the musical, western and gangster film are described as "the movies constant

tendency to create fixed dramatic patterns that can be repeated indefinitely with a reasonable expectation of profit" (Warshow [1948] 2016, 228). In this illuminating passage, Warshow explains the mechanism of genre films' success:

> For such a type to be successful means that its conventions have imposed themselves upon the general consciousness and become the accepted vehicles of a particular set of attitudes and a particular aesthetic effect. One goes to any individual example of the type with very definite expectations, and originality is to be welcomed only to the degree that it intensifies the expected experience without fundamentally altering it. Moreover, the relationship between the conventions that go to make up such a type and the real experience of its audience or the real facts of whatever situation it pretends to describe is of only secondary importance and does not determine its aesthetic force. It is only in an ultimate sense that the type appeals to its audience's experience of reality; much more immediately, it appeals to previous experiences of the type itself: it creates its own field of reference. ([1948] 2016, 227-228)

The term "type" may be replaced with "genre" in this passage to read like a contemporary account that positions the audience at the centre of a collective genre authorship. The passage above foreshadows key debates surrounding the role of audiences in recognising the discursivity of genres, but what Warshow is referring to more broadly here is the central role genres play in the commercialisation of film. Explaining how films appeal to an audience's previous experience of similar types to create their "own field of reference" Warshow sums up the formulaic tendencies of commercial cinema. It is in an audience's active recognition of genre conventions and in the commercial pressures on filmmakers to make a profit that allow financial and popular expectations to be met by creatively repeating, manipulating and referencing "previous experiences of the type". It is, however, this same commercial potential of genres and the repetition of conventions that also vilified genre in the eyes of art purists and why Warshow's serious consideration of popular culture in this era, and particularly with reference to film, should be recognised as breaking new critical ground.

Contemporary film genre theory is indebted to the insights of these early film critics. Although Bazin and Warshow assumed ideal genre definitions, in terms of the western and gangster film, much of their writing is concurrent with later theorisations of film genre that attempt more systematic definitions of genre. The western, and also to some extent the gangster film, were to feature prominently in these later theoretical debates as will become apparent in the following section. An awareness of film genres' contexts, such as their cultural specificity, historical transformations, geographical dispersion and

audience reception indicates an appreciation these early critics had for the inherent discursivity of film genres as concepts open to constant interpretation and renegotiation. It is this line of enquiry which concerns this thesis and which has often been neglected in the subsequent theorising of film genres.

Early Film Genre Theory and its Discontents

As the presence of genres was seen as an inherently commercial practice and obstacle to the artistic credentials of American cinema in early studies of cinema, the work of Bazin and Warshow, devoted to two of the most prolific American genres, was ground-breaking and long lasting in its influence on later critics and theorists (see Grant and Kurtz 2016; Moine [2002] 2008). These first attempts to articulate concepts of film genre naturally built upon loose descriptive terms used by film producers, marketers and audiences to categorise films into types. The term 'genre', derived from the French word meaning 'type/kind', encompassed these early descriptors indicating the kind of narratives and feelings to be expected upon viewing a film. According to Barry Keith Grant:

> Only after this circuit of economic and aesthetic relations was firmly established was it possible for critics to realize that if those handy descriptive tags actually referred to true traditions of film practice, then they might be worth identifying, analyzing, and theorizing about. Genre thus became a critical term as well as a collection of popular categories, and it has since proved to be one of the most useful conceptual tools for understanding popular film as both art and artefact. (2012, xviii)

Grant (2012) and Hutchings (1995) both associate the development of genre theory in the 1970s with concurrent attempts to establish Film Studies as a field deserving of serious academic recognition during this period. Much of the early scholarship then took up two issues of major concern. The first, building on the work of Bazin and Warshow, was concerned with methodological issues about how to define film genres and systematically analyse genre in films. The second issue was a response to auteur theory as a "critical imposition" (Hutchings 1995, 65) and so genre was used as a way to reconnect the scholarship with the experiences of the average audience member who pays to go to watch a movie. The turn to genre analysis was, therefore, also an attempt to resituate Film Studies scholarship within cinema's roots as a popular form of cultural production and entertainment. This last point is raised by Ed Buscombe in his early contribution to the field, stating that "anyone who is at all concerned with education must be worried at the distance between much of the criticism now written and the way

the average audience reacts to a film. For them it is not a new Hawks or Ford or a new Peckinpah; it is a new western" (1970, 43).

Broader mid-twentieth century academic trends, including in Film Studies, were heavily influenced by the wider approaches of structuralism, concerned with examining the underlying structural logic of cultures and all forms of cultural production. Structuralist readings of film inspired by Claude Lévi-Strauss' anthropological work had already influenced the thinking of Bazin and Warshow about the myth-making credentials of the western and gangster film. The roots of structuralism can be found in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, who explores how language can be studied as a formal meaning-making system of multiple elements. Occurring at the same time as research into film genre in Film Studies was Christian Metz's "application of Saussure's theories to film, arguing that film was a logical entity that could be examined using scientific techniques, a belief he developed in his influential works *Language and Cinema* (1974) and *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (1974)" (Crosson 2013, 25). Film Studies was still in its formative years as an academic programme of higher education during this period and Metz's semiotics of the cinema identified a "theory of film-as-a-system-of-signs" (Harman 1975, 90) that evolved into a specific language of film conventions. Seán Crosson observes that "the existence of film genres is the most recognisable example of how a particular and recognisable 'language' has evolved in cinema" (2013, 25) and as early film genre scholarship emerged at the same time as work on the semiotics of cinema, the research varied from formalist to structuralist interpretations. The work on genre reflected this broader move in the subject, beginning in the 1960s, from formal theories on the film text to theories on film's wider socio-cultural implications. As James Monaco notes, "[t]he center of interest has shifted from generative to receptive theories. We are now no longer so concerned with how a film is made as with how it is perceived and what effect it has in our lives" (2000, 359).

Various approaches to film genre were adopted by scholars in the early 1970s. Kitses' (1969) approach to the western and McArthur's (1972) approach to the gangster film reflected the competing attitudes in Film Studies at the time. Both these early studies adopt a theory heavily dependent on textual analysis influenced by structuralism. In a vein similar to the theorisations of the family melodrama genre, the methodology of much of the research is neatly explained by Moine: "after a general analysis of genre based on structuralist principles, they deal with prominent auteurs who have been

associated with a genre, thus attempting to combine the study of genres with auteur studies" ([2002] 2008, xiv). A large number of articles exploring American film genres appeared in journals such as *Screen*, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, *Film Culture*, *Jump Cut*, *Movie* and *Journal of Popular Culture* with each showing a bias to a different approach. *Jump Cut*, for example, was well known for promoting Marxist-inspired interpretations. The field as a whole was also centred in American and British universities which made the American experience of film genres the most accessible and obvious case study for genre studies. Film Studies since, however, has not managed to properly de-centre its research from American experiences that still dominate mainstream studies in the field. The fixation on American cinema, meant that alternative cultural experiences of genre were overlooked in exchange for an increasing acceptance of American universalism. This notion, for example, can be evidenced in four influential monographs written during this period: *American Film Genres* (Kaminsky 1974), *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Cawelti 1976), *Beyond Formula: American Film Genres* (Solomon 1976) and *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking and the Studio System* (Schatz 1981). As well as Film Studies' understandable fixation with American experiences of film genre, approaches were also preoccupied with the period of classical Hollywood cinema with Moine explaining that "[t]he crises that the Hollywood system underwent during this period, and along with it the system of genres, possibly also contributed to make the 'old' Hollywood genres a subject of study" ([2002] 2008, xiii). Despite varying approaches, then, the fascination of early film genre theorists was overwhelmingly concerned with American experiences of cinema during the studio era and often exemplified in studies of the western. This is, perhaps, understandable seeing as most theorists were themselves white American males, the demographic from which this genre is considered to draw its largest fan base (Hutchings 1995).

Much early film genre scholarship was devoted to seeking methods in order to accurately define genres, a task fraught with its own methodological issues. Here Ryall describes the work of genre theorists, somewhat problematically, as follows: "[w]e are defining the limits of its [a genre's] significance" (1975, 27). Seeking the limitations and boundaries of single genres with little regard for the relationships between genres, Hutchings aptly critiques this common approach, stating that "genre (or genres generally) as a legitimate object of study here involves authorizing particular readings of the genre and, as a necessary by-product of this, marginalizing or ignoring others"

(1995, 66). The *a priori* recognition of genre conventions from a pre-conceived canon of films, seen as genre archetypes, led early theorists in circles in what Tudor termed the "empiricist dilemma". This method of exploring the limits of genre "first requires that the films be isolated, for which purposes a criterion is necessary, but the criterion is, in turn, meant to emerge from the empirically established common characteristics of the films" (Tudor [1973] 2012, 5).

Douglas Pye further alludes to the problems of defining genres in isolation from each other. He points particularly to issues inherent in "terms like 'definition' and 'classification,' which seem almost unavoidable in genre criticism" and argues that they "are probably misleading: they suggest a greater precision of method than is in fact possible, and also tend to imply that genre criticism exists to establish territorial boundaries" (1975, 29). Pye points to the issue of essentialist definitions of genres and echoes the work of Alloway in this regard. Pye, however, continues down the common path in early genre theory of using the western as his exemplar for understanding film genres in general. Indeed, like many genre studies at this time, scholars often used genre to enhance their understanding of "authorship in the American cinema" (Pye [1975] 2016, 254) and thus amalgamated genre and auteur approaches. Although Pye gives lucid examples and makes valuable contributions and insights into the methodology of genre studies, his work is emblematic of the fact that – in essence – early genre theory was really only an American genre theory (and often a theory of westerns at that) which neglected the role of the audience altogether.

The relationship between film genres and audiences is also an issue of considerable debate, yet meaningful and systematic methodological developments remain elusive despite important work in audience and reception studies. As Hutchings points out, the rhetorical position of the audience in many genre studies has remained abstract and thus, "[r]eal audiences (rather than Ed Buscombe's 'average audience') sometimes seem a million miles away" (1995, 66). Tom Ryall's 1975 article clearly sets out the place of the audience in his "master image for genre criticism" consisting of "a triangle composed of artist/film/audience. Genres may be defined as patterns/forms/styles/structures which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the film maker, and their reading by an audience" (1975, 27-28). Yet this triangular scaffold has not been substantially built upon and has come under significant criticism for its vagueness (see Neale 1980). Other genre theorists,

such as Andrew Tudor, sought to place the critic amidst the audience. He writes that "*Genre* is what we collectively believe it to be" (Tudor 1973, 139), evoking the earlier writing of Agee (1944) and Alloway (1971), who measure their analysis of a film in relation to their participation as an audience member and, by extension, feeding off the visceral reactions of audiences. Tudor himself, however, acknowledges that an approach based on seemingly anecdotal evidence falls short of the requirements necessary for a genre theory (1973).

The majority of early genre film scholarship, such as the work by scholars already discussed, was devoted to exploring the western and to a lesser degree the gangster film in order to test various methodologies for genre classification. From Bazin's fixation with the western to Pye's explicit combination of genre and auteur methods, the work devoted to the western in particular inspired a variety of significant and enduring insights for genre theorists. The formal analysis of genres and attempt to understand their perceived iconography,[47] built on the idea of genre conventions. Alloway (1963; 1971) used the term "iconography" to identify aspects of story, style and theme in crime films while Buscombe's (1970) attention focused on formal objects within the mise-en-scène such as in setting, costume, props and colour. Furthermore, Buscombe (1970) identified an inner and outer form, the outer form referring to specific objects that then act as generic icons carrying symbolic meaning and thematic significance which in turn denotes an inner form. In a western, the iconographic wardrobe of the genre typically differentiates between a hero in a bright/white costume and a villain in a dark/black costume. Typecast actors, archetypal characters and specific objects also become iconographic in genre films as well as broader aspects of the mise-en-scène such as in the case of low-key chiaroscuro lighting being iconographic of film noir.

Grant explains that "just as religious icons are always already infused with symbolic meaning, so is the iconography of genre films" (2007, 12). The inner and outer form become indicators of a film's overall themes and attitudes in the particular way they are organised and represented in the film. The relevance of this work to this thesis is that the icons of genre films can be seen to carry specific culturally determined meanings while their thematic and moral values remain open to manipulation by the film's narrative organisation and interpretation by audiences. The work on iconography, like

[47] The use of the term, iconography, in genre studies was borrowed from the art historian Erwin Panofsky ([1955] 1974).

genre conventions, sees genres as engendering visual motifs for conveying ideas that also carry culturally embedded meanings. In the early film scholarship, however, the cultural specificity of American experiences was taken for granted. As all of this research was concerned with American film it was inherently work of a deeply cultural nature, the issue being that it was often too readily used to explain other experiences of film genre in different contexts.

Further issues with this iconographic approach, particularly with regards to the western, was that there was an overemphasis on the analysis of the image within the frame (the mise-en-scène) and in particular the film's setting. This is evident through Buscombe's approach, "that because of the physical setting a Western is likely to deal successfully with stories about the opposition between man and nature, and the establishment of civilisation" (1970, 38). As the western is by definition set in a certain time and place (the period of the Wild West in the latter half of the nineteenth century, geographically anywhere west of the Mississippi river) the genre emits strong iconographical connections from such images. Similarly, the gangster film is often seen to have strong links to urban settings. In this genre context Warshow claimed that the gangster dwelled in the city, poetically referring to the city as "that dangerous and sad city of the imagination which is so much more important, which is the modern world" (1971, 131). The centrality of setting in these two most widely discussed genres, as can be read from Warshow's quote, gave more weight to thematic and symbolic readings of the iconography of recurring generic landscapes.

The problem of placing such definitional onus on setting or iconography, such as with the western and gangster film, was that it was impractical when applied across the system of genres. Musicals, for example, can be set anywhere and unlike the dramatic illusions of reality constructed by western and gangster films in their consistency of mise-en-scène, there is no unity of iconography across the genre (Altman 1987). Instead, musicals are more reliant on aspects of performance, sound and music, and formal film elements that image based genre approaches often overlook.

The division between form and content also becomes more blurred in a musical where the function of a musical number, the genre's defining feature, has clear and indistinguishable formal *and* thematic significance. A combination of accentuated formal elements – characters breaking the fourth wall and performing directly for the

camera, singing and dancing to non-diegetic music seemingly materialising from thin-air – intermittently intrudes on the dramatic narrative in a fundamentally anti-realist and expressive way to heighten emotional effect (Altman 1987). In this example the musical numbers signify such a shift in tone and style that they prompt an intense (often spectacular) emotionally-charged moment instead of representing themes and concepts such as those expressed in the symbolically-charged objects distinguishable in the iconographies of westerns and gangster films. The signature musical numbers in Bollywood films is an example par excellence here, with scholars such as Carlo Celli citing their roots in the digressions common in ancient Hindu literature (2011).

These more thematically oriented approaches to film genres were developed early in genre theory by Kitses (1969), focusing on ideas stemming from the Wild West as embodied in the western, as "an ambiguous, mercurial concept" (11) in American culture. For Kitses the contradictory and complex relationship between the colonialism of white American 'founding fathers' and the foundational principles of liberty in the American constitution were embodied in oppositional values. This "philosophical dialectic" (Kitses 1969, 11) enabled Kitses to identify the western's base application of thematic concerns. Drawing up a table of polarities under the headings "Wilderness" and "Civilisation", Kitses emphasises a flexibility to these defining themes as he explains the western as "a loose, shifting and variegated genre with many roots and branches" (1969, 17). Although Kitses' detailed study proves persuasive in relation to the westerns he analyses, it is not clear how a similar thematic approach would be applied to other genres.

Will Wright's 1975 study of the western is perhaps the most complete attempt to fully define a particular genre. Leading on from the earlier work of Kitses and influenced by Bazin, Wright argues that the western acts as a myth in American society and identifies formal narrative structures and types within the historical changes of the genre. Wright's notion of myth is heavily reliant on Claude Lévi-Strauss' work and positions audiences within a specific social order: "the structure of the myth corresponds to the conceptual needs of social and self-understanding required by the dominant social institutions of that period; the historical changes in the structure of myth correspond to the changes in the structure of those dominant institutions" (Wright 1975, 17). The depth and detail of Wright's study is impressive; however, for all the variations of

structure in the western, it seems that even this attempt at defining the limits of a single genre can only amount to "a provisional critical model" (Hutchings 1995, 71).

These issues of genre definition and methodology in the early scholarship all arise from a few pervasive oversights. Instead of understanding structures of film production and why genres developed in the first place, there was "an overinvestment in the western, which to a certain extent was figured at this time as the 'typical' genre, an understanding of which would eventually lead to an understanding of all genres" (Hutchings 1995, 71). Different genres are, however, defined by distinct and changing criteria. An understanding of the relationships *between* genres, however, was never explored even when their hybrid and mutable nature is recognised. Methodologies were focused on understanding separate genres in isolation instead of the larger governing structures of the genre system in the context of the American film industry. This was a case of not properly positioning the study in relation to broader governing issues of culture and contexts of production and reception and only appeared in any detail in genre scholarship during the 1990s (See below).

It is useful, here, to come back to Tudor's writing on the problems of genre definition:

> To take a genre such as a 'western', analyse it, and list its principle characteristics, is to beg the question that we must first isolate the body of films that are westerns. But they can only be isolated on the basis of the 'principle characteristics' which can only be discovered from the films themselves after they have been isolated. (1973, 135)

Moving towards a more pragmatic than systematic approach, Tudor suggests a "common cultural consensus" to be sought as "[*g*]*enre* is what we collectively believe it to be" (1973, 139). Although Tudor expresses a cultural awareness to genre, there is no attempt to critically engage with this crucial relationship between genres and audiences. In fact the assumed position of the audience remains problematic and underexplored, and is raised as a central concern in Hutchings' critique that:

> specific audiences can produce readings and interpretations that are not immediately available through a traditionally academic textual analysis. […] the triangular (and in retrospect rather hermetic) relationship between film-maker, film and audience drawn by 1970s genre theory would have to be pulled apart so that other issues – to do with national cinemas and the role of audiences – could be addressed. (1995, 75)

Hutchings raises the enduring issues of genre reception and the culturally homogenous focus of early film genre scholarship concerned with American films. It was only a few

scholars, including Kitses and Pye, who in this period made the point that "[w]hat is needed is a sense that all these films belong to the traditions of the American narrative film, a fact that is on the whole treated as unproblematical" (Pye 1975, 31). In Moine's recent research into cinematic genres she states that "a theory of cinematic genres must reconcile both textual and contextual approaches" ([2002] 2008, xvi) encouraging a move away from "the flattening of the question of genre under the Hollywood paradigm" ([2002] 2008, xvii). Moine recounts that French film scholarship has shied away from genre in the French context in part because "the prevalence of genres in popular and commercial cinemas, as well as their strong economic and ideological roots in mass culture, put them well outside the artistic field" ([2002] 2008, xvi). Even French scholarship that is concerned with genre is invariably concerned with American experiences (see Bourget 1985; Gili 1983; Lesuisse 2002). The American-centric nature of genre theory characterises much of the scholarship and continues to do so, but it is necessary to draw attention to the issues this has created in early scholarship and the long-lasting impacts it maintains on contemporary scholarship.

Ideology, Ritual and Historicity in Film Genres

An important line of inquiry in early theorisations of film genre was also less concerned with methodological questions of defining particular genres and more concerned with an analysis of genres in relation to their American socio-historical contexts and ideological/political underpinnings. This has already been evidenced in the discussion in Chapter 2, concerned about how melodrama was understood as a genre in relation to its ideological function in American society. This scholarship characteristically took the existence of the genre for granted, proving to be less concerned with theoretical and methodological issues of a genre's definition. The effect of genres on the lives of their consumers was of paramount concern in this work which raised further methodological questions concerning the study of audiences. Like earlier work, these studies also often took a single genre as their object of study in isolation from others but were pivotal in advancing the understanding of relationships among a particular genre and ideology and society.

It is important to note here that the complex layers and relationships between film genres and ideology are a matter of ongoing debate and, indeed, opinion. Building from the ideas already expressed by Will Wright (1975) in conceptualising genre films (particularly the western) as cultural myths stemming from the thinking of Lévi-Strauss

(1963) and Roland Barthes ([1957] 1972), also enabled the scholarship to reengage with the idea of the audience in relation to genre. According to Judith Hess Wright in her study on the ideological function of westerns, horror films, science fiction films and gangster films, genres act to "serve the interests of the ruling class by assisting in the maintenance of the status quo, and they throw a sop to oppressed groups who, because they are unorganized and therefore afraid to act, eagerly accept the genre film's absurd solutions to economic and social conflicts" ([1974] 2012, 60). In her homogenisation of audiences as passive spectators, Wright goes on to suggest that "viewers are encouraged to cease examining themselves and their surroundings, and to take refuge in fantasy" ([1974] 2012, 68).

This reading was indebted to the theories of mass culture in the 1940s and 1950s as proposed by Marxist thinkers such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1977; see also Horkheimer and Adorno 1979). Heavily influenced by their formative experiences during the rise of fascism in Germany, Adorno and Horkheimer, who emigrated from their 'Frankfurt School' to California, saw Karl Marx's prediction that capitalism would collapse as unfounded. The general argument of the Frankfurt School critics, therefore, was "that the industrialization of culture had transformed culture into a commodity. The sole value of culture was to generate profit and therefore maintain the capitalist system" (Hollows 1995, 20). Film industries, by their commercial and populist nature were seen as having the sole ideological purpose of reproducing their spectators as consumers, with formulaic genres for Adorno being indicators of the "power of the culture industry's ideology" through which "conformity has replaced consciousness" (1975, 17). However, the arguments of mass culture theories and the ideological nature of cinema fail to comprehend how films themselves achieve popularity amongst a wide range of audiences emerging from diverse contexts and how the American film industry in particular "recognizes and exploits diversity (if the audience can pay)" (Hollows 1995, 33).

In reading film genres as conduits for dominant ideologies, genres are seen to constitute the mythic validation of the status-quo. The western, for example, is read as giving ideological credence to white bourgeois American society including that of individualism, racism and colonialism (Kitses 1969; Abel 2002; Grant 2007). Such ideological readings of film have been heavily influenced by Roland Barthes' writings on the cultural myth, which "does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk

about them: simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact" ([1957] 1972, 143).

While the annulment of history, representation of extreme opposites, and stereotyping of 'Others' may all be part of the function of film genres as myth, the relationship between genre and ideology is more complicated. In the Hollywood example, this most structured and industrialised cinema, run by large studios and powerful financiers, is still said to serve as the cultural embodiment of capitalism and so is often noted as sustaining its ideological and economic impulses (Hollows 1995). Judith Hess Wright (1974) notes that the reliance on genre conventions and familiar plots in this instance can have the effect of distracting audiences from real world problems in order to maintain the status-quo. Indeed the idea of 'Third Cinema' was positioned in direct opposition to these supposed ideological constraints maintained by what Solanas and Getino describe as "first cinema" (1969). The Marxist and third cinema influences of much early scholarship on African cinema, similarly, derive from the ideological premise that American and European cinema oppresses African/black societies (Diawara 1992; Ukadike 1994). This is evidenced in the domination of non-African films and their foreign ideological projections on African screens as popular Bollywood and Hollywood productions exploited the sensational and spectacular. These ideological positions, however, have been questioned more recently with the global commercial success of the superhero film *Black Panther* (2018) that employed a predominantly African-American cast and production crew, and is a case in point for the progressive possibilities of genre films and reflective of Jim Hillier's (1992) considerations of the purchasing power of African-American communities and "cross-over" potential.

The singular critical position of describing genres and their films' "textual politics" as "conduits for and perpetuators of existing ideological norms" (Klinger [1984] 2012, 96), is called into question when changes, innovations and progressions occur in genres. Barbara Klinger's 1984 work offers a strong intervention into the genre/ideology debate as she identifies the existence of "the progressive genre film" that exists in all genres ([1984] 2012, 96). She identifies certain formal textual qualities in progressive films within any genre that work to subvert the status-quo instead of maintaining it. The characteristics of the progressive or subversive genre film include a "pessimistic world view" that often critiques key sociocultural institutions such as the law and family (Klinger [1984] 2012, 99-100). Narratively, progressive films must prevent a clear-cut

separation and identification of forces of good and evil and "must escape the compromising forces inherent in the conventional procedure of closure" in a way that leaves questions open to interpretation. The foregrounding of visual style is also deemed essential,

> manifested so forcefully as to contend with the dominance of the narrative line: in exploitation and B films, the visual register calls attention to itself through its sheer bargain-basement look; in film noir and horror, it is the use of expressionistic chiaroscuro [lighting] and camera angles; and in melodrama, there is a similar "baroque" foregrounding of the formal aspects of mise-en-scène and camera – all of which are seen as intensifying the text's internal structure of distanciation. (Klinger [1984] 2012, 102)

Klinger's work persuasively points to how film genres and commercial cinema in general represent a more nuanced ideological stance than the singular capitalist and consumer indoctrination into the status quo (Wright [1974] 2012). Often, however, the more critical positions of any film can be constrained by certain genre conventions. Thomas Schatz accommodates this view of film genres as being inherently contradictory since they "confront elemental conflicts inherent in modern culture while at the same time participating in the projection of an idealized collective self-image" ([1977] 2012, 118).

Broadening out from the strict textual analysis of film genres, early critics also took into account the ideological contexts in which films were produced and received. In this light, genres can be regarded as groups of fictional formulae that inherit the contextually relevant cultural pressures and social issues of their places of production and reception (Moine 2008). Cawelti (1976) and others have proposed similar ideas which, again, stem from Lévi-Strauss' examination of myth. In this sense, film genres represent bodies of codes directly taken from a particular schema of conflicts and associations that structure a culture. As in the Lévi-Straussian conception of myth, film genres are a form of cultural expression that react to shifting sociocultural nuances. As Cawelti identifies, the very success of genres (the testament of their being) depends on their ability to adapt familiar formulae that balance the expression of sociocultural anxieties with harmonious and confirmatory conclusions, giving rise to popular national film industries across the globe (1976, 35).

Simple allegations of film genres being purveyors of dominant ideology, therefore, often overlook the complex arrangement of both stylistic and narrative genre

conventions and lack any engagement with the very audiences that the success of any film (and their genres) hinges upon. Indeed, as has been discussed above, there has been no serious attempt to try to understand genre in relation to audience reception and although audiences are often alluded to, conclusions tend to disempower audience reception, relegating audiences to being passive and accepting agents. Conceiving of film genres as myths, however, also leads to an understanding of film genre as a ritual act (Altman 1999; Crosson 2013). As explained by Rick Altman:

> Whereas ritual critics interpret narrative situations and structural relations as offering imaginative solutions to a society's real problems, ideological critics see the same situations and structures as luring audiences into accepting deceptive non-solutions, while all the time serving governmental or industry purposes. Here too, genres have a particular role and importance, for it is through generic conventions that audiences are lured into false assumptions of societal unity and future happiness. (1999, 27)

Rick Altman, however, argues for the value of both ritual and ideological approaches in understanding the function and popular nature of genre in any given society and/or culture. In recognition of the work of Stuart Hall and other (popular) cultural theorists of the 1980s, Altman observes:

> Though an individual film may have a single (albeit usually collaborative) author, genres always depend on decoding practices shared by a broad if dispersed community. This double authorship prompts genres to lay claim simultaneously to both positions, both ideological and ritual. (1999, 172-173)

The coming together of spectators in a cinema gives rise to a heightened sense of recognition and participation offered by being part of a crowd. Unity comes in sharing the pleasures of laughing, weeping and recognising common values activated by films through genre conventions. This crowd mentality and ritualising of the cinema experience can certainly be said to be a crucial element in the Ethiopian context in helping to sustain the popularity of particular genres. While a genre film (as myth) proposes an ideological anchor to which society and culture are tethered, it is in the act of viewing the film (the ritual) that a person identifying with these sociocultural values is able to decipher the conventions of the genre and accept/reject the naturalisation of this ideology within society.

The question of the position and nature of the audience in relation to film has been an issue too readily presumed in nearly all theories of film genres, a drawback that the above theories and methodologies are not immune to. Audiences of film genres are

presumed to be all-knowing consumers who experience film in the same way and are immediately familiar with a genre's conventions. Reception theory, which developed in English arts and humanities and social sciences scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s, was crucial to addressing the cultural assumptions that underpinned much early film genre scholarship. Stuart Hall's 1973 essay "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" became an influential work that theorised how spectators/readers interpret a text based on each individual's cultural background and life experiences. Further empirical and theoretical work on audiences has since helped move genre critics away from homogenous definitions of 'the audience' (Morley 1980; Maltby 1999; Jancovich *et al.* 2003).

In film genre scholarship, Roberts builds on Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication, pointing to the complex and heterogeneous nature of each audience member's responses, thus suggesting a number of "'reader-to-genre' relationships" (1990, 12). These relationships mark different types of film viewer (reader), such as the "fan", the "occasional reader", the "exclusivist" and even the "allergic", amongst which "there lies an intricate pattern of addictions, preferences, random interests, avoidances, and allergies which is never quite the same pattern in any other reader" (Roberts 1990, 85). These "preference hierarchies" within each reader extends into the realms of any form of cultural consumption and act of socio-cultural expression and are not exclusive and unchanging but reach beyond the boundaries of genres. Neale sums up by noting "while it is likely that most sectors of America's population and many sectors of the world's population were and are aware of the cultural issues dealt with on a regular basis in Hollywood's genres, it is also likely that their understanding of those issues and their relationship to them varied and continues to vary enormously" (2000, 226).

Steve Neale's important preliminary intervention into film genre theory "Questions of Genre" (1990) opened up genre studies to aspects that had previously been considered extraneous and is largely responsible for a 'media industries' turn in genre scholarship. This work placed genres and genre cycles in particular histories and the interrelations between genres within overarching systems of genres or "generic regimes" (Neale 1990, 45-66). Neale's later monograph *Genre and Hollywood* (2000) builds a thoroughly researched and detailed account of the range and nature of American genres throughout history, taking into account trade discourses and journalistic writings as he considers the broader social and cultural ramifications industrial factors have on genre production and

reception. It is the industrial side of genre production, particularly in the marketing of films that becomes prominent in Ethiopia. Here, the paratextual indicators of a film's genre, expressed through marketing paraphernalia such as posters and TV/radio adverts, precondition prospective audiences' genre expectations before films are viewed. Indeed, Raphaëlle Moine argues that "reviews of the film, and the promotional discourse surrounding it, can emphasize one or more of its generic intentions, thus influencing not only the choice of the viewer, but also his or her attitude" (2008, 89).

Perhaps the most detailed work positioning film industry practice within a specific time and place and exploring the relationship between genre production, box-office success and audience taste, is Kapsis' (1991) study of a cycle of horror films made in the late 1970s up until the early 1980s. Kapsis' approach is critical of those theories that ignore the role of film industries in genre formations, productions and cycles (1991). Influenced by writings on cultural production, Kapsis moves away from the text to explore the political economy of genre production, focusing on "the interorganizational network of production companies, distributors, mass media gatekeepers, and retailers" and the tensions between them (1991, 70). Using Hollywood as his example, Kapsis argues that there is "a complex network of interorganizational relationships which mediates between the movie production company and the consumer. Which genres finally get made depends on how organizational gatekeepers at various stages of the film production process assess the product in relation to their perception of audiences' future tastes" (1991, 71). The analysis of horror films in the 70s and 80s marks a significant departure from previous film genre methods of study and brings into focus the essential bonds that tie film genres to their contexts of production and consumption.

Media industries approaches to film genre address the shortcoming of both ideological and ritual theories of genre that pay little attention to the actual nature, practices and structures of film industries and overlook historical and social-cultural change, becoming too dependent on textual readings. A media industries approach that regards an appreciation of the political economy of cinema becomes necessary to address the ahistorical issues of ritual, ideology and audience. An enquiry into the political economy of film industries, therefore, leads to an understanding of "the industrial processes and practices that structure the form and content of these film texts; and how audiences select and interpret them. It offers a way of understanding the power relations

involved in film production and consumption, and contributes towards a more historical analysis of cinema" (Hollows 1995, 33).

The following chapter (Chapter 5) traces the industrial nature of cinema in the Ethiopian context. Exploring the role of genre in different stages of film production and marketing helps understand the subtleties and complex relationships between different sectors, how they behave, and how genres are inextricably tied to geographic and historical locations. It is through such pragmatic and internationalist approaches to studying film genres, foregrounding cultural specificities and focusing on film industries outside the American context, which contemporary genre theorists have begun to explore in more detail.

Towards Pragmatism and Internationalism in Film Genre Studies

Along with Steve Neale's more recent important contributions, Rick Altman has also contributed significantly to film genre theory and comprehensively attempted to address the problems of early genre theory. His monograph on the subject, *Film/Genre* (1999), is a tour-de-force covering the many issues that arise when contemplating genre from multiple perspectives. Altman builds on his earlier view of genre development and formation (1984; 1987; 1996) as constructed of "semantic" and "syntactic" elements:

> While there is anything but general agreement on the exact frontier separating semantic from syntactic views, we can as a whole distinguish between generic definitions which depend on a list of common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, sets, and the like – thus stressing the semantic elements which make up the genre – and definitions which play up instead certain constitutive relationships between undesignated placeholders – relationships which might be called the genre's fundamental syntax. The semantic approach thus stresses the genre's building blocks, while the syntactic view privileges the structures into which they are arranged. (Altman 1987, 95).

Altman goes on to suggest that genres necessarily combine both approaches so that each genre possesses semantic traits, such as those of iconography and conventions, and syntactic features identified in common themes and narrative structures.

The placing of genres in history and recognition of the mutations they experience and affect over time becomes paramount in the semantic/syntactic approach as the focus is on: "1) the introduction and disappearance of basic semantic elements […] 2) the development and abandonment of different syntactic solutions […] 3) the ever-changing

relationship between semantic and syntactic aspects of the genre" (Altman 1987, 97-98). Looking at the historical changes of the science fiction genre, Altman describes it "first defined only by a relatively stable science fiction semantics, the genre began borrowing the syntactic relationships previously established by the horror film" (Altman 1986, 35) as exemplified in Ridley Scott's 1979 *Alien*. Consequentially, and particularly on the back of the success of George Lucas' original *Star Wars* trilogy (1977; 1980; 1983), the science fiction genre's final frontier replaces the American frontier of the western and transforms the pastoral semantic iconography (horses and stagecoaches) into one of technology (spaceships and computers). The syntax too has moved to closely resemble the western as the struggle of individualism and humanity against forces of structure and conformity take centre stage.

Altman readily acknowledges that questions remain unanswered from this approach, highlighting the inconsistencies that define the very boundaries between the semantic and syntactic he acknowledges: "[a]ssuming stable recognition of semantic and syntactic factors across an unstable population, I underemphasized the fact that genres look different to different audiences" (1999, 217; see also Leech 1974 concerning linguistics). Altman also only focuses on a few well-developed genres such as the musical and the western; the privileging of these genres at times makes it feel like a continuation of earlier genre scholarship. Ultimately, however, and borrowing the words of Steve Neale, "[w]hat is valuable about it as an hypothesis is that it is premised on the importance of history, on the recognition of heterogeneity, and on the possibility of difference, variation, and change" (Neale 2000, 217). Most tellingly, Altman supports the idea of genres as *processes*, an idea he substantiated from the work of Jauss (1982), Cohen (1986) and Neale (1980; 1990). This point can be made clearer by quoting Cohen, who suggests "each genre is composed of texts that accrue, the grouping is a process, not a determinate category. Genres are open categories" (1986, 204). Each new film alters its constituent genre(s) through its unique organisation and representation of semantic and syntactic elements which may in turn be contradictory or innovative enough to present the possibility of the cross-breed genre (Bordwell and Thompson [1979] 1986).

Altman subsequently attempts to bridge the divide between textual approaches of researching film genre by bringing history and context to bear more prominently in

genre theory. In critiquing his own former semantic/syntactic approach, Altman recognises

> that disparate viewers may perceive quite disparate semantic and syntactic elements in the same film […] I found my work compromised by the unspoken assumption that terminology can be neutral. (Altman 1999, 207-208)

In the conclusion of *Film/Genre* (1999), Altman revises his approach to genre, renaming it "semantic-syntactic-pragmatic", opening the more strictly textual analysis of films to the considerations of genre interpretations and usages in society.

In his use of pragmatic analysis, Altman aims to complicate reception studies, stating "film production and genre formation cannot be systematically and simple-mindedly located upstream from film viewing, as most reception studies would have it" (1999, 211). He goes on to highlight the importance of pragmatics as it "recognizes reception study as an appropriate way to acknowledge the activities of specific user groups, but only in order subsequently to embed reception in a broader process-oriented and interactive analysis of competing user groups" (1999, 211).

Here, Altman is also casting a broader remit than that of the influential pragmatic cultural studies of Stuart Hall and Michel de Certeau who focus more narrowly on the act of reading itself. Hall's seminal article "Encoding/Decoding" (1973) prescribes readers as being (to varying degrees) either accepting, negotiating or opposing decoders of an intended (encoded) reading. De Certeau, on the other hand, depicts readers as "travellers" who "move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy themselves" (1986, 174). Both Hall and de Certeau focus on the single moment of reading from the perspective of readers and thus overlook the wider process of reading and its relationships to sociocultural institutions. Unanswered questions remain such as: Who are the encoders and decoders and what is their relationship to each other and institutions? How are intended readings identifiable as such and by whom, or are they just assumed? Furthermore, there is no clear route to how decoding can lead to successive encoding, or to how intended readings may become oppositional (or vice versa) or how readings from the periphery of one sociocultural milieu may embody the dominant position in another.

The work of Hall and de Certeau came at a crucial time and helped turn the tide against narrowly focused textual analysis, attributing readers an agency they were previously denied. Their work, however, also similarly suffered from a narrow approach, analysing readers as fixed in one position while readers can also be fluid and change their interpretation of any text. As a consequence, they were unable to capture the bigger picture, or what Altman more precisely calls "the pragmatic complexity of literary and filmic systems" (1999, 213). Altman goes on to explain, "[t]oday we have good cause to understand texts as one part of a far broader cultural enterprise. Only by shifting attention from reception practices alone to the broader – and conflicting – usage patterns of all [genre] users can we escape the residual tyranny of the text-king" (1999, 213). Less a precise theory, then, Altman is calling for a cultural turn in film genre research based on grounding textual analyses in specific production, distribution, exhibition, consumption and interpretation contexts.

Finally, the semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach crucially harnesses pragmatics to widen the analytical remit of genre theory in order to consider geographical and historical specificities. Through the expansion of his hypothesis, Altman emphasises the move away from genre theorists who relied upon assumptions that audiences automatically interpret intended meanings of texts (as directed by producers). It is through geographically placing a text in a specific moment in time that distinguishes between what Altman describes as the practice of "use-as-directed" readings compared to the "use-as-planned" readings of texts in isolation (1999, 214). The practice of "use-as-planned", however, is not inherently built into a text. As Roger Odin makes clear, "images never tell us how to read them" (1983, 68); therefore, the sociocultural, economic and political processes film genres traverse result in multiple and diverse meanings by all who deploy and interpret them. In order to diversify the approach, Altman ultimately encourages a move away from the exploration of established Hollywood genres, explaining:

> Successful genres of course carry with them an air of user agreement about the nature of both genres in general and of this genre in particular, thus implying that genres are the unproblematic product of user sharing. In fact, the moments of clear and stable sharing typically adduced as generic models represent special cases within a broader general situation of user competition. While genres may make meaning by regulating and co-ordinating disparate users, they always do so in an arena where users with divergent interests compete to carry out their own programmes. (Altman 1999, 214-215)

The arena in which divergent interests compete today can be characterised by a wide variety of social and cultural forms such as literature, language, religion and media, each forwarding distinct and often competing (ethno)nationalist sentiments. Media, in particular, allow for constellated reading communities who "cohere only through repeated acts of imagination" (Altman 1999, 161). And even despite the possible geographical dispersion of audiences through online distribution, "[t]he media allow for citizens [and members of the diaspora] to learn the news of the nation, to participate in its rituals and events and to rehearse the cultural myths of the nation through its popular culture" (Grant 2007, 103). The inherent commercialisation of genres must also not be overlooked as it is primarily through cultural specificities that national and local cinemas manage to compete successfully by "carve[ing] a space locally and internationally for themselves in the face of the dominant international cinema, Hollywood" (O'Regan 1997, 5). In the case of Ethiopia, and the Amharic film industry, this is possible due to the vast population of Amharic speakers both inside and outside the national borders. Hollywood genres are susceptible to being reworked according to local cultural sensibilities creating hybrid localised forms (as is evident in Italian spaghetti westerns or British and French gangster movies) while new, contextually specific genres may also be created.

Grant discusses the development of distinctive genres in the German context such as "the mountain film, involving a character or group of characters striving to climb or conquer a mountain" or the "Heimatfilm, or 'Homeland film' […] sentimental, romanticised movies about rural Germany and its inhabitants" (2007, 106-107). With Indian Bollywood films, also representing a global commercialised cinematic power-house, the term "masala films" has been used to denote the combination of a variety of disparate generic elements culturally distinct to Indian films, most notably as they often insert musical and dance numbers that employ large ensemble casts, acting as emotionally enhanced and spectacular digressions from the main narrative (Grant 2007; Celli 2011). The influence of Japanese period or *jidai-geki* films have also impacted on Hollywood genres, their focus on the figure of the samurai and their strict code of discipline (*bushido*) was emulated by the western gun-slinging hero's strong moral code of honour (Grant 2007). Thus samurai films, particularly those directed by Akira Kurosawa, had a major influence on the western, as is evident in the adaptation of *Seven Samurai* (1954) into *The Magnificent Seven* (1960).

In the light of distinct commercialised genres emerging from various contexts the world over and even as early as 1984, Alan Williams identified that "genre is not exclusively or even primarily a Hollywood phenomenon," calling for genre studies "to get out of the United States" (1984, 124). As can be seen from the small snapshot above of genres emanating from Germany, India and Japan, there is much more heterogeneity and cultural distinctiveness to genres than the vast body of work on film genre theory suggests. In 2007, however, Grant was still voicing the same concerns: "while some work has been done in recent years on non-English genres such as Asian action films and melodrama, much more needs to be done" (107-106). There have since been encouraging developments into the study of film genres outside the vast body of scholarship focusing on American genres. Moine's work *Cinema Genre* translated from French in 2008 is one of the most open and ambitious studies of film genres in an attempt at reconciling and "grasping the meaning and function" of existing genres "whether they have been forged by the film industry, by scholarly or critical thought (theoretical or historical), or by the most ordinary social uses of the cinema" ([2002] 2008, xvii). By also recognising the inherent historicity of film genre theorisations and scholarship Moine is aware that:

> Hollywood genres, while they constitute a particularly rich and structured system, constitute only one use (or group of complex uses) of genre by cinema. The dominant position of American cinema, the major influence it has exerted on other cinemas (including its genres), and the large number of analyses that have been applied to it, have had the effect of rather skewing the examination of cinema genres. This volume inherits, and undoubtedly suffers from, this skewing, but one of its intentions is, modestly, at least to open or point to paths that allow one to think about different generic regimes, among which figures Hollywood classicism. ([2002] 2008, xvii)

Moine's decentring of the American experience opens up the analysis of film genres as emerging in diverse film industry contexts and it is the aim of this thesis to do so with regards to the Ethiopian case study and its commercial Amharic film industry. Of particular importance for the study of the Amharic film industry and its genres in Ethiopia is the experience of Nollywood (majority English-language films from Southern Nigeria), as it bears some comparisons in terms of its geographical proximity, historical development and structural organisation.

Out of Hollywood and into Nollywood

Taking a more flexible approach to genre criticism, Jonathan Haynes, in his research on Nollywood notes that "generative models of genre are doubtless better than the attempt to erect a stable taxonomy" (2010, 18). Here, Haynes recognises the tendencies for structuralist and formalist textual approaches in film scholarship which result in closed definitions and classifications of genres. As has been discussed above, however, it is the multifaceted and interrelated aspects of genre, constructed by consumers and producers alike, which create its fluidity. In order to carry out a comprehensive study of genre in Amharic cinema, then, it is also important to focus on how multiple genres relate to one another and how the very structures of the film industry in Ethiopia, like with Nollywood, Bollywood and Hollywood, can be seen as essentially generic due to the profit-driven pressures of the industry (Haynes 2011). This calls for studies that accommodate the sociocultural but also industry specific permutations of genre. Quelling the preconceived ideas and assumptions of prior film genre scholarship, Haynes simply states, "[w]e need to establish what they [genres] mean and what to call them; we cannot assume we already know" (2010, 20). Haynes' illuminating monograph on the subject of Nollywood genres, *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres* (2016), thus opens up key theoretical and methodological implications for the study of film genres in an African context, such as Ethiopia.

Nollywood has become a major force on the global film stage over the past couple of decades due to the industry's dynamic approach to film production and distribution, and because of its popularity in many parts of Africa and in the African diaspora. Haynes has helped pioneer the scholarship on Nollywood since its conception; his work has long influenced scholars in the field, sparking more systematic and in-depth research in African film and screen studies. *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres* explores structural, thematic and historical elements of the Nigerian film industry through the lens of local genres. Haynes is not overburdened with the theoretical weight of film genre scholarship and instead focuses on modern Nigeria's socio-political and economic history through Nigerian film genres in order to decentre the dominant American cultural narrative in genre studies. This is achieved by relating Nigerian history to important themes, ideologies and aspects of culture that run through the films and genres discussed.

Haynes harnesses the everyday genre usages of film producers and consumers in Nigeria, grounding the study in the Nigerian context and importantly in first-hand interviews with industry professionals and ethnographic research built upon his more than twenty years' experience of film in Nigeria. This ground-up approach to studying film genres in Nigeria allows Haynes to highlight the natural fluidity and hybridity of genre evolutions, cycles and definitions which are too often lacking in mainstream genre studies overly concerned with established Hollywood genres and their demarcated conventions. The value of this research is that the Nigerian case study opens doors for genre exploration in other emerging film industries across the globe and interrogates mainstream understandings of certain genres such as melodrama, comedy, epic and crime film genres.

By harnessing a genre framework to structure the history and development of commercial filmmaking in southern Nigeria Haynes opens the way for a genre approach based on "shifting methodological approaches" dwelling on "origins, borders, and the evolution of genres as they react to changed circumstances and generate new genres by dallying or mating with one another" (Haynes 2016, xxv). This is particularly useful as the first part of the book sets out the social, political, economic and structural conditions which gave rise to video filmmaking in Nigeria and traces this history through two widely cited films, *Living in Bondage* (1992) and *Glamour Girls* (1994). The perennial thematic issues in Nollywood films – such as the depiction of wealth, the presence of the supernatural and spiritual, the centrality of female characters and the commitment to exploring emotional extremities – are all marked out as important contributing factors to films associated with the key genres of the money ritual film and the family film. The latter genre is then highlighted as central to the genre system in Nigeria as "the queen of Nollywood genres and [one that] holds sway over nearly all of them" (77). In recognising the centrality of the family film in Nigeria and its influence on other genres, Haynes combines a reading of the text with an understanding of the sociocultural and historical influences and implications of the genre in the Nigerian context.

The second part of the book develops chronologically, tracing historical developments that occurred in the Nigerian film industry around the turn of the millennium. This part of the book looks at filmmaking shifting away from Lagos (mainly to Igbo parts of Nigeria) and the emergence of genres such as comedies and the political film. These new genres are read as engaging with more socio-political themes, and along with the

crime films and the cultural epic (set in the rural pre-colonial past), genre developments are grounded in the structural changes in the film industry as well as the changing socio-political Nigerian context. The thematic issues of wealth, the supernatural and emotional extremes are again discussed in relation to these genres while highlighting how these new genres engage with politics and violence. This change from a predominant focus on domestic and family scenarios to a broadening out into the more public socio-political arena is largely attributed to the end of military rule in 1999 and the transition to civilian-held power which opened up a space for video films to reflect and inflect the various popular moods in the country.

Part 3 of Haynes' book then branches out again, moving away from the more conventionally bounded genres to discuss diaspora and campus films, genres which can be regarded as cutting across the genres Haynes previously maps. This highlights the hybrid and changing nature of genre in the Nigerian context reflecting and reliant on the increasing popularity of Nollywood films around the world. The ensuing fragmentation of audiences and filmmakers are direct indicators of new genre cycles as filmmaking in Nigeria moves into its third decade and aspires to escape the marketing systems of old. Important structural shifts in the distribution and exhibition of Nigerian films, such as with online video-on-demand platforms and satellite broadcasting, are key to understanding the rapid rise of Nollywood across the globe and the consequential impacts on film production in Nigeria and by Nigerians in the diaspora. These, in turn, impact on the content of films and Nigerian genres as they are embedded and contingent within their changing contexts of production, distribution, exhibition and reception.

Despite mentioning the influence of Hollywood and soap operas, broader questions such as those relating to how the Nigerian system of genres relates to those of Hollywood, Bollywood or elsewhere remain open for discussion. The achievement of Haynes' work, however, is in the impressive scale of the study, representing a comprehensive appreciation of historical developments in Nollywood that grounds genre research in structural issues, influential directors, key themes and an analysis of over two hundred films from multiple genres. Although a more sustained engagement with mainstream film theory may have made this important contribution more impactful and accessible to the world of mainstream Film Studies, the real value of the work is in how it balances historical understanding with readings of genre cycles and processes

from a distinctive sociocultural and film industry context altogether separate from Hollywood.

The concept of film genre for Haynes is not fixed but as fluid as the genres that he traces. The three decades of commercial Nigerian film production and consumption are distilled through a genre lens in order to frame the connections between Nigerian films and their life-cycles as cultural products at home and abroad. Haynes begins at the centre, with the first commercially successful and economically viable films produced and consumed in Nigeria, and works his way out to the peripheries by traversing conventional genre boundaries that culminate in transnational and cross-genre currents. While the possibility of an audience study in relation to Nollywood genres is not brokered by Haynes, it is not clear how such a massive undertaking could be achieved considering the diverse audiences Nollywood attracts and the multiple distribution and exhibition techniques it employs. Haynes' study does, however, manage to successfully distance itself from, but "is equally relevant to the field of film and media studies, a disciplinary field within which the 'asymmetric ignorance' inherited from colonial and postcolonial practices of knowledge production and dissemination has prevented scholars from appreciating the importance of studying African realities for the sake of a wide range of issues" (Jedlowski 2016, 189).

The experience of Amharic film genres in Ethiopia offers an alternative perspective to that of Nollywood from the African continent. The concentration of film exhibition in the cinemas of Addis Ababa offers sites for research into audience understandings of genre, a task nonetheless bigger than the undertaking of this thesis. At the same time, the Nollywood experience represents a similar historical moment of popular film/cultural production processes to that in Ethiopia that can be seen as "disrupting received geographies of core and periphery" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012, 7). It is the aim of my research, therefore, to use a contextually focussed approach to the study of film genres from the Ethiopian vantage point, much like that of Haynes' study in Nigeria, and at the same time observe wider transformations in film genre and melodrama the world over.

Conclusions

The academic study of film genre, as discussed in this chapter, has been historically dominated by Anglo-American scholarship focused on Hollywood examples of genre.

This is not to say that the rich research on Hollywood genres should be bypassed, but rather probed and questioned and added to; it is important to acknowledge the historical global dominance of American cinema and the major influences that it, and other transnational cinemas such as Bollywood and Nollywood, have exerted on 'local' cinemas and their genres throughout the world, including in Ethiopia. However, the widespread assumptions of genre in Anglo-American film criticism that ignore the inherent empirical and experiential nature of film genres can inhibit the application or study of genre in other contexts, thereby impoverishing the 'theory' as a whole. It is necessary and enriching to explore film genres in other contexts, *from* those contexts, to gain a fresh perspective on genres in cinema and also in order to move away from the majority of genre studies that focus solely on Hollywood (see Jedlowski 2016).

In opening new pathways in film industries outside of America, contextually led approaches can better appreciate film genres as cultural sites which are "contexts of life as well as frames of reference" in the establishment of identity ([2002] 2008, 207). Culture overflows from and characterises melodrama and other genres, Moine concludes that:

> The collective practices and uses of generic categories, then, construct cinematic and cultural sites, and generic denominations affect films at these sites, giving them an identity, establishing their relationship with other films, and situating them in history… Genres are only "living" for a community to the exact extent that its members find themselves in them, and see their relationships with others and the world mediated through them ([2002] 2008, 207-208).

If we see film genres in this light, it becomes apparent that they are not mere classificatory terms, but are instead imbued with culturally specific references that are both constructed by producers and interpreted by viewers, and wax and wane on the winds of political, social and stylistic change.

Although a comprehensive audience study in Ethiopia is deserving of a larger and better resourced investigation than can be provided here, the methodological challenges audiences pose to genre research were confronted in the relatively small preliminary study undertaken. The following chapter acts as a staging-post to the study of the distinct Amharic film genres of the Ethiopian film industry, setting out the filmmaking and film consumption context in Ethiopia. This includes an investigation into the significance of genre in all sectors of the Amharic film industry, incorporating the preliminary audience study and interviews with film professionals in order to directly

respond to, and build on the calls made by Moine, Haynes, Neale, Altman and others to ground genre research in the pragmatics of sociocultural *and* industry contexts. As the Amharic film industry is centred in Addis Ababa, where the majority of private and government-run cinemas operate and where the vast majority of films are produced, Chapter Five details the contexts of production, distribution, exhibition and consumption that inhabit (but not exclusively) the Ethiopian capital.

CHAPTER 5

Genre in the Context of the Commercial Amharic Film Industry

> The film industry here is like a marathon: many athletes start the race at the beginning but only a few extra talented make it to the finish line.
>
> Behailu Wassie (interview, Addis Ababa, March 8, 2016)

Important recent ethnographic research on video film industries in Africa has made apparent the diverse and complex experiences of film in culture and contexts across the continent. Works such as Jonathan Haynes' *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres* (2016) and his edited volume *Nigerian Video Films* (2000), Brian Larkin's *Signal and Noise* (2008), and Carmela Garritano's *African Video Movies and Global Desires* (2013) are all contextualised studies that focus on specific film cultures within Africa. Prior to these studies, there was reluctance from African film scholars to engage with locally produced, popular cinemas emerging in Africa because of their fundamentally commercial nature and broadly melodramatic forms. Indeed, scepticism about commercial cinema in Africa is well rehearsed, with Haile Gerima, the most internationally recognisable filmmaker to emerge from Ethiopia, saying he finds "it difficult to call the current video productions real cinema" (cf. Arefe 2006). Even prominent African film scholar Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike at one point dismissed video films for being "devoid of authenticity" (2003, 126). However, in 2010 the publication of the edited volume *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century* (Şaul and Austen) attempted to bridge the critical divide between African video and film scholars by combining the two strands of scholarship. This publication contains the following pertinent call by Haynes: "It is time to roll out the disciplinary apparatus of film studies and apply it to the video films" (2010, 13).

More conventional film scholars also took issue with the topics addressed in these 'video' films. For example, Onookome Okome argues that sceptics of commercial films from Africa are opposed to them precisely because they see Nollywood as representing Nigeria in denigrating ways (for example, through "juju" and "spirit possessions") (2010). Similar criticisms are voiced locally by commentators in Ethiopia about Amharic films due to the dominance of "love" based dramas and comedies which are deemed to provide a naïve image of the country to outsiders (Worku 2005; *Capital Ethiopia* 2013, February 18). This viewpoint is crucial and common in Ethiopia, and alludes to the more conservative aspects of genre production and consumption which will be explored later in this chapter.

Haynes makes the important point that "it is hard to function without a working taxonomy" when attempting to write about genre in a context such as Nigeria (2010, 18). In industries where no sustained or systematic cataloguing of films exists and where the commercial nature of film production results in constantly high output, there is not the time and resources for scholars to cover every film. As such, the scholarship often suffers from an incoherent and often indiscriminate and wide-ranging, almost random, selection of texts. Indeed Cohen points out that genres change over time and that "the process by which genres are established always involves the human need for distinction and interrelation" (1986, 204). With the sheer volume of films being produced by the Amharic film industry, what concerns this chapter is how the industry itself produces its own generic taxonomies. This gives the researcher a window into the industry and an opportunity to open up Ethiopian experiences of cinema to analysis from the terms set by the industry itself. Identifying films in relation to genre is not only an invaluable tool for dealing with the increasing number of film productions in Ethiopia, but it also presents the opportunity, although not explored in depth here, for documenting the influences and histories of early celluloid films and non-filmic genres (oral and written literature) in relation to the contemporary moment.

In order to bring Amharic film genres to bear on genre theory in Film Studies, it is important to contextualise the study in terms of the specific structures of the film industry in Ethiopia. A media industries approach setting out a political economy of commercial Amharic cinema helps ascertain why and how particular films and genres get produced and exhibited/distributed; the specific industrial structures and practices that influence the form and content of Amharic films; and why and how audiences consume them. Likewise, Haynes raises the issue of context, calling for studies analysing movies as "prolongations, or possibly betrayals, of specific cultural traditions, as interventions in specific local debates or histories" (2010, 12-13). To a certain extent, however, this has been lacking in much African film scholarship as academics have intervened by naming genres with a "foreign normality" (Haynes 2010, 12) using terms such as "horror movies" (Wendl 2004) or "the women's film" (Owusu and Kwansah-Aidoo 2015). Although such work does well to bring genre theory to bear on African film industries, they fail to move in the opposite direction and overlook how African examples of local genres can intervene in global debates on film genre. Most of these studies offer "cultural humility and inductive procedures" as described by Haynes (2010, 20); however, scholarship focused on contextualizing daily genre usage by local producers, exhibitors and spectators remains largely absent.

It is necessary to reiterate here that identifying films as belonging to certain genres and defining genres themselves should always be a process open to negotiation. This is particularly relevant

when analysing local film genres in a commercial industry as young and rapidly changing as that of the Amharic film industry in Ethiopia. As Amharic film genres have not, prior to this thesis, been subject to any kind of full-scale critical study, I take as a starting point the common usage of Amharic genre terms by film promoters, producers, and consumers. Amharic film genres, however, are not neatly definable or readily identifiable as the terms and their usage are not entirely systematic or consistent and may vary from one user to the next. I intend, therefore, loosely to define each genre based upon analyses of how they are promoted, produced and consumed, something which will be enhanced by analysis of the film texts themselves and their narrative and stylistic conventions in the following chapters of this thesis. The Amharic genre terms I work with are taken from cinema screening information and film marketing "paratexts" (Genette 1997) which hold clues to differences and similarities compared to other genres in different contexts from around the world. It is the promoting and marketing of films, therefore, that brings ideas of genres to the fore acting as an axis between producer/consumer and as the locus of expressions of Amharic film genres. Walking the streets of Addis Ababa it is the colourful film posters, leaflets and car stickers that present ideas of genre, grabbing people's attention as the first point of contact between an audience member and a film. An exploration of genre in the marketing of films, then, offers the broadest examples of Amharic film genres and an ideal starting point for this analysis before the chapter goes on to highlight more specific examples of genre in production and reception contexts. Although I adopt genre terms as they are expressed in Amharic, I also interrogate why some genres are expressed using multiple, seemingly interchangeable terms (often Anglicised) and what this tells us about the producers, marketers and consumers who use non-Amharic genre terminology and the ultimate discursive nature of genre usage (Altman 1999) in Ethiopia.

An overview of the major Amharic film genres and their key films is important in order to situate and familiarise this chapter and the rest of the thesis in necessary background information. The commercial viability of the Amharic film industry began, in earnest, with *ቀዝቃዛ ወላፈን - Kezkaza Welafen/Cold Flame* and *ጉዲፈቻ - Gudifecha/Adoption*, released in 2002. Both films harness a specifically Ethiopian melodramatic imagination deeply integrated within the socioemotional implications of processes of modernisation in Ethiopia and which contributed to the *የፍቅር ፊልም - yefiker film/love film* becoming the first commercially successful Amharic film genre. The *yefiker film*, as such, resembles the Amharic genre most closely associated with theorisations of melodrama as a genre in mainstream film theory (see Chapter 2). In a sense it was the *yefiker film* and its interaction with an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination or Ethiopian-style melodrama that was to become the basis for the system of Amharic film genres. Off-shoots were produced that manipulated and integrated the dominant melodramatic mode of the *yefiker film* with other affective dramatic modes such as suspense and comedy that resulted in popular Amharic genres such as the *ልብ አንጠልጣይ (የፍቅር) ፊልም - lib*

anteltay (yefiker) film/suspenseful (love) film and the *አስቂኝ የፍቅር ፊልም - assikiñ yefiker film/humorous love film*. Early attempts at producing the *lib anteltay film*, such as *ሰማያዊ ፈረስ - Semayawi Feres/Blue Horse* (2005) proved popular but the commercial conditions of the industry meant that genres reliant on more complicated narratives and refined filmmaking techniques such as the *lib anteltay film* also consequentially meant more time and money invested in production; a more challenging commercial proposition which resulted in fewer being made. In order to develop the audio and visual style integral to the suspense of the genre, films such as *ሔርሜላ - Hermela* (2005), *ሰርየት - Siryet/Absolution* (2007) and *የሞሪያም ምድር - Yemoriyam Midir/The Land of Moriam* (2008), for example, invested in renting empty warehouses (or other such spaces) in order to have a more controlled environment in which to build sets and rig lights (Yidnekachew Shumete, interview, 2016, March 3). Acting as temporary sound stages, in the absence of any permanent purpose built studios in Ethiopia, these warehouses facilitated the use of chiaroscuro and low-key lighting designs which are a hallmark of *lib anteltay film* productions.

Since 2007, the *assikiñ yefiker film* (humorous love film) has been most influential in the system of Amharic genres through its engagement with comedy and its relatively cheap and quick production methods underpinned by a narrative dependency on dialogue. A further analysis of how this genre in particular influences the production and promotion of films underlines the very commercial nature of the Amharic film industry of which the *assikiñ yefiker film* appears as the most 'mass-produced' of all the genres. Before the popular success of the *assikiñ yefiker film*, instigated by Henok Ayele's *የወንዶች ጉዳይ - Yewendoch Gudday/Men's Affair* (2007) and with Tewodros Teshome's *አባይ ወይስ ቬጋስ - Abay vs Vegas* (2011) reaching the genre's summit, the *yefiker film* (love film) was by far the most common genre. Other genres have been experimented with and bear close relations to these two dominant genres; the first successful Ethiopian 'buddy comedy' *ባላገሩ - Balageru/The Countryman* (2012), for example, was released in 2012 directed by Hermon Hailay. Hermon also directed another commercially successful 'buddy comedy' *ያልታሰበው - Yaltasebew/Unthinkable* (Hermon Hailay) in 2013 that mixed the genre with the family issues that had dominated the *yefiker film* in a way that the film can also be seen as a predecessor of the more comedic *የበተሰብ ፊልም - yebeteseb film/family film* (a discussion of which is expanded upon in Chapter 7). In order to understand how normative genre usages structure the industry and how progressive genre practices also occur to push boundaries, I start by discussing the fundamental position of film promotion and exhibition.

Genre in Context: Exhibitors and Film Promotion

The commercial viability of the Amharic film industry is reliant on theatrical distribution as the VCD and online distribution markets are dogged by allegations of pirating and theft. Local

filmmaking in Amharic, therefore, is only economically sustainable through revenues collected at the box-office. Alessandro Jedlowski makes the observation that:

> At the beginning of the production phenomenon, in the early 2000s, very few films were released and they were all accepted for screening in the few existing theatre halls. But today the competition is harsh and many films are rejected by the selection boards that each private cinema has set up. Selection criteria are often criticized for their lack of transparency and film-makers accuse cinema owners of selecting films only in relation to their (supposed) commercial value (or, worse, as a result of corruption practices), rather than for their technical standards and artistic qualities. Many professionals see this as one of the main causes behind the current tendency towards repetition of plots and genres. (2015, 177)

The unstructured and relatively unregulated nature of the industry, therefore, leaves it open to widespread financial manipulation and dishonest commercial practices that undermine the integrity of the whole industry. A case in point here is the Protection Appellate Tribunal heard at the Federal Trade and Consumer's Protection Authority that investigated the charge of unfair competition brought against Sebastopol cinemas by the smaller, neighbouring cinema Eyoha in 2016 (*Capital Ethiopia* 2016, January 15). Beyond this, it should be added that the system of film exhibition has gone through a reversal of fortunes in terms of the supply and demand of films. Up until 2008 there was relatively little competition between films achieving general release in cinemas. There were roughly thirty films released in 2007, including *Yewendoch Gudday*, the pioneering *assikiñ yefiker* film. By 2008 there was a massive spike in competition as roughly seventy films were released (and not dropping below fifty films released per year thereafter), the majority of which can be identified as *assikiñ yefiker film*. This increase in both the production and theatrical release of what is the most low-cost and cost-efficient of genres, also had the effect of highlighting structural issues in the film exhibition sector in Ethiopia.

Suddenly there was an oversupply of films, some of which did not make general release in cinemas and some of which had to wait to be screened. In more recent years, some films have waited over a year to be screened in cinemas, as was the case with *የፀሃይ መውጫ ልጆች - Yetsehaye Mewicha Lijoch/Sons of Sunrise* (2016), and this has meant a gap between audiences and producers has developed, making it harder for cinemas and producers to judge and respond to audience tastes and popular trends. This can be seen as early as 2007, a year that Jedlowski (2015) rightly points out as one in which various films from different genres were popular and commercially successful. Although the *assikiñ yefiker film* provides an accessible and economical genre blueprint, it took a full year before the genre became more established in the country whereas the films often took less than seven months to produce (Henok Ayele, interview, 2016, February 11; *Capital Ethiopia* 2013, February 4). Director and scriptwriter Behailu Wassie, who entered the Amharic film industry in 2010, casts more light on the matter, saying:

> It is the case that we make most of our money from theatrical releases in cinemas, but our films reach more audiences after they are released on VCD, and this is when people contact me to tell me how much they appreciate the film. Even if you look at Ethiopia, we have a population of over one hundred million, but there are only a few cinemas in other towns and cities outside Addis Ababa, so when films are released on VCD, although there are issues with pirating, that is when the films become well known. The other problem is that the cinema owners are only concerned with making their money now; they have no concern for making the industry grow in terms of art and diversity in the future. There is a gap in trust and communication between filmmakers and producers, cinema owners, and audiences because of this. This is why it seems that after films become very well-known and popular through VCD more of that genre will begin to be screened in cinemas because there is less risk for the cinema owners. (Interview, 2016, March 8)

This quote is vital to understanding how the pervasive mistrust and anxiety in the Amharic film industry impacts on its commercial structure and reveals that genre is created at the nexus between theatrical exhibition and VCD circulation. The relatively opaque and secretive practices of producers and exhibitors means that it is often by word-of-mouth and not by any transparency or accurate box office receipts that a film's success can be ascertained.

It is with the emergence of the *assikiñ yefiker film* (humorous love film), more so than that of the previously dominant *yefiker film* (love film), that genre became a tool used by exhibitors to classify films. As cinema building also increased in the form of privately-run single-screen cinemas (often in new multi-storey buildings/malls) during this period (from 2007 until around 2014), it created more barriers for producers who had to go from private cinema to private cinema selling their films to each exhibitor and their selection committees. Yidnekachew Shumete's *lib anteltay/suspense* films *Siryet/Absolution* (2007) and *ኒሻን - Nishan/Nishan (Medal of Honour)* (2013) straddle this period and their exhibition details help demonstrate the increased competition at this time and the lack of opportunity for genres other than the *assikiñ yefiker film*. While in 2007 *Siryet* was released in five cinemas, being screened continually for between six and eight months and was still being screened in some cinemas two years after its release; *Nishan* in 2013 was screened in 25 different cinemas for between three and six months (Yidnekachew Shumete, interview, March 3). Despite the five-fold increase of cinemas exhibiting films in 2013 compared with 2007, the duration of time a film stayed in the cinema was at best halved.

Behailu Wassie further explains that as "cinema owners have a lot of power over what films they show, they often want films that make the audience laugh in the first minutes, and so fail to open their doors to new genres and ideas" (interview, 2016, March 8), a sentiment echoed by prolific filmmaker Biniyam Werku (cf. Fikadu 2013, 197). The commercial pressure is then

heightened as some cinemas even demand payment for films to be considered for screening (Dawit Tesfaye, interview, 2016, February 27) while exhibitors and producers share the box office revenue of each film at a standard ratio of 50/50. On top of this, exhibitors charge producers for various promotional activities and decide screening schedules (from anywhere between once and twelve times per week) and films can be dropped from screening schedules as cinemas see fit. Yidnekachew Shumete also makes the point that there has been no formal distribution sector in Ethiopia which has meant that it is often left to the filmmaker to produce, promote and distribute their film, entailing them (or a trusted employer/friend) to go "to the theatre and put the DVD in the laptop [used to project the film] (so it won't be stolen), then wait until the film ends and then take the DVD back home" (interview, 2016, March 3). Tewodros Teshome mentions that there was a new company that was promoting a distribution service for producers but they do not deal financially with the cinemas on any level, instead they just alleviate the workload for filmmakers and producers (interview, 2016, February 18). The commercial pressures on film producers, however, are then expounded after films have finished screening in the private cinemas as it is up to them to chase their share of the box office receipts from cinema owners who have been known to delay and even default on payments. The fact that the exhibition sector is not standardised or transparent and that cinema tickets remain at low prices to attract Addis Ababa's lower-middle classes only presents more financial risk to producers and people who invest in films (Tewodros Teshome, interview, 2016, February 18). Along with the added work pressures and financial strain the exhibition system in Ethiopia places on film producers, it leaves them little choice but to come to an agreement with cinema owners about the popularity of the *assikiñ yefiker film* as the favoured genre of their audiences (Sintayehu Taye, interview, 2016, March 4).

Despite the commercial and genre-oriented nature of the Amharic film industry as evidenced above in the relationship between producers and exhibitors, there are some important exceptions to the rule where film genre is less relevant. Some film producers own their own cinemas too which offers another source of funds to finance film projects. Writer, director, actor and producer Serawit Fikré owns the single screen, 600 seater Agona Serawit Cinema in Bole and favours the higher budget *lib anteltay film* as three of his four films belong to this higher budget genre, namely *Semayawi Feres/Blue Horse* (2005), *ሒሮሺማ - Hiroshima* (2011) and *ወርቅ በወርቅ - Werk Bewerk/Gold by Gold* (2012). Sebastopol Cinema, with seven cinemas in Addis Ababa and four in other major cities, is the largest chain of cinemas in Ethiopia and enjoys the largest market share. Owned by producer/director Tewodros Teshome, the cinema business has proved a useful tool in exerting influence on industry competitors to such an extent that during the time of our interview in 2016 Tewodros was proposing to add a distribution business along with the already established production and exhibition arms of Sebastopol in order to buy the exclusive rights of films for screening in Sebastopol cinemas (Tewodros Teshome, interview, 2016,

February 18). This amounts to an attempt to vertically integrate the production, distribution and exhibition of films allowing for more freedom concerning the genre constraints experienced by the majority of film producers and exhibitors in Ethiopia but resurrecting significant barriers to entry into the film industry.

Of these privately-run cinemas, Alem Cinema, built in 2002 by the world-record breaking long distance runner Haile Gebreselassie and his wife Alem, is a purpose built cinema on land owned by the company meaning that it is alleviated from the monthly rent instalments paid by other exhibitors, a major reason for the financial short-termism of other privately-run cinemas. Alem Cinema has also stood out as a cinema willing to show a wider variety of film genres with one of their managers, Kebede Mesfin stating that for him the *assikiñ yefiker film* does not dominate their listings (interview, 2016, March 4). Alem was not only the first privately-run cinema to screen Amharic films but also starting in 2002 screened a variety of genres with the sitcom turned comedy film *የበረዶው ዘመን - Yeberedow Zemen/The Ice Age* (2002) and the rural-set film *የነፃ ትውልድ - Yenetsa Tiwild/The Free Generation* (2002) coming before the screening of *Kezkaza Welafen* and *Gudifecha* later that year. Alem Cinema has consistently screened films outside the dominant genres with it being integral for critically acclaimed films such as *አሸንዘ - Ashenge* (2007) and *ሎሚ ሽታ - Lomi Shita/Scent of Lemon* (2012) achieving at least limited release (Paulos Regassa, interview, 2016, February 9; Abreham Gezahegn, interview, 2017, November 2).

As a result of there being no functioning distribution sector bridging the divide between producers and cinemas in Ethiopia there is no proper auditing of box office receipts or audience attendance. The lack of independent film distributors, in turn therefore, has led to the assumption that the *assikiñ yefiker film* is the audience favourite while producers and exhibitors also favour the genre due to its status as more commercially risk-averse than other, higher production value genres. The three larger government-run cinemas, Ambassador Theatre, Cinema Empire and Cinema Ethiopia, administered by the Addis Ababa City Administration Cinema Houses Enterprise (AACACHE), represent a separate exhibition system from the privately-run cinemas previously discussed. Films that producers believe are successful after release in the privately-run cinemas often move to the second-tier government-run cinemas; these cinemas have more than twice the capacity of most private cinemas, have a cheaper ticket price (ETB 20-30 compared to the ETB 40-100 of privately-run cinemas) and screening timeslots are rented out for a certain number of weeks on a flat-rate.

Seen as less corrupt and more transparent than privately-run cinemas the AACACHE also keep numbers on audience attendance and revenue with income, for example, increasing between 2007-2015 by around four million birr (from just above eight million to just below twelve

million birr), and with audience numbers rising from 861,648 to 1,056,503 in the same period (Jamaneh 2016). This snapshot of the Amharic film industry provides a useful indicator of the growth experienced in the industry as a whole during this same period whereas today Amharic films often surpass over a million views on a single YouTube channel (evidenced by the most popular films on Arada Movies1). The government-run cinemas also do not distinguish between film genres or even consider the commercial viability of the film and as long as the film has an exhibition license from the Addis Ababa Culture and Tourism Bureau in theory it would be accepted for screening if and when a free slot existed. However, despite the government-run cinemas now seen as second-tier exhibition spaces, this was not the case at the advent of the commercial Amharic film industry in 2002 as it was Ambassador Theatre in which *Gudifecha* was first screened, and continuously so for a period of roughly a year and a half (Tatek Tadesse, interview, 2016, March 12). Nevertheless, as audience numbers increased and more films were produced, so too competition increased and privately-run cinemas were established to meet the demand for a competitive exhibition sector and have since acted as gatekeepers to the industry where genres now play a prominent role in whether films get screened. In this increasingly profit-driven industry, films associated with popular genres, specifically the *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker* film, are regarded as of lower financial risk by exhibitors, and this has a knock-on effect for producers. The higher cost and financial risk associated with other genres in this exhibition environment can inhibit the production of films of other genres.

It is in the screening schedules of privately-run cinemas where genre terms become more visibly attached to films as the genre is commonly the second piece of information about a film after its title. The different genre terms used often give rise to multiple ways of naming the more broadly identifiable *የፍቅር ፊልም - yefiker film/love film, አስቂኝ የፍቅር ፊልም - assikiñ yefiker film/humorous love film, አስቂኝ ፊልም - assikiñ film/humorous film, ልብ አንጠልጣይ ፊልም - lib anteltay film/suspense film, አክሽን ፊልም - acshin film/action film* and *የበተሰብ ፊልም - yebeteseb film/family film*. One film, for example, may be attributed to two or more genres as it is promoted through different avenues, such as in the case of *ጥለፊኝ - Tilefeñ/Abduct Me* (2015) described as a *ኮሜዲ - komédi/comedy* on the screening schedule of Alem Cinema while in the film's poster the term *assikiñ yefiker film* is used to denote its participation in this more specifically Amharic genre. The case of *ያነገስከኝ - Yanegeskeñ/The One Who Enthroned Me* (2015) represents a similar case, described as a "romance movie" in English on its poster while noted as a *ድራማቲክ ኮሜዲ - dramatik komédi/dramatic comedy* on the cinema listing. The use of two quite different terms to describe a single film in this case indicates the complexity and often indiscriminate, inaccurate or incomplete nature of incorporating films into the Amharic system of film genres. The naming of genres is the prerogative of producers and their promoters when films are exhibited and marketed which may explain such inconsistencies in genre recognition.

Furthermore, there is no clear, industry-wide consensus on Amharic film genres, as is evidenced when looking through the screening programmes of Alem Cinema and finding duplicate terms used to describe the same genre that become discernible only through replacing Amharic terms with English. *Yefiker film* for example seems interchangeable with *የፍቅር ድራማ - yefiker drama/love drama*, *ሮማንስ ድራማ - romans drama/romance drama* and even in many instances of the broader and more international and inter-media term *ድራማ - drama*. Similarly, *assikiñ yefiker film* may be replaced by terms such as *ሮማንስ ኮሜዲ - romans komédi/romance comedy*, *የፊቅር ኮሜዲ - yefiker komédi/love comedy*, *ሮማንቲክ ኮሜዲ - romantik komédi/romantic comedy* or *አስቂኝ የፍቅር ኮሜዲ - assikiñ yefiker komédi/humorous love comedy* with many films (but by no means all) described as *አስቂኝ ፊልም - assikiñ film/humorous film* also integrating romance narratives and partaking in the commonly identified generic conventions of the *assikiñ yefiker film*.

More broadly the terms *drama* and *comedy* can be attached to the dominant Amharic film genre terms to denote the general mode and emotional tone of a film, whether it is a *yefiker film*, *assikiñ yefiker film*, *lib anteltay film* or *yebeteseb film*. The term '*film*' that accompanies these genres may even be replaced by either *drama* or *comedy* as is the case for *ብላቴና - Bilatena/The Young Man* (2015) described as a *yebeteseb film* (family film) in Alem Cinema's programme while in the tenth edition of the Ethiopian International Film Festival the film is described as a *yebeteseb drama*. The use of English terms instead of Amharic, and *drama* or *comedy* instead of *film*, provide an aura of sophistication and layer of jargon that audiences do not distinguish between or necessarily understand. The use of these duplicate terms, rather than being actual signifiers used to distinguish the form and content of films, indicate instead a producer's attempt to either position the film within the popular system of Amharic film genres or to make it seem more distinct and prestigious.

Apart from the explicit and ubiquitous categorising of film by genre in cinemas throughout Ethiopia, Amharic genre terms also often feature on film posters and VCD jackets, as well as in trailers and radio advertisements. It is much more common for a comedy or *assikiñ yefiker film* to harness genre appellations in the promotion of films but other genre terms also appear on posters, especially if the film posters fail clearly to communicate the genre (see Figure 10). Figure 10 offers a selection of film posters and VCD jackets, all of which state they are *assikiñ yefiker film* (or an anglicised version of the Amharic term) apart from the bottom two posters that, despite their similarities in colour, tone, composition and even the starring actors, differentiate themselves by stating they are of the *lib anteltay film/suspenseful film* variety. The paratextual generic indicators of a film, expressed through such promotional materials, therefore, are already conditioning prospective audiences' genre expectations before the film is viewed (Moine [2002] 2008, 89).

Figure 10. A selection of *assikiñ yefiker film* posters and two *lib anteltay film* posters at the bottom.

As genre labels are often to be found on the posters and in the advertising of films in Ethiopia, with cinema listings reserving a space for "the film's type" (genre) directly below the title of the film, there are clear examples of explicit paratextual indicators of generic intentions and conventions. As can be seen with the *assikiñ yefiker film* examples in Figure 10, however, there also appear more subtle paratextual transmissions of genres through observing the colour palette or fonts used in posters and DVD/VCD jackets of films. These colours and references, just as in globally recognisable genres, are usually mirrored in the opening sequences of the films and therefore enhance genre expectations audiences carry with them when entering the auditorium. While the tones and colours of the *assikiñ yefiker film* are usually light reds, blues and yellows and accompanied with smiling stars, the *yefiker film* often has a similar palate but in darker tones with actors rarely smiling.

Crucial to a paratextual analysis of a film's promotional material is the investigation of actors, both as prominent features in the marketing of genre films and in their personal appeal to audiences. As Grant notes in relation to this, "the context of genre is perhaps the most significant factor in determining a star's persona or iconographical meaning" (2012, 140). This statement refers to how Hollywood films are marketed abroad differently than in America, often corresponding to the popularity of different actors in different contexts and then making them central to the film's promotion.

Similarly, many Ethiopian actors get typecast in specific genres as a result of a successful performance in a successful film associated with a specific genre. Some actors who appear in comedy films, such as Netsanet Werkneh or Mesfin Haileyesus, can be seen to embody a specific genre convention as their private personalities seep into their star personas and comedic character types and vice versa. In the small selection of *assikiñ yefiker film* posters in Figure 10, three feature Netsanet Werkneh who takes the leading male comedic role and also writes and directs many of his films; while Mesfin Haileyesus features in four others, playing a key supporting comedic role in all of them. Genre films that feature their images on posters help to legitimise the film's comedic credibility for prospective audiences.

More recently, with his supporting role in the successful *yefiker film* ምዕራፍ ሁለት - *Mi'eraf Hulet/Chapter Two* (2016), Mesfin Haileyesus has proven to be a capable actor of naturalistic and serious performances. Despite this being the standout role of this type in a career spanning more than thirteen comedic films, mostly of the *assikiñ yefiker film* nature, it exemplifies Mesfin's desire to break free of the typecasting he has become accustomed to (interview, 2016, March 7). There are also other actors who are associated with serious roles; Birtukan Befikadu for example, in her career spanning seven leading or supporting roles starting from 2009, the only comedic performance she has undertaken was in Samson Tadesse's 2014 ደላሎቹ -

Delalochu/The Dealers, described as a *lib anteltay assikiñ film* (humorous suspense film) in its listing for Alem Cinema. Birtukan Befikadu has established herself as a serious, versatile and capable actress who chooses only to perform in film projects that she connects with (see Kassahun 2018). Birtukan along with a few other actors/actresses such as Tseganesh Hailu and Meseret Mebraté, however, are more an exception to the rule that sees most prominent and critically acclaimed film actors/actresses cross genre divides more freely, evidenced in the multi-genre performances of Selam Tesfaye, Kalkidan Tibebu, Seyat Demissie, Mahlet Shumete, Girum Ermiyas, Kassahun Fiseha, Tariku Birhanu, Mikael Million, Samson Tadesse and Solomon Bogale (amongst others). As can be seen from the film posters of films featuring Birtukan Befikadu (see Figure 11), they all differ significantly in both tone and colour, with the much brighter and multi-coloured *assikiñ yefiker film* posters (see Figure 10). The production value of the films (and their genres) can also be deduced from these posters. Whereas the *assikiñ yefiker film* posters are more two dimensional and roughly cut, the film posters featuring Birtukan (none of which are *assikiñ yefiker film*) portray more compositional integrity in their symmetry and aesthetics, communicating a clearer sense of the nature of the film (see Figure 11).

The explicit application of genre terms, used as tags on film posters and VCD jackets, makes the generic nature of the industry more prominent as categorising a film seems key, particularly in either claiming to be an *assikiñ yefiker film* or explicitly stating otherwise. Like with Hollywood and other film industries throughout the world, film stars also carry important genre specific meaning. Richard Dyer refers to the Hollywood example explaining:

> Stars like Clark Gable, Gary Cooper, John Wayne, Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Steve McQueen, James Caan establish their male action-hero image either through appearing in Westerns, a genre importantly concerned with nature and the small town as centres of authentic human behaviour, and/or through vivid action sequences, in war films, jungle adventures, chase films, that pit the man directly, physically against material forces. ([1986] 2004, 10-11)

In Ethiopia this star/genre association is particularly apparent with regards to comedic actors who can be easily typecast as supporting characters in any *assikiñ yefiker film* but also becomes evident with some critically acclaimed actors, Birtukan Befikadu for example. She makes a conscious effort to avoid particular genres, the *assikiñ yefiker film* in her case. The combination of poster designs, star power, explicit usage of genre terms when promoting films and the highly influential nature of genres at the production stage of Amharic films, makes film genres relatively ubiquitous within the discourse of the film industry in Ethiopia compared to

Figure 11. The film posters of all the films in which Birtukan Befikadu plays a leading role with *Delalochu* at the bottom.

elsewhere. In this sense then, far from genre offering a limited commercial interest after a film is created,[48] in Ethiopia generic distinctions become central discursive tools both in the making and marketing of films. This "generic discursivity" (Altman 1999, 121) gives rise to variations in genre terminologies and meanings depending on the different situations within which they are deployed.

Genre in Context: Production and Producers

In my interviews with eighteen different industry professionals who have produced and made Amharic films within the industry, genre was discussed to varying degrees by each interviewee. In general, people were aware of the importance of associating films to genres for the purpose of selling or promoting their film to audiences and particularly exhibitors whose arbitrary methods for selecting films was often criticised, not least for being dependent on whether audiences laughed (or cried) in the first five minutes of screenings. So the idea that Amharic genres are predominantly genres of affect is reinforced here (Dawit Tesfaye, interview, February 27). Generally, when filmmakers and producers mentioned Amharic genres, the most commonly cited was the *assikiñ yefiker film*, spoken of in pejorative terms as associated with the arbitrary methods of exhibitors' selection committees and as in demand by young audiences seeking to be entertained. Those filmmakers and producers who had managed successfully to produce a variety of films associated with different genres were more versed in the details of genre production in Ethiopia and more likely to talk about Amharic film genres in general. On the other hand, those who had not produced an *assikiñ yefiker film* or who were interested in producing more artistically prestigious films were less likely to even mention or show an interest in the notion of Amharic film genres.

The way in which people involved in the production of films talked about genre varied widely. Some of the more prolific filmmakers who had made many films associated with different genres such as Henok Ayele, Behailu Wassie and Tewodros Teshome spoke about genre in detail and were acutely aware of the effects and perceptions of different genres in Ethiopia. Henok Ayele, as well as acknowledging his role as pioneering the *assikiñ yefiker film* or "romantic comedy" in Ethiopia, spoke of the many different genres he had made, such as "action", "romance", "suspense", "drama" and that he had plans to make an Amharic "musical" (interview, 2016, February 11). The terms Henok used, despite conducting the interview in Amharic, were mostly Anglicised terms borrowed from more standard Hollywood usages, indicating that his awareness of genre was strongly linked to his knowledge of American discourses on film. Henok's overriding tone was one of enthusiasm for genre filmmaking

[48] As Altman has described in his comparison of the publicity of two biopics in 1939 and 1940 (see Altman 1999, 57-58).

indicating a belief that experimenting with different genres was good for the diversification of the Amharic film industry (interview, 2016, February 11).

Behailu Wassie, unlike Henok, uses Amharic terminology to describe the films he has penned and directed as both "*yefiker film*" and "*assikiñ yefiker film*", amongst others, and explains their popularity within the specific cultural and industrial conditions of cinema in Ethiopia. With particular reference to the production of the *assikiñ yefiker film* he explains:

> Here we call romantic comedy *assikiñ yefiker film*, and because of the commercial pressures to recoup the cost of making a film, many filmmakers are able to take advantage of the popularity of certain genres. Equally, however, there are people who become constrained by the idea of genres. As well as *assikiñ yefiker film* being the most popular films in cinemas, they are also the largest in number that fail to be screened. This is also because many unqualified people attempt to make a film and think they can get easy financial rewards, but this is not the case as is evidenced by the statistics given by the Bureau of Culture and Tourism and the number of films that fail to get an exhibition license. (Behailu Wassie, interview, 2016, March 8)

Despite well-made and socially relevant *assikiñ yefiker film*s proving popular amongst audiences, such as *ኣይራቕ - Ayrak/Don't be Distant* (2014) written by Behailu, the popularity of the genre led to assumptions that the industry could be easily breached with any quickly and cheaply made *assikiñ yefiker film* narrative (*Capital Ethiopia* 2013, February 18). False rumours concerning the prosperity of the Amharic film industry, particularly those surrounding the perceived low cost/high return of genres such as the *assikiñ yefiker film*, seemingly led to a number of amateurish low quality and zero production value films being produced that ended in financial failure (Behailu Wassie, interview, 2016 March 8). This is particularly noticeable in the *assikiñ yefiker film* which has not only saturated the market and garnered the genre trash-status in popular parlances, but also led to the loss of investments by many newcomers in the industry and spread a reputation of poor quality filmmaking across the industry as a whole.

Tewodros Teshome, who helped establish the commercial viability of Amharic films in Ethiopia and in so doing contributed to the early success of the *yefiker film* and later, also to the *assikiñ yefiker film* with the acclaim of *Abay vs Vegas*, spoke about Amharic genres and general filmmaking in Ethiopia in a more pejorative manner in line with popular discourses. Choosing to speak mainly in English, Tewodros used the terms "romance", "*yefiker film*" and "romantic comedy" to discuss film genres in Ethiopia describing his own films not in terms of genre but in terms of their social awareness and contribution to issues in Ethiopian society. In quite the opposite approach to film genres compared to Henok Ayele and Behailu Wassie, Tewodros was generally disparaging of Amharic genres and referred to them as an example of the low quality filmmaking in Ethiopia compared to his own films (interview, 2016, February 18). Despite acknowledging the elements of genre in his films, however, Tewodros relates their commercial success to the fact that they engage with pressing social issues in Ethiopian society and that they

have bigger budgets and production values than other films produced in the Amharic film industry (interview, 2016, February 18). Tewodros, therefore, although showing a general awareness of Amharic genres was keen to distance himself and his films from the 'low brow' connotations he and many critical cultural commentators in Ethiopia perceive them with (Worku 2005; *Capital Ethiopia* 2013, February 18).

How filmmakers and producers such as Henok, Behailu and Tewodros spoke about genre was largely influenced by their own relationship and experiences with film/genre, their position in the film industry and their own perception of the filmmaker's role in society. Those producers and filmmakers who are major stakeholders in and depend on the commercial potentials of the Amharic fiction feature film industry for their livelihoods, mention the notion of genre much more than those who have not produced an *assikiñ yefiker film*, and who are more interested in artistic/critical acclaim and seem to have diversified their work much more through other screen media based outputs. Those filmmakers and producers who have diversified their economic activities in numerous ways, such as Yidnekachew Shumete (interview, 2016, March 3), Sewmehon Yismaw (interview, 2016, February 26), Hermon Hailay (interview, 2016, February 17), Abraham Gezahegn (interview, 2017, November 2), Naod Lemma (interview, 2016, March 5) and Paulos Regassa (interview, 2016, February 9) talk less of genres and are more concerned with the artistic potential and credentials of Amharic films as well as their sociocultural impacts. This is also evident with filmmakers who are strongly associated with a particular genre. Both of Yidnekachew Shumete's films, for example, partake in the conventions of the *lib anteltay film* but also raise issues of social importance in Ethiopia, however, the notion of genres and their role in the Amharic film industry were not discussed.

It is the nature of the Amharic film industry and predominantly, but not exclusively, its commercial pressures and risks that has meant filmmakers concerned more with the artistic credentials of their films have to offset these risks with other sources of revenue such as in the making of television commercials (Paulos Regassa, interview, 2016, February 9). None of the filmmakers mentioned in the above paragraph, for example, have made an *assikiñ yefiker film*, which is telling of their resistance to the film market and its genre trends. In order to explore the relationships between funding, production timescales, production values and genre in Amharic films and the different production methods associated with certain genres, I have interviewed sixteen industry stakeholders and draw upon examples from within the operations of the Amharic film industry. The findings of this part of the research are presented in the following paragraphs.

The Amharic film industry in Ethiopia is difficult to quantify in terms of numbers since research producing statistics has not been undertaken, or is hard to obtain. Apart from the government

figures on how many films are granted exhibition licenses, each commercially run 'private' cinema maintains separate and independent screening committees who in turn pass films for exhibition in their particular cinema (or chains of cinemas in some instances). These cinemas, however, according to many industry professionals, do not monitor the statistics of film circulation or even effectively count box office receipts. Moreover, the informality and uncertain commercial nature of the Amharic film industry is exacerbated by constant rumours about the industry's economy whereby cinema owners or managers peddle tales of sharply falling audience numbers and diminishing returns in order to delay or even default on returning box office shares to producers while some producers magnify their profitability in order to guarantee future investment. There are extreme cases at each end of the spectrum with many stories of economic success and failure. The difficulty of interpreting rumours and business practices in the Amharic film industry is a challenging task and one which I attempt to distil with as much corroboration between interviewees and concrete examples as is available.

The production values of Amharic films are considerably lower than those films that form part of more transnational industries, this means that many films are highly dependent on genre in many parts of the production process in order to speed up and make the process more efficient. In 2002, one of the first commercially successful Amharic films was Tatek Tadesse's *Gudifecha* and cost ETB 70,000 or roughly $9,000 to produce according to 2002 exchange rates (interview, 2016, March 12). Since then film production costs have steadily risen; Alessandro Jedlowski puts the average production value in 2013 between ETB 250,000 and 350,000, which, according to 2013 exchange rates was between roughly $13,000 and $19,000 (2015, 176). From reports of 18 film releases in *Capital Ethiopia* between the end of 2011 and 2013 the average budgets mentioned amounts to ETB 513,000, varying from ETB 130,000 to ETB 1.2 million; with an average production period of 11 months, varying from three months to two years (see *Capital Ethiopia*: 2011, October 31; 2011, December 8; 2012, January 2; 2012, April 19; 2012, April 22; 2012, September 4; 2012, September 12; 2012, September 24; 2012, November 5; 2012, December 24; 2012, December 31a; 2012, December 31b; 2013, January 21; 2013, March 4; 2013, March 18; 2013, March 27; 2013, May 27; 2013, October 22) .

Most producers themselves are not film professionals and essentially act as financiers who burden filmmakers with all the responsibilities of producing and distributing a film. Their financing often comes with caveats regarding the genre of the film with their main contribution being the purchasing of a screenplay. Screenplays are often heavily edited and reworked by filmmakers/directors and filmmakers can equally approach financiers (producers) in order to fund their film projects after already finding or developing their own script (Yidnekachew Shumete, interview, 2016, March 3; Behailu Wassie, interview, 2016, March 8). This was the case for Yidnekachew Shumete, with his *lib anteltay film*s, the first of which, *Siryet*, he acquired

the script and persuaded his friend and founder of one of the major video training academies in Ethiopia, Tomas Getachew, to help produce, despite doubts about the financial viability of the film's genre (Yidnekachew Shumete, interview, 2016, March 3). A similar effort to get *Nishan* produced was required after Yidnekachew had co-written the script with his wife and star of the film, Birtukan Befikadu (Yidnekachew Shumete, interview, 2016, March 3). A rarer occurrence is Naod Lemma's experiences with *ገዳይ ሲያረፋፍድ - Geday Siyarefafid/When the Killer was Late* (2013) which was originally an *assikiñ yefiker film* script that Naod developed, with the consent of the film's producer, into a rurally set feature telling the story of an unfaithful farmer and his close encounter with a local bandit (Naod Lemma, interview, 2016, March 5). It is perhaps the experiences of Biniyam Tefere, however, part of a younger generation of filmmakers trying to break into the film industry, that better explains the general atmosphere surrounding script-development and the early function genre plays in the success of any script being produced. Biniyam explains that the commercial pressures of the industry in recent times has seen producers become more risk-averse, and this has translated into scripts being favoured that tell more conventional stories from which an *assikiñ yefiker film* can be developed (Biniyam Tefere, interview, 2016, March 11).

A lack of funding, time, and expertise on behalf of many producers means that genre often works as a normative tool to communicate simple, quick and easy ideas across different agents in the production process. The role of producing a film (i.e. coordinating preproduction, production, post-production and marketing of a film) commonly falls on the shoulders of the film's director. The lion's share of the budget is often ring-fenced to secure the casting of popular actors. Other elements such as sound/music, cinematography, lighting, costume, make-up and set design then suffer from a lack of adequate funding and attention and therefore often become normative depending on the genre. As the *assikiñ yefiker film* is considered the genre with, on average, the lowest production value, it is not uncommon for different films in the genre to share production features in the departments of makeup, lighting, set design and music/sound. Standard production practices of an *assikiñ yefiker film* are to shoot on location, commonly using vacant offices, condominiums or even mansions (that landlords rent out for a minimal fee or other agreement) and in restaurants, hotels, bars and clubs (featuring in return for sufficient brand exposure), while transitions from one space to another often feature shots from within 4X4s driving along Addis Ababa's main streets. Makeup is often standard salon makeup and lighting options are limited, with interior shots commonly lit by a single, face-on hard light or for a simple high-key lighting scheme to be used. And while blinds or curtains are used to block out natural light in most interior shots, exterior shots are almost always fully lit by natural light apart from night shots which vary in their approach to lighting.

The *assikiñ yefiker film* also often exhibit poor sound or music production values. In an interview with *The Reporter*, the prolific filmmaker Yonas Berhane Mewa mentions that from an audio perspective, "arrangers are told the genre of the film and they proceed to do the score without seeing the film or understanding the story" (cf. Tigebu 2014). Yared Shumete, who has worked on the editing and other post-production tasks of many successful films adds that as "most of the films are owned by producers, sound is not something most of the producers are concerned with […] since they do not think it is necessary there is usually no budget for [sound in] the films" (cf. Tigebu 2014). Music, however, is recognised as crucial for creating suspense. As a result producing original film scores is a more established normative characteristic of the *lib anteltay film* production process that are on average afforded much longer production and post-production timescales and higher funds. Of Yonas Berhane Mewa's eleven films, it is only *Hermela* (2005), *Yemoriyam Midir* (2008) and *ኦቶን - Eton/Furnace* (2009), namely his only films recognisably drawing on *lib anteltay film* narrative and stylistic conventions, which deploy original scores. Likewise, the normative function of the *lib anteltay film* impacts on lighting schemes that offer much more chiaroscuro, sets that are often purpose built for the film and more detailed costumes and makeup in order to characterise a villain or to make injury effects look more real.

The higher than average budgets of films in any genre noticeably impact upon their production value and the audio-visual qualities the films display. At the higher end of budgets there are higher production values; for example, Naod Lemma's *Geday Siyarefafid* (2013) invested much in preproduction: in location-scouting and script development, taking roughly two years to complete the production process. Naod was given the time, money and trust by a first-time film producer from Bahir Dar called Gashew Molla (who became wealthy through marketing and distributing films there) to develop and rework a comedic script into what became a very serious film (Naod Lemma, interview, 2016, March 5). Similarly Yidnekechew Shumete's *Nishan* was a long time in production, coming five years after his critically acclaimed and popular *lib anteltay film Siryet* (2007) and was written, produced and directed by himself and a couple of trusted partners. The budgets for both these films fell between ETB 500,000 and ETB 700,000 ($25,000 and $35,000) with *Nishan* also benefitting from some post-production work (such as colour correction) carried out in Germany. In fact the high costs associated with filming outside of Addis Ababa (in the case of *Geday Siyarefafid* and other rurally set films) and the more sophisticated audio-visual suspense creating elements of the *lib anteltay film* often demand a high budget and is only attempted by established producers or filmmakers, willing and able to raise the funds and spend time working more closely with film casts and crews. Funding and expertise, therefore, tends to be the major factor in whether a film follows more normative genre production processes (after taking into account the average difference in budgets between

different genres such as the *assikiñ yefiker film* and the *lib anteltay film*) or whether the film is able to push the boundaries of established genre conventions.

A clearer example of how larger budgets and production values impact on the production processes of Amharic genres is especially evident in the films of Tewodros Teshome – producer, director, distributer and owner of the biggest cinema-chain in Ethiopia (Sebastopol Cinemas), and one of the most influential players in the Amharic film industry. His pioneering *Kezkaza Welafen* (2002) was followed by the success of *ፍቅር ሲፈርድ - Fiker Siferd/When Love is Judged* (2005) which also drew on *yefiker film* conventions. It was the commercial success of these two *yefiker film* productions that financed Tewodros' diversification into the exhibition and distribution sectors in Ethiopia. Alessandro Jedlowski notes how this move later proved integral in maintaining Tewodros' long-term power in the industry which he currently enjoys as he "owns the largest number of private cinema halls in Ethiopia, thus playing a particularly influential role in defining the success or failure of a new release within the context of a distribution system that […] gets most of its revenues from theatrical release" (2016, 181). By 2016 Tewodros was working with seven Sebastopol cinemas in Addis Ababa and another four in Hawassa, Jimma, Mekelle and Bahir Dar (interview, 2016, February 18).

Tewodros Teshome's contribution to the *assikiñ yefiker film* was down to his *Abay vs Vegas* (2010) going beyond the normative production processes associated with the genre particularly through its use of music. Described by Tewodros as the most successful film in Ethiopia and with a reputed budget of around 8 million Ethiopian birr (approximately $400,000), it is by far the most expensive *assikiñ yefiker film* to be made (interview, 2016, February 18). As a result of the comparatively huge budget, the production of *Abay vs Vegas* was able to bypass many of the previously stated constraints common in *assikiñ yefiker film* production while maintaining its participation in the genre. Of these, perhaps most striking are the efforts afforded to producing and arranging the film's sound and music. *Abay vs Vegas* was Sultan Nuri's first production. Sultan has gone onto become one of the few professional sound engineers and film composers in Ethiopia, and he puts his success down to his more detailed, time-consuming and costly methods of sitting down with directors to understand the themes of the film before working with the film script and editors in post-production (cf. Tigebu 2014). This practice was later developed by Sultan on other film projects, including in other higher budget *assikiñ yefiker film* productions such as Henok Ayele's, *ፔንዱለም - Pendulum* (2011), released a year later by another leading film producer, Tomas Getachew. Sultan points out that the style of music in Amharic cinema usually denotes the type of film, explaining how music has become a key marker of genre (cf. Tigebu 2014). *Abay vs Vegas* too, can be seen to participate in the music of *assikiñ yefiker film* as the use of traditional Ethiopian instruments and style of music was something the

film evolved from the soundtrack of Henok Ayele's first pioneering *assikiñ yefiker film*, *Yewendoch Gudday* (2007).[49]

The time and investment that resulted in the popular and critically celebrated soundtrack of *Abay vs Vegas* set a normative trend in higher budget *assikiñ yefiker film*, which has since spread to most other successful films regardless of genre. The film's huge budget also resulted in the film being shot on a Red One camera, with extra money spent on location shooting in America using American cast and crew (Tewodros Teshome, interview, 2016 February 18). As well as casting Rekik Teshome, an actress associated for her performance in *Yewendoch Gudday* in a supporting role in *Abay vs Vegas*, two of the most popular male actors, Girum Ermiyas and Solomon Bogale also feature in prominent roles, with Solomon playing Negus (meaning "king" in Amharic), the farmer who lives by the Blue Nile ("Abay" in Amharic) waterfalls and who ultimately wins the heart of the female protagonist Mena (played by Blen Mammo). The unique score, the star power of these popular actors, the billing of being the first Amharic film shot on a Red One camera and the novelty of some scenes shot in America all added to the attraction, production value and budget of *Abay vs Vegas* and influenced future key ingredients in the normative production of the most successful *assikiñ yefiker film*s. The expenses afforded on the film by Tewodros were ultimately rewarded by the film's runaway commercial success. The production of *Abay vs Vegas* also had a more lasting impact on film production in general in Ethiopia with particular reference to the trend it set in featuring songs that are specifically written for the film, often emerging in dénouements, lyrically accompanying closing montage sequences.

Through this short discussion of how genres influence producers and the production processes of Amharic films it has become apparent, particularly with reference to the *assikiñ yefiker film* and the *lib anteltay film*, that they play a substantial normative function in the production of films. Genre, here, becomes a tool of short-hand for communicating ideas, exemplified in the case of the production of sound and music, lighting, setting, makeup and costume and are prominent in the decision making of producers when choosing scripts to develop. For artistically minded young filmmakers such as Biniyam Tefere, genre can represent a barrier to getting scripts produced as producers ask first what type of genre it is before they read it (Biniyam Tefere, interview, 2016, March 11). Genre is used as a shorthand on the set of many film productions and in the various stages of post-production to get different production teams on the same page, lighting setups, for example, are expected to be more expressive for a *lib anteltay film* while slapstick-style music is associated with comedies. As larger budgets risk

[49] The similarities between the two films does not stop here, however, as *Abay vs Vegas* also cast Rekik Teshome (who also appears in *Pendulum*) in a supporting role after she shot to fame as the female lead in *Yewendoch Gudday*.

more on a single product, many producers opt to risk less on smaller budgets and stick to the tried and tested formulae of previous commercial successes. In turn, then, productions are generally underfunded which leads to both monetary and time pressures on production teams. Genre usages, then, become associated with the economic conditions of film production whereby "[g]enres are often created or reinforced as by-products of industrial imitation" (Altman 1999, 122). This, however, is not the only use genre has in the production process as some producers invest more time and money, affording filmmakers extra room to be more innovative in their production approach. Although these filmmakers may avoid common Amharic genre terms to describe these processes, their employment of certain actors and use of music, lighting and make-up may all be associated with a specific genre.

The investment into the production process from bigger-budget films, as exemplified in *Abay vs Vegas,* can help change the production methods for future films belonging to the same or similar genres, as was the case with the film's successful score. The production budgets of the average film made in the commercial Amharic film industry have risen steadily but not massively. A review of how genre functions in Amharic examples indicates the normative role it has, particularly in the *assikiñ yefiker film* and *lib anteltay film*. As was indicated from the interviews with producers and filmmakers, however, there is no consensus as to the notion or function of genre in Amharic film production. As discussed in relation to film exhibition and marketing in the previous section, however, genre terms are often used by producers in premiers to add distinction to normative genres. The next section discusses how producers and filmmakers present films using genre terminology and how this then links into genres becoming a major meeting point between producers and consumers.

Genres in Context: Surpassing Normative Genre Projections at Premieres

Tewodros Teshome's *Abay vs Vegas* offers a further example of how films and their producers attempt to differentiate themselves from normative or popular conceptions of genres in the lavish promotion and premiere of the film. Spending ETB 300,000 ($18,000) on the premiere and promotion of the film, more than the entire budget of your average Amharic film, Tewodros managed to orchestrate an elaborate premiere (which was even aired for one hour on national television) and established a trend for producers attempting to set their films apart from the "'popular' milieu" of the Amharic film industry (Jedlowski 2016, 184). For films that are clearly partaking in the conventions of established genres, such as *Abay vs Vegas*'s credentials as an *assikiñ yefiker film*, the high expenditure on the film's promotion sets it apart from the norm. More mid-to-low range budget films use the less expensive strategy of adding prestige or distinction by employing the term "*ምርጥ - mirt/best*" and/or "*አዲስ - addis/new*" in a variety of ways and usually attached to a common Amharic genre.

During my research in Ethiopia in 2016, I attended two film premieres of two very different films, the experiences of which are useful to an analysis of how producers deploy film genre parlance when presenting films to 'VIP' audiences and their peers in the film industry. The first premiere was *Yetsehaye Mewicha Lijoch* (2016) by Sewmehon Yismaw, a director who has established himself as artistically minded and experimental in the form and content of his films and not beholden to the normative genre workings of commercial Amharic cinema. Co-founding the production company Sabisa Films with specialist make-up artist Tesfaye Wondimagegn and Tamrat Mekonnen, they are also regarded as a preeminent company for aesthetically accomplished screen content in Ethiopia (be this for beer commercials such as for Habesha or Jano beers or feature film production). Sewmehon's first film *8:62* (2008) was a self-proclaimed low-budget *lib anteltay film* that experimented with plot temporality and amplifying suspense through a jarring non-linear narrative, while innovative and attracting the services of lead actor and popular film-star Girum Ermiyas, the film did not prove to be a hit with local audiences (Sewmehon Yismaw, interview, 2016, February 26). After this Sewmehon focused more on his skills as a cinematographer participating as director of photography for the aforementioned *Pendulum* (2011), for the first successful Ethiopian 'buddy comedy' *Balageru* (2012) and helped pen *Yaltasebew* (2013) (Sewmehon Yismaw, interview, 2016, February 26). Interestingly *5:62*, *ዓለሜ - Alemé/My World* (Sewmehon Yismaw 2015) and *Yetsehaye Mewicha Lijoch* did not achieve the commercial success of the other features he worked on but for Sewmehon this seems of little concern as he manages to make money by directing commercials which in turn fuel his passion for more experimental filmmaking (Sewmehon Yismaw, interview, 2016, February 26). Sewmehon, therefore, is less beholden to the commercial pressures of the Amharic film industry. For Sewmehon, then, genre is a tool he uses to experiment with, and this in turn gains him due respect among top actors such as Girum Ermiyas (featuring in *8:62* and *Yetsehaye Mewicha Lijoch*), Solomon Bogale (featuring in *Alemé* and *Yetsehaye Mewicha Lijoch*) and Birtukan Befikadu (featuring in *Yetsehaye Mewicha Lijoch*) and many of his films go on to influence genre conventions due to the critical acclaim they achieve amongst his peers in the film industry.

Of note, during the premiere of *Yetsehaye Mewicha Lijoch*, the producer introduced the film as the first Ethiopian "road movie", a term he used in English but which never appeared in the film's marketing. Although featuring a journey in the Ethiopian country-side, the film's narrative revolves around a love triangle between the three protagonists, a husband, wife and her first love as the men suspect each other of seeking vengeance out of jealousy. Using the English term "road movie" while introducing the film to film professionals and invited guests at its premiere can be read more as highlighting the experimental credentials of Sewmehon and the film to a select audience, whereas, upon the film's general release, in Alem Cinema, for example it was listed as a "drama". Just by observing how a film's genre can change when it is

marketed at its premiere and upon general release in cinemas shows how genre definitions can change depending upon who is the producer's target audience. A select audience at a premier of cinephiles and industry professionals are also more likely to understand a foreign genre term such as "road movie" which will not be clearly understood by the general public.

The use of genre terminology in the premiere of the second film, Naod Gashew's *ኦትውደድ ኦትውለድ - Atwided Atwilid/ Don't Fall In Love, Don't Give Birth* (2016) was used in a similar way to that of *Yetsehaye Mewicha Lijoch*'s premiere but to achieve a different effect. There were considerable expectations drummed up by the producers and director before the film's release as rumours abounded amongst film professionals that tipped *Atwided Atwilid* as a game-changer for the genre system in the commercial Amharic film industry (personal communication). This can be read clearly in the film's title telling us to "not love" which directly disassociates itself from any of the major "*yefiker*" (love) genres. Prior to its screening, the film was introduced on stage as a "suspense drama comedy" and throughout the screening there was bemusement and confusion but also scenes when the whole auditorium shook with laughter as an audience member behind me exclaimed in Amharic "this certainly is not a *yefiker film*". So instead of *Atwided Atwilid*'s producer using genre appellations to highlight the film's artistic credentials as with *Yetsehaye Mewicha Lijoch*, the confusing amalgamation of "suspense drama comedy" was used to separate the film from the established genres by explicitly pitting it against the dominant *yefiker* genres. Whereas the production value and processes of *Atwided Atwilid* clearly work within the established system of Amharic film genres (in order to parody them), the attempt to define *Yetsehaye Mewicha Lijoch* as a "road movie" is an attempt to separate it from the commercially oriented system of Amharic genres altogether. And while *Yetsehaye Mewicha Lijoch*, with its higher production value and more sophisticated aesthetic organisation was no blockbuster, neither was *Atwided Atwilid* despite its best efforts.

Unlike the normative use of genre in different stages of a film's production, producers often use film premieres to gain more exposure for their film and they often attempt to outshine more standard genre conceptions to heighten anticipation and excitement. Premieres also function as a way of professionalising the industry as similarly noted in Ghana by Carmela Garritano (2013), through which producers and filmmakers demonstrate their credentials by employing new or enhanced genre definitions. In the case of *Atwided Atwilid*'s premiere, however, such occasions can also work to reinforce accusations of amateurism associated with the industry as was evidenced in the lengthy delay to the start of the film and the pixilation and data corruption that paused the film's projection half-way through. Genre, as used by producers can be both normative and progressive with a distinction between socially/artistically minded filmmakers (progressive) and those with purely entrepreneurial intentions or tighter budget constraints (normative).

Amharic Genres in Transnational Perspective and as Experienced by Cinemagoers

Cinema and film genres are thoroughly transnational at the same time as developing distinct local iterations (see Grant and Kuhn 2006; Moine [2002] 2008; Altman 1999; Haynes 2016; Oliete-Aldea *et al*. 2016). The idea of syncretism, the merging of cultures, has been successfully argued by Karin Barber (2003) with reference to popular cultures across the African continent. This syncretism is also most pronounced in cinema and although films may be perceived as engaging with the reification of national cultures, the aesthetic and narrative conventions of cinema have broadly evolved within the formulaic practices of film genres (Altman 1999; Crosson 2013). Amharic genres, for example, have been forged in a supranational sphere punctuated more often than not with universal notions of romance and entertainment. In the following chapter, the dominant presence of Amharic *yefiker* - love/romance films will be explored in greater depth, but here they can be used as an example of how seemingly 'global' genres engage both in transnational romantic narratives and respond to specific local socio-cultural challenges. Indeed the idea of transnationalism cannot be easily ignored and is an ever increasing experience of contemporary life. With regards to cinema, the transnational has been discussed in terms of infiltrating national industries and impacting upon production, distribution and reception. Miriam Hansen's (1991; 1999) often cited works describing classical Hollywood cinema as vernacular modernity, for example, explains that Hollywood films could "be understood by a mass audience regardless of individual cultural or ethnic background and of site and mode of exhibition" (1991, 138). Ethiopia, however, can be cited here as an example of an industry relatively nationalistic in its political economy while relationships with outside forces, other than the Ethiopian diaspora, appear infrequently and are seen as marginal. Transnationalism appears more significantly in the cross-fertilisation of content and particularly in the deployment of a melodramatic mode (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3) in Amharic films (that of their themes, narrative and style) and influences from Bollywood and Hollywood. As is the case with Amharic films and their contexts of production, the theoretical influences of this study enable the Amharic experience of film to be integrated within broader debates concerning Film Studies and overlapping fields of study.

An interesting example to explore here is the circulation of Amharic 'festival' films and their theatrical releases in Ethiopia. Compared to the commercial Amharic cinema, these films are consistently greeted with a cold reception by the majority of Ethiopian cinemagoers. Following the theatrical release of the critically acclaimed *Lamb* (2015), which was the first Amharic feature to be officially selected in competition at Cannes, Ethiopian audiences responded ambivalently at best (Naod Lemma, interview, 2016, March 5). This ambivalence is shown in the weak box office receipts the film garnered (reflecting the previous year's performance of *Difret* [2014]), but is also evident in audiences referring to this *fictional* film as a

"documentary" (Naod Lemma, interview, 2016, March 5). In fact, after further discussion on the subject of what "documentary" means in its Amharic usage (and in the context of contemporary cinema in Ethiopia) it emerges that the term is used by cinemagoers and some producers to describe a film which is aesthetically accomplished but lacks the narrative energy, and crucially the *melodrama*, of the commercial Amharic films familiar to Ethiopian audiences (Biniyam Tefera, interview, 2016, March 11). In effect, then, "documentary" in the Amharic lexicon has come to define festival films which screen in Ethiopia as they lack the specific Ethiopian melodramatic imagination and energy of the commercially dominant genres. It is the centrality of the local Amharic system of genres in the Ethiopian context, dominated by the *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker film*, which transforms the understanding and definition of a fictional 'festival' film into a "documentary".

When discussing local audiences and throughout this thesis, I have deliberately used the most common terms to describe Amharic film genres and it is important to note the prevalence of the Amharic lexicon particularly with reference to terms such as *fiker/love*, *assikiñ/humorous*, *lib anteltay*/*suspense* and *beteseb/family*. It is clear, however, that many of these terms and their various anglicised guises borrow from more global genre categories, often emanating from America but as already evidenced with the term "documentary" it does not always carry the same meaning. So, while recognising the influences on the Amharic system of genres – particularly from Hollywood, Bollywood and the romantic comedy, for example – the *assikiñ yefiker film* (along with other film genres made in the Amharic film industry) are predominantly made for an Ethiopian audience and not an international one and therefore have more impact in Ethiopia than, say, an Amharic 'festival' film made for an international film festival audience. For this reason, the *assikiñ yefiker film*, or romantic comedies made in Amharic, have an alternative genre formula, both influenced by and at the same time drastically different from Hollywood-type romantic comedies. The emergence of Amharic film genres consumed by Ethiopian audiences in turn demonstrates the cultural and linguistic localisation of genres. In the process of their domestication, however, genres lose their transnationality in exchange for a "cultural formula that is ideologically and temporally specific" (Moine [2002] 2008, 184) differentiating themselves from more transnational and global industries such as Hollywood, Bollywood and Nollywood.

So while influences on filmmakers may be foreign, the spectators are very much imagined as local and that is what makes all the difference as the economy of the Amharic film industry hinges on audience attendance in local cinemas. Imagine, for example, an Ethiopian director deciding to make a romantic comedy targeted at audiences around the world rather than just in Ethiopia. Then the genre of the romantic comedy would be handled very differently compared to the handling if an Ethiopian audience only is imagined. Although there have been some

filmmakers from the Amharic film industry whose films have secured participation in international film festivals around the world, such as *የነገን አልወልድም - Yenegen Alweldim/I Will Not Be Born Tomorrow* (2016), *የፍቅር ዋጋው - Yefiker Wagaw/Price of Love* (2014) and *Nishan* (2013), none of them are romantic comedies or *assikiñ yefiker film* and none of them performed as commercially well as expected in Ethiopia (Yidnekachew Shumete, interview, 2016, March 3; Hermon Hailay, interview, 2016, February 17; Abreham Gezahegn, interview, 2017, November 2). Comedies that rely on dialogue rather than performance/choreography for their humour, such as in the joke fuelled dialogue of the *assikiñ yefiker film*, almost always perform best to native speakers of the language spoken in the film (and even more so to those familiar with any specific dialects, colloquialisms or regional/cultural specific references).

Before going into more detail about specific audience responses to questions about Amharic films and genre that I put to audiences queuing outside Cinema Empire (Piassa, Addis Ababa) in a small yet consequential bit of ethnographic research, a brief scholarly reasoning and rough demographics of Ethiopian cinemagoers and audiences is necessary to focus the research. As I have made clear throughout this thesis, one of my priorities is in attempting a greater move towards a cultural turn in Film Studies. Mainstream Film Studies, however, has a "tradition of prioritizing the status of the text abstracted from the viewing context" (Morley 1992, 158). As discussed in the previous chapter in relation to genre studies, instead of considering audiences in sociocultural context, *the audience* was often positioned as an imaginary and often unitary construct that legitimised the study of popular films. This assumption led to alternative and multiple interpretations of a film's text being overlooked. David Morley's (1980) research into television audiences showed that interpretation of a text was considerably affected by specific contexts of viewing. Unlike Richard Maltby's (1999) fascinating analysis of film industry materials that sought to understand audience preferences as "a means through which Hollywood could negotiate the generic organisation of its products", in conducting ethnographic research I am concerned with Ethiopian audience's own accounts of their relationship to Amharic cinema and genre.

As the economic viability of the Amharic film industry is underpinned by theatrical releases and as the majority of cinemas are based in Addis Ababa, commercial Amharic cinema is very much directed towards urban Addis Ababa based cinemagoers. Each cinema imbues its own atmosphere and is often located in a commercial district, at meeting points and/or minibus termini and attract a local clientele. At the weekends and in more popular evening performances, the larger and cheaper state-run cinemas (particularly Ambassador Theatre, notorious as a pick-pocket hot-spot) provide an experience not too dissimilar from Brian Larkin's account of cinemagoing in Northern Nigeria as "[…] shouting, and thumping chairs,

the cinema-goer's experience of the theatre itself can be as melodramatic as that of the films it screens" (2008, 153).

In terms of demographics, in my small study there was a relatively even balance of men and women who attend cinemas, and unlike Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Churches or Mosques that segregate worshippers according to gender, mixing in the cinema is considered the norm. Unlike in Larkin's description of women attending cinemas in Kano considered as "*karuwai* (prostitutes)" (2008, 147), a popular Amharic anecdote in fact paints the cinema as a more female space as it explains that while men watch the English Premier League (football), women go to the cinema. However, in my experiences and in the small sample of roughly 50 responses with queueing cinemagoers I gathered there is no telling divide, and nearly all cinemagoers were in their twenties or thirties. Most of the respondents were with friends of the same gender but there were also a few male/female couples and a few who attended unaccompanied. The majority of respondents said they were students based in Addis Ababa but there were a few who were from outside the capital and visiting friends or family. Alem Cinema provided me with similar figures that placed 60% of its audiences as female and between the ages of 20 and 40 years old (Kebede Mesfin, interview, 2016, March 4).

Speaking to cinemagoers queueing outside the government-run Cinema Empire during fieldwork, although only managing to gain a small sample of respondents, it is striking how genre plays a secondary role in their decision making to that of being entertained. Most respondents said they made a decision to go to the cinema based on timings that fitted with when they had time-off from work or studies, so watching a particular film was "*ባጋጣሚ - bagatami/by chance*" but the choice to go to the cinema to see an Amharic film is also conditioned by the genres that they expect to see. Generally at the time of research each cinema had four screening times per day (around 2pm, 4pm, 6pm and 8pm) with only Alem Cinema providing free monthly cinema programmes with detailed information about what films were screened in each of the daily slots. Other cinemas implement daily or weekly schedules that display film posters under their respective screening times or attach screening time information (usually on a standard A4 piece of paper) to the film posters themselves (see Figure 12). The success of films therefore strongly depends on when they are shown, with privately-run cinemas offering little transparency as to how films are allocated the most popular screening slots. Importantly people study the posters of the films they are attending in the queues that form outside cinemas prior to screenings, meaning that posters play another key role in communicating genre and conditioning audiences' generic expectations immediately before they enter the auditorium (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Queuing up for a film screening outside Empire Cinema with the film's screening time on an A4 piece of paper attached to the poster (photo credit: Adriano Marzi)

As the business of privately-run cinema exhibition in many cases remains informal and open to manipulation, producers often cannot properly ascertain the success of films from box-office receipts alone and it is only through the distribution of films on VCD that producers can properly quantify a film's success. As VCD jackets most often consist of a reformatted version of the film's poster, the visual paratextual information they communicate concerning genre is equally, if not more, crucial in attracting consumers. VCDs are commonly sold by street vendors, small kiosk owners (see Figure 13) or hawkers who offer their own recommendations to prospective buyers. Genre again plays a role here as a selling strategy used to ascertain the taste of VCD customers, most of whom purchase VCDs from the same local vendor as it is important for sellers to secure the trust and confidence of their clients to avoid accusations of piracy (Kidus, interview, 2016, March 3). The difference between VCD consumers and cinemagoers, therefore, is quite dramatic. While the central selling point for VCDs is built around a film's poster (reformatted as the VCD jacket) and recommendations made by vendors from a choice of twenty or more other films, cinemagoers have far less prior concern and choice about what particular film they are attending. It becomes apparent, then, that while cinemas are selling a social experience to audiences looking to be entertained, VCD consumers are buying

the film itself. Compared with cinema exhibition, and due to piracy, VCD distribution presents a less desirable commercial model to film producers but for consumers it offers a more content-oriented approach as genre, in the form of VCD jackets and word-of-mouth recommendations, play a prominent role. However, due to the precarious nature of the VCD market and higher number of films to choose from, films can only compete here if they have already gained prior circulation and promotion through theatrical release.

Figure 13. A small shop renting and selling films on VCD (photo credit: Adriano Marzi).

For the cinemagoers I interviewed in Addis Ababa, cinemas represent a separate social space for friends and couples to spend leisure time together. It is the social experience of going to the cinema, rather than going to see a specific film, that was important to these cinemagoers, all of whom were in their twenties with a roughly even split of males and females. The second most common reason for attending a screening, other than for filling free time with the social experience of cinemagoing and the entertainment it offered, was the desire to watch a film from Ethiopia with a story to which they could relate. Also mentioned by most cinemagoers was the fact that they wanted to laugh. Genre terms used to describe their preferences ranged from Amharic terms such as *yefiker film* or even *assaziñ film/tragic film* (by one respondent) to many respondents using anglicised terms such as comedy, romantic comedy, romance and suspense. Other frequent opinions voiced by cinemagoers mentioned negative stances on the repetitive nature of the stories told in films; a desire to be entertained and to learn about issues of love.

Despite criticising the repetitive nature of films many respondents also cited that wanting to laugh and the attraction of certain actors were major factors for going to the cinema in general.

Relating to the prominent desire voiced by cinemagoers wishing to see Ethiopian stories, the *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker film* in particular fill a gap in Ethiopia where American romantic dramas and romantic comedies are broadly rejected on the grounds that their overtly sexualised images and themes do not appeal to Ethiopian audiences for mainly sociocultural and religious reasons. If, for example, Hollywood romantic comedies are traditionally based on the boy-meets-girl plotline in which true romantic love is able to overcome any obstacle and ending in the sexual (re)unification of the couple, then the Amharic version differs greatly. The *assikiñ yefiker film*, in contrast, downplays any reference to sexual romance as the coupling of a boy and a girl is nearly always obstructed by issues of money (class) and/or family with matters of sexual intimacy intentionally left underexplored. Displays of romantic affection are limited in the most part to hugs, holding hands and kissing on the cheek, only on a few rare occasions have audiences been privy to an unadulterated French kiss. This is to say that the sexualisation of romance in Amharic romantic comedies is heavily muted compared to their American and European equivalents. The very depiction of such romantic gestures, however, can be considered as just as progressive or challenging in such an orthodox society. The deeply conservative element that has been discussed in relation to the production of genres, and in particular the *assikiñ yefiker film*, is also evident in their relationship to local sociocultural anxieties. Similar to the understanding of the ideology and social function of film genres by Judith Wright (1974) as inhibiting social transformation by reinforcing the status quo, in the light of films relying on fewer resources, such as in the Ethiopian context, the *assikiñ yefiker film* often cannot afford to be overtly radical. However, as the majority of audience members in Ethiopia consist of the young, urban, middle-lower classes of Addis Ababa the *assikiñ yefiker film* also has to be seen as a genre engaged in, and representative of, a collective imagination that offers structures and ways of interpreting global desires and local anxieties (see Garritano 2013 with similar comments concerning the Ghanaian context).

In Daniel Mains' anthropological study of how young urban males structure their free time, he makes this relevant observation regarding the ideological nature of Amharic films and is worth quoting at length here:

> In a context in which ideals of wealth and marriage were clearly unattainable for most young men, Ethiopian films provided stories in which different possibilities could be explored. These stories were particularly compelling, partially because they were told in Amharic and partially because they dealt with locally relevant issues such as HIV and religion. The escape from time associated with film was important, but so was the construction of narratives that enabled youth to think through an uncertain future. Youth interacted with films to

> imagine other possibilities and worlds. It was not that films created a false belief among young men that bridged the gap between their aspirations and economic realities. The process of imagination allowed young men to contemplate this gap in a way that did not necessarily imply success or failure. (Mains 2012, 54)

In this description of audience reception of Amharic films amongst young men, the ideological stance genres take with regards to love and money ("wealth and marriage") activates complex and often ambivalent responses from audiences who are forced to engage with their own social realities and anxieties at the same time as enjoying seeing their desires projected on screen. The importance of learning about love and the position of women in modern, urban Ethiopian society becomes the more central concern of female respondents with many films featuring female protagonists and projecting a female point of view through which female audiences can more easily identify. The process of imagination facilitated by Amharic films is, however, understood to have roots in religion and so acknowledging a specific Ethiopian melodramatic imagination as discussed in Chapter 3 is also important here to understanding the appeal of Amharic genres to local audiences and how Amharic films condition gender representations.

Conclusions

Due to the relative infancy of the commercial Amharic film industry and the fact that the industry's commercial viability hinges on a small, concentrated market of Addis Ababa-based cinemagoers, genre is an important normative economic master plan with only little room for innovation (available to more established filmmakers) that results in the repetition of plots, setting and character types. To this point Behailu Wassie adds that "many filmmakers do not have the time or effort to try and make another genre apart from *assikiñ yefiker film* as it is easy to make people laugh and to create empathy with characters who have to overcome obstacles to achieve their love" (interview, 2016, March 8). So the *assikiñ yefiker film* becomes the generic blueprint of relative economic efficiency for producers, representing the most affordable, low risk and potentially high return investment in the industry.

In interviews I have conducted with film professionals of long-term standing and repute in the Amharic film industry (such as with Henok Ayele, Behailu Wassie, Yidnekachew Shumete, Hermon Hailay, Abreham Gezahegn, Sewmehon Yismaw, Mikael Million and Mesfin Haileyesus), it has been made clear that those who have experienced the film industry from its early years are able to better negotiate the financial risks involved and diversify their production portfolios across film genres and by specialising in certain sectors of the industry or by producing more economically risk-averse screen content such as commercials and documentaries for NGOs. This can be exemplified with the recent opportunities in both fictional content provision and lucrative deals to produce commercials, opened up by multiple new television broadcasting stations commencing operations since 2016. The move of successful

filmmakers such as Behailu Wassie, Henok Ayele and Kidist Yilma into producing narrative television content along with the closure of some smaller private cinemas since 2016 certainly marks a shift in the profitability of television production compared with film production. This dramatic shift in the realms of screen content production has been roundly regarded as damaging for the film industry and has initiated a response (in 2018) from the government in the form of announcing an industry wide consultation[50] prior to releasing a film policy to better support and regulate the film industry. The significant shifts in the landscape of the Amharic film industry and screen content production in Ethiopia since 2016 have, therefore, helped to dispel the rumours of the film industry's promised riches but also opened up new opportunities to more experienced and established stakeholders.

The new developments in the Amharic film industry which may be brought about by the film policy could result in the industry adopting more formal operating structures in each of the production, distribution and exhibition sectors. This in turn may result in a more efficient system of commercial film production grounded in changes in consumer taste rather than in the current conservative expectations of film producers and exhibitors who have historically based their choices on successful films of the past, rarely venturing outside the conventions of the *assikiñ yefiker film* and *yefiker film*. Indeed, the significant impact film exhibitors have in contributing to the longevity of film genre cycles will be discussed in the following section but it is first enlightening to explore in more detail how genre is deployed as a functional tool at many levels of pre- and post-production in the Amharic film industry.

Sophisticated theories of genre, such as Altman's semantic-syntactic approach based on historical accounts of processes of genrification, are difficult to apply in such a young and rapidly changing film industry such as in Ethiopia. The structuring of semantics into a stable and specific syntax remains impractical as there are no canonical films or previously defined genres around which to organise the system of genres. In the Ethiopian case with Amharic genres, however, and even with the distinction between the *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker film*, because they share a great deal of semantic qualities, as evidenced in the common application of the term *fiker* in naming genres, they are inherently less distinguishable through textual analysis alone. Here it is appropriate to balance Altman's more strict approach to textual analysis with an analysis of these texts in relation to their contexts of production and reception.

[50] This significant announcement was made in February 2018 upon the writing-up of this thesis and thus the outcomes or details of the Ethiopian government's film policy were not yet known or available at the time of writing. It is rumoured, however, that significant planned changes concern the building of a "film village" with full production and post-production facilities and capabilities, the empowering of industrial unions that represent different sectors, amending the double taxation that regarded film technologies as luxury goods, helping to implement a better structure to coordinate different stakeholders, offer funding for projects and set up more educational and training programmes.

Therefore, in order to properly accommodate the environment in which Amharic genres have developed and in which they continue to flourish and proliferate, the analysis of Amharic genres and their constituent films demands a less prescriptive and more exploratory approach than prior genre theories. As this study is focused on a cinema (Amharic cinema) that has only recently managed to become the dominant cinema in its locale, usurping the popularity of Hollywood and Bollywood productions, it is also necessary to view genres from a transnational perspective in order to help explain the continuing effects of foreign language cinema in Ethiopia on a production and reception level. Amharic cinema has flourished through a relatively informal set of structures, lacking any centralised institutional backing (although this is apparently set to change with the announcement in 2018 of the government's long anticipated film policy). The commercial viability of filmmaking in Amharic has been attributed to the surge in cinemagoing and huge local demand for Amharic films telling Ethiopian stories. Taking the issue of the reception of generic regimes into account complicates the matter but crucially sheds light on the multiplicity and duplicity of genres in certain production and exhibition contexts and as both normative and progressive in nature. The appearance of anglicised genre terms point to the fact that Hollywood films are still accessible through satellite television and therefore widely available to those same cinemagoers who drive the local demand for Amharic films. This complicates a study focusing on a particular film context but proves that audiences are not restricted in their film viewing options and that there exist multiple generic regimes in any one context (Moine 2008). This adds more diversity in the form of greater choice between local and global products where the Amharic film industry has become an important contributor in sustaining an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination and sense of national identity. Each individual viewer is, therefore, influenced by his/her personal set of social, economic and cultural relationships which underpins his/her ideological and aesthetic experiences of cinema, making it possible for each individual to attribute his/her own logic to a system of genres and to separate genres.

Questions surrounding the concept of the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination and the emergence of an Ethiopian-style melodrama in Amharic cinema are central to the discussion in Chapter 6. A combination of contextual, textual and historical analysis will be harnessed in the following investigation, building on the prevalence of the *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker film* as discussed in this chapter. A discussion of the *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker film* will situate them in relation to the significance of genre and melodrama in the Ethiopian context, exploring these two most populous genres with regards to specific canonical films, their textual analysis and their long-lasting impact on the Amharic film industry as a whole.

CHAPTER 6

Whether to Laugh or Cry?
Explorations of the two most Prominent Amharic Film Genres

> Romantic melodrama or romantic comedy? That is the crucial question.
>
> Deborah Thomas (2000, 99)

This chapter explores, in particular, the two most prolific genres in Amharic cinema, *yefiker film/love film* and *assikiñ yefiker film/humorous love film*, which have come to dominate cinema screenings across Ethiopia since the flourishing of the Amharic film industry in the early 2000s. Chapter 5 has detailed how the *assikiñ yefiker film* has deployed normative genre functions both in the production and promotion of films and also how it is seen as delivering some of the basic desires many audiences seek when going to the cinema, such as being entertained and educated on issues of *fiker*/*love*. In order to combine a genre approach with the discussion about melodrama in Chapters 2 and 3, the analysis of the *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker film* genres in this chapter will show how genres in Ethiopia are inflected by *both* foreign influences (specifically, Bollywood and Hollywood) *and* local influences and participate in an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination. The competing versions of *fiker/love*, represented in these genres as – romantic, religious, patriotic and familial – are central to appreciating the cultural specificity of melodrama and film genres in the commercial film industry of Ethiopia.

The approach of this chapter aims to galvanise scholarship in melodrama and genre studies by arguing for cinema genres to be studied in context *and* in a diachronic way, seeing how genres change over time in any context. Before discussing these Amharic film genres, however, it is worth recapping the key timelines from their emergence, peaks and troughs in popularity with particular attention given to the *yefiker film* and the *assikiñ yefiker film*.

The period between 2002 and 2007 was dominated by the *yefiker film* as Tewodros Teshome's *ቀዝቃዛ ወላፈን - Kezkaza Welafen/Cold Flame* (2002) and Tatek Tadesse's *ጉዲፈቻ - Gudifecha/Adoption* (2002) became the first commercially successful Amharic films, playing in the theatres of Addis Ababa before they toured across Ethiopia and

even to places with big Ethiopian diaspora populations, such as Washington D.C. (Tewodros Teshome, interview, 2016, February 18; Tatek Tadesse, interview 2016, March 12). As well as these two most successful films, which will be discussed in more depth below and that were still playing in cinemas in 2004, roughly 50 Amharic films played in local cinemas in the period 2002-2006. Out of these, some 20 can be understood to be clearly participating in the *yefiker film* conventions with dominant romance through lines obstructed by family issues, crime/violence, medical issues (particularly HIV Aids), competing suitors, the death of a loved one or a mixture of similar such circumstances. Apart from *Kezkaza Welafen* and *Gudifecha*, other films associated with the *yefiker film* during this period include: *የሾህ አጥር - Ye'Shoh Atir/Thorny Fence* (2004); *አስራ አንደኛ ሰዓት - Asra Andeñña Se'at/Eleventh Hour* (2006); *ዕጣ ፈንታ - Eta Fenta/Destiny* (2005); *መሥዋዕት - Meswe'at/Sacrifice* (2006); *ፍቅር ሲፈርድ - Fiker Siferd/When Love is Judged* (2005); *ፍቅር እና ዳንስ - Fiker ena Dance/Love and Dance* (2006); *ትንቢት - Tinbit/Prophecy* (2005); *ጩኸት - Chuhet/Shout* (2005); *ታጋቹ - Tagachu/The Hostage* (2005); *የፍቅር ነገር - Yefiker Neger/Love's Thing* (2006) and *ኤልሻዳይ - Elshaday* (2006). These films have tragic as well as positive situations that do not always resolve in romantic couplings but almost always warn of modern society's ills and end with didactic moralisations bound in nationalist or local religious/philosophical sentiments.

The concluding moralisations of Amharic films are common across the system of genres and can be regarded as a crucial component of an Ethiopian-style melodrama. Whereas the *yefiker film* enacts these moralisations through pathos; action and suspense are the primary vehicles for such moralisations in the second most populous genre during this period (which emerged before the *assikiñ yefiker film*), the *lib anteltay film/ suspense film*. The primary narratives common in this genre are fuelled by suspenseful sequences of threat, underhand or illicit activity and violence which are also often intertwined with secondary romantic narratives (leading to the existence of the near-duplicate term *lib anteltay yefiker film/suspenseful love film*). There were some 10 *lib anteltay film*s during this period with the notable examples being: *ሔርሜላ - Hermela* (2005); *ሰማያዊ ፈረስ - Semayawi Feres/Blue Horse* (2005) and *ሾተላይ - Shotelay/Demon (that inflicts disease on a new-born child)* (2005). The other genre of note during this period was the *akshin film/action Kung Fu film* with *አላዳንኩሽም - Aladankushim/I Didn't Save You* (2005) and *ታዳኞቹ - Tadañochu/The Hunted* (2005) being good examples of films from a genre defined by its martial arts fight sequences. Comedies were rare, with

ካምፑስ - *Campus* (2004), *ሰለማይዘነጋ ውለታ* - *Silemayzenega Wileta/The Unforgettable Favour* (2004) and *ሰው በልኬ* - *Sew Belké/Someone to Suit Me* (2006) being the few examples I have come across. Films set purely in rural Ethiopia were also not common, despite *ብራ* - *Bira/Brightness* (2006) and *የነፃ ትውልድ* - *Yenetsa Tiwild/The Free Generation* (2002) being examples of this type of film from directors who had made similar VHS movies in the 1990s (before films were permitted a general theatrical release). The film *ሳራ* - *Sara* also released in 2006 is considered one of the few, and most acclaimed, Amharic 'horror' films as it came runner-up in the Best Feature Film category to the *lib anteltay film ሰርየት* - *Siryet/Absolution* (2007) at the second Ethiopian International Film Festival in 2007.

The next period of the commercial Amharic film industry **from 2007 to 2011** saw a substantial increase in films being produced and released in cinemas, roughly 290, nearly six-times the estimated 50 of the first five years. This spike in film production can be attributed to the arrival of the *assikiñ yefiker film* after the success of *የወንዶች ጉዳይ* - *Yewendoch Gudday/Men's Affair* in 2007 and the general expansion of the film industry that also gave rise to the *yebeteseb film/family film* after the success of *ውሳኔ* - *Wisané/Decision* and *ኮሞሮስ* - *Comoros* in 2008. Films associated with the *yefiker film* and *lib anteltay film* still proved successful and were produced in greater numbers than previous years, but the market seemed saturated with the sudden arrival of the *assikiñ yefiker film* and its relatively low-cost economic model. This low-cost economic model, as discussed in Chapter 5, meant that the production values of films associated with the *assikiñ yefiker film* genre varied greatly with many in this period finding success through investing budgets primarily in securing favourite comic actors such as Netsanet Werkneh or those who became well-known through the success of *Yewendoch Gudday*, such as Mesfin Haileyesus, Zerihun Asmamaw, Tewodros Seyoum and Elizabeth Getatchew.

Netsanet Werkneh fronted two of the first comedy films to be released in Ethiopia (and mentioned above: *Campus* and *Silemayzenega Wileta*) and his films are a good example of the varying production values of successful *assikiñ yefiker film*s. Early *assikiñ yefiker film*s that featured Netsanet in the lead male role relied heavily on his star value as a comic which he had fostered in the theatre (Fresh Man Theatre). Examples of these lower production value yet popular films featuring Netsanet and a strong ensemble cast are: *ከማይርሱበት* - *Kemaydersubet/Unreachable* (2009); *ባለቀለም ህልሞች* - *Balekelem*

Hilmoch/Colourful Dreams (2010); *F.B.I* (2011); *ያንቺው ሌባ - Yanchiw Léba/Yours Thievingly* (2011) and *ሚስተር ኤክስ - Mister Eks/Mr. X* (2011). With the success of the big budget *አባይ ወይስ ቬጋስ - Abay vs Vegas* in 2011 there was a shift towards higher production values in the more popular *assikiñ yefiker film*s than was the case previously, such as in: *ፔንዱለም - Pendulum* (2011); *ሰላዮቹ - Selayochu/The Spy* (2012); *ሲቲ ቦይዝ - City Boyz* (2012); *የፍቅር ABCD - Yefiker ABCD/Love's ABCD* (2012); *ያ ቀን - Ya Ken/That Day* (2013) and *ታስጨርሺኛለሽ - Taschershiñalesh/You've Made Me Finish It* (2013). The popularity of the *assikiñ yefiker film* was such in this period that the box office takings of *ሀይወቴ - Hiyweté/My Life* (2012) of 1.2 million birr (roughly $66,000), according to Fikadu Limenih (2013), made it the highest grossing Amharic film.

The period 2012-2015 saw roughly 100 films made per year and this signalled a plateauing of the film market in Ethiopia. Since my fieldwork in February 2016 new Amharic TV stations have also come on air and offered another avenue of screen media content production that many people think will adversely impact on the film market (Paulos Regassa, interview, 2016, February 9). Successful filmmakers such as Behailu Wassie and, purportedly, Kidist Yilma have already moved into TV content production but it remains to be seen what effect this will have on the commercial Amharic film industry as a whole. From this brief overview of popular Amharic cinema in Ethiopia it is clear that locally produced and locally consumed cinema has emerged and spawned a system of genres relating to the once ubiquitous Hollywood and Bollywood films but which remains distinctly local.

The "*yefiker film*" genre

Understanding the underlying Ethiopian melodramatic imagination and ongoing processes and conventions that are shared among films in the system of Amharic genres helps position the commercial Amharic film industry and its output compared with other film industries the world over. The system of Amharic genres as understood here, is an ongoing process made up of a group of genre categories that denote expectations in narrative and tone. Importantly, these genres are determined by the relations they maintain with one another and with foreign genres (and their system of genres) which inevitably affect one another. It is clear from this and previous discussions throughout this thesis that both foreign and local influences affect the commercial Amharic film industry in Ethiopia. So, although it is necessary to acknowledge the specificities of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination and its underlying role in the system of Amharic

genres, it is also crucial to acknowledge the influences of genres from outside Ethiopia, such as from Bollywood and Hollywood.

Before the term '*yefiker film*' was used in reference to Amharic cinema, it was in usage as a descriptor of Bollywood films as evidenced by Kasim Meka, who explains the Hindi film *Gunga Jumna* (1961) as such (Fantu 2016). Even though the film is described as an Indian *dacoit* (an Indian bandit) crime drama or *dacoit* western (Teo 2017; Ghosh 2013) and as portraying moments of "rustic comedy, romance, tragedy and villainy" (Mahan 2010), it is Dinesh Raheja's (2002) interpretation of the film as a "morality drama" that resonates most with the contemporary Amharic *yefiker film*. It is the moralising tendencies of popular Amharic films, entwined in competing conceptions of *fiker* that may be similarly recognised in the melodrama of such Indian films.

Typically, the core melodramatic imagination of Indian films critiques society through representing reified cultural and religious elements in opposition to the tensions and global desires of India's transition towards modernity (Nandy 1998; Vasudevan 2000; Larkin 2008). Likewise, popular Amharic films display an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination similar to that deployed by Bollywood, in order to probe questions into contemporary Ethiopian society. The concept of melodrama as an underlying tendency in cinema finds expression in multiple and various contexts and styles, each asking similar questions but representing specific world-views. By discussing the idea of the melodramatic imagination in different contexts, similarities arise in the structure and centrality of melodrama to cinema across the globe, with localised ideologies resonating from similar narrative structures focusing on moral oppositions, high emotion and sensational events. In this sense then, melodrama becomes a form that goes "beyond genre" (D. Thomas 2000) in the reified, conventional sense, although in the Ethiopian case, it is the *yefiker film* genre that can be seen as the early progenitor for the system of Amharic genres and a distillation of an Ethiopian-style melodrama.

In order to investigate distinctions between film genres in Ethiopia and to better evidence the continuation of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination harnessed by the commercial Amharic film industry in its address of Ethiopian audiences, this chapter turns to explorations of the *yefiker film* (love film) and the *assikiñ yefiker film* (humorous love film). These are the two most widely and commonly used generic terms amongst film practitioners and spectators in Ethiopia, and the names which characterise

the main content categories used to distinguish film releases. These genres are dominant through a combination of critical acclaim, commercial success, sheer volume of films produced, and their ability to influence other genres. For instance the *yefiker film* heavily influences the moralising and diachronic narratives of the *lib anteltay film/suspense film* and the *yebeteseb film/family film* as well as fusing with humour in the creation of the *assikiñ yefiker film*.

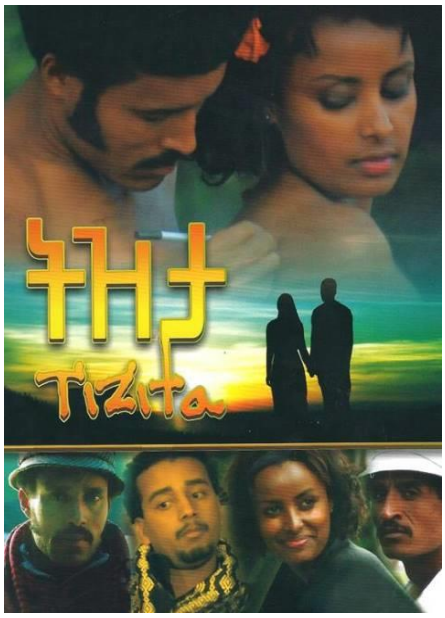
The melodramatic tendencies common in the *yefiker film* – including suicide-attempts, revenge, death and other traumatic and fatalistic occurrences – interrupt romantic through-lines, which fundamentally posit ideas of marrying for romantic love against more traditional marriage values and patriarchal dominance in Ethiopian society. Central to *yefiker film*s of the early 2000s were explorations of the tensions between youth and the traditional family nucleus as university and other settings of greater individual freedom encouraged a disobedience within the realms acceptable to Ethiopian society. Instead of a total dissociation from and rebellion against the family, films often resolved with compromise and understanding being reached between the younger and older generations. More often than not, love posited as true, unconditional and spiritual (often inspired by Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity) paves the way for the healing of all wounds and liberation from strict traditions as there is resolution of the complications between young lovers and their extended families through moralising dénouements. In this sense, the affirmation of faith, achievement of spiritual love and contemplative calm in the often sombre and reflective closings of the *yefiker film* can be seen as opposed to the more jovial, bodily and physical union achieved in the *assikiñ yefiker film*. Thus, pointing to the idea that whilst *yefiker* films provide nourishment for the soul, *assikiñ yefiker* films provide comedic relief and escape from the corporeal dilemmas of daily life (Behailu Wassie, interview, 2016, March 8).

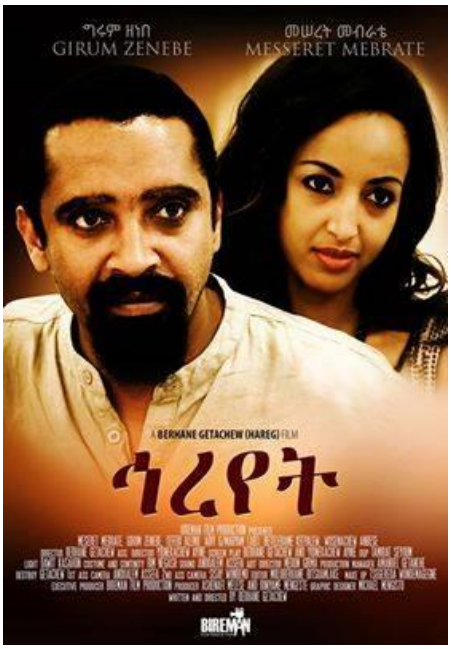
The contrast in the more repressive tones of the *yefiker film* with the playful rambunctious nature of the *assikiñ yefiker film* plays to different emotional states pre-conditioned by an audience's expectations of each genre. As such, the tones of film posters are crucial paratexts used to communicate a film's specific genre associated expectations and thus prepare their audiences for different emotional and thematic experiences. Compared to the light colours deployed in the posters of the *assikiñ yefiker film* and direct address of specific actors as they seemingly cast their smiles directly at prospective audiences (see Figure 10), the posters of the *yefiker film* communicate a

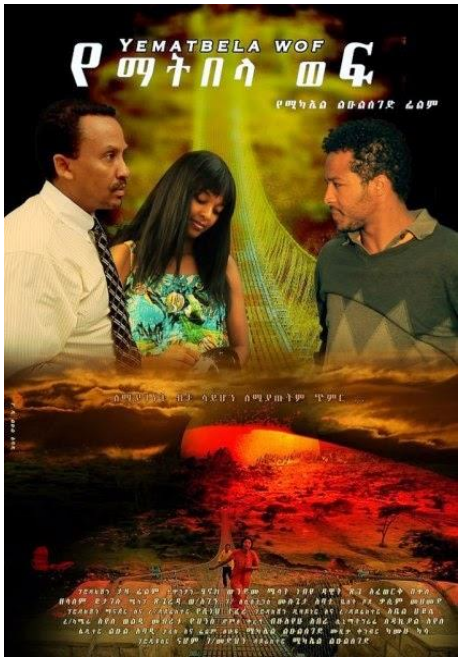
more sombre mood. These posters rarely depict smiling faces, are much more atmospheric, bleached in monochrome tones and are commonly constructed around a central image of the male and female protagonists wearing serious, contemplative expressions or silhouetted against a setting sun (see Figure 14).

The commercial viability of filmmaking in Ethiopia was facilitated after cinemas were allowed to screen Amharic digital films in cinemas. A pre-cursor to this regulatory change was Tesfaye Mamo's *ፍቅር መጨረሻ - Fiker Mechersha/The Edge of Love* (1994), an Ethiopian melodrama that negotiates between modernity and tradition, youthful desires and family expectations which became critically acclaimed after it was allowed to be screened at the Hager Fiker Theatre for its premiere (Tesfaye Mamo, interview, 2016, March 9). Adapted from a folktale and shot on location in Bahir Dar (the capital of the Amhara region), the film follows the story of a young couple, Abaynesh (played by Meseret Mulugeta) and Habtamu (played by Haile Abera), who defy their families' wishes for them to separate by escaping to an island in Lake Tana. After their papyrus *tankwa* (canoe) drifts away they become marooned. Habtamu soon succumbs to illness while Abaynesh is left alone, mournfully despairing Habtamu's death with the film's tragic ending revealing a man discovering the remains of the couple.

The film's Ethiopian melodramatic imagination depicts the young couple as more liberated when they are together as they are free to speak their mind to each other while relaxing by the shore of Lake Tana. When Abaynesh and Habtamu are portrayed in their respective family environments, however, they are ordered to listen and respect the decisions of their elders. These scenes feel more claustrophobic and stifling with the natural lighting and small indoor fires not able to stave off the darkness that crowds around the corners of the frame. Because these scenes depict how the love of the young couple is complicated by the love, loyalty and commitment they show to their extended family they are not victims of evil deeds but victims of circumstance and of society. It is this struggle between satisfying an individual desire for romantic love while staying true to familial, social and national expectations through which an Ethiopian-style melodrama is achieved which places the generational struggle and ambivalence of urban Ethiopian youth centre screen. Despite the successful, if short, screening of *Fiker Mechersha*, it was unable to be screened in Bahir Dar or other cities due to a lack of projectors (Tesfaye Mamo, interview, 2016, March 9).







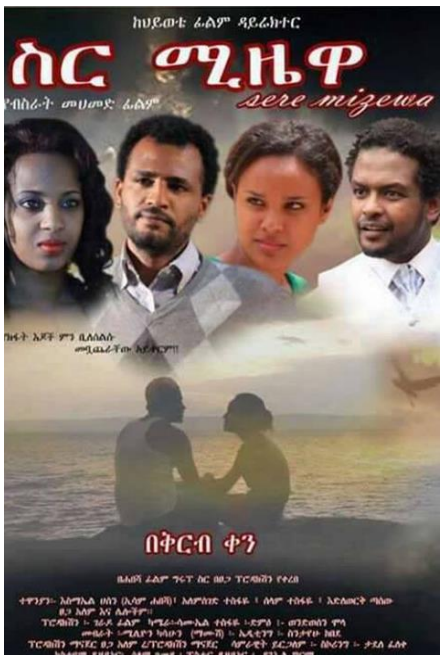


Figure 14. *Yefiker film* posters.

It was only in 2002, after the screening of five different films in four different cinemas/theatres, that theatrical releases of Ethiopian films became the norm and the Amharic genre system became established with the emergence of the *yefiker film*. Of these five films, by far the most successful were the three *yefiker film* features: Zekarias Haile-Mariam's ፃማኮ - *Tsamako* (2001); Tewodros Teshome's *Kezkaza Welafen* (2002) and roughly three months later, Tatek Tadesse's *Gudifecha* (2002). The other films screened were Helen Tadessa's, የሸረዳው ዘመን - *Yeberedow Zemen/The Ice Age* (2002)[51] and Abreham Tsegaye's rurally set, *Yenetsa Tiwild* (2002). As Alem Cinema was seen as more exclusive by audiences at the time, it did not draw the huge crowds the government-affiliated cinemas and theatres were able to, leading these latter two films to be relatively unsuccessful at a time when many cultural commentators cited the fact that films were popular by default, simply because they were in Amharic (Worku 2005; Gebre-Egziabher 2006). Despite these five films being released at a similar time it was mainly the success of *Kezkaza Welafen* and *Gudifecha* that helped establish a generic blue-print for commercial filmmaking in the form of the *yefiker film*. Evident across all these films, however, is the development of an Ethiopian-style melodrama that employs dialogue-centric narratives and editing patterns dominated by shot-reverse-shots of two characters framed in medium and close-ups typically before an emotional reaction or physical action propels the narrative forwards. The specificity of this melodrama is always conditioned by an Ethiopian imagination that finds associations and commonalities with characters, settings and sounds that addresses the day-to-day sociocultural realities of contemporary urban Ethiopian cinemagoers. The emergence of the *yefiker film* as the first commercialised and widely recognised genre in the Ethiopian context, therefore, was the result of moulding a serious and emotionally fuelled melodramatic mode to suit Ethiopian circumstances.

Low cost budgeting was crucial in making commercially successful *yefiker film*s as audiences were attracted more by the Ethiopian specificity of the story rather than the production value (Gebre-Egziabher 2006). *Tsamako*, for example, was by far the most costly film of this era, costing ETB 250,000 (roughly $33,300) and taking six months to produce. Although *Tsamako* was first premiered at Imperial Hotel in 2001, due to the director and producer's affiliations with the government, it was permitted to be screened at Mega Amphitheatre in early 2002 proving popular and influential in paving the way

[51] *Yeberedow Zemen* was a situational comedy originally made for television but later screened in Alem Cinema due to disagreements with ETV (now EBC).

for digital films to be screened in cinemas and theatres across the country, but it did not represent a viable economic model because it was too costly to produce. The film's narrative, set in the communist Derg era of the previous government, follows the female protagonist, Tigist, as she searches for her lost love Tewodros, after he escapes from a military prison. Finding refuge with the Tsamako people of southwest Ethiopia who nurture Tewodros as one of their own, Tewodros proves himself to such an extent that the elder of the community promises his daughter's hand in marriage to the outsider. In true melodramatic form, Tigist manages to track down Tewodros through the help of a journalist and arrives at the village on the eve of the planned wedding. The love triangle of this film represents the tensions between tradition, modernity, love and community within a setting of a small ethnic group outside mainstream nationalist notions of Ethiopian culture in which a hopeful and inclusive image of Ethiopia is projected and through which, in Zekarias Haile-Mariam's own words, one is encouraged to "measure the depth and might of love" (cf. Yared 2001).

The Ethiopian melodramatic imagination imbued within the romantic social narratives of the *yefiker film* comes to the fore in both *Kezkaza Welafen* and *Gudifecha*. Largely set between the domestic space of the female protagonist Selam's home and the Sidist Kilo campus of Addis Ababa University, *Kezkaza Welafen* directly addresses the social tensions of everyday life for Ethiopian university students with the dangers of HIV/AIDS as its central theme. It follows the story of Selam (played by Lulit Aseffa), a promising university student and advocate for the prevention of HIV/AIDS at university. The film opens with Selam and her friends driving back from Sodere to Addis Ababa. As Selam stares out the window, wiping a tear from her cheek, her friend Hirut (played by Aster Bedane) talks flippantly about AIDS only for the driver of the car, Selam's boyfriend (played by Solomon Bogale), to lose control and crash. After the opening title sequence we see Selam returning home from hospital relatively unscathed. Upon entering her home an overprotective man, Ashagre (played by Tesfu Berhane), is seen already in the house waiting for her unable to understand why Selam would travel to Sodere with such reckless friends. The low-angle shots used to depict Ashagre emphasise his status and it soon emerges that he has been entrusted to look after Selam and her family by her late father. Ashagre, however, unbeknown to Selam has also been promised her as his wife and becomes impatient after waiting five years. Selam does not react well to the news and refuses his proposal. Infuriated, Ashagre gives Selam an ultimatum, demands reparations for the time and money he has spent supporting her

family unless Selam agrees to be his wife. Due to Ashagre's constant harassment, Selam struggles at university and decides to agree to marry Ashagre. On the wedding day, and just when their marriage service is about to be consummated with a kiss, Selam's mother decides to step-in and calls the wedding off due to Ashagre not providing a certificate proving he is HIV negative.

A university student and shy admirer of Selam, Brook (played by Shimeles Abera), whose family own and run a successful business secretly pays the debts Ashagre demands he is owed and also covers the costs of Salem's mother's medical expenses. Although Brook declares his love for Selam and the feelings seem mutual, she turns him down on many occasions. After Selam's close friend, Hirut passes away due to AIDS it then appears through flashback that Selam believes herself to be living with HIV because of an incident in Sodere where her ex-boyfriend forced her to have sex with him whilst he was drunk and knowingly HIV positive. *Kezkaza Welafen* reaches its climax after Selam confesses her love for Brook but tells him she doesn't deserve him, further explaining her condition to him in a letter. A montage then begins of a pensive Brook driving aimlessly on a road out of Addis intercut with flashbacks of Selam and him enjoying dates together. After he is shown wondering along a train-track, he narrowly misses getting hit by an onrushing train, a moment that jolts him to his senses. Selam, unable to cope with her shame and feeling of unrequited love attempts to commit suicide only for Brook to arrive back in time to smash through her bedroom window and rush her to hospital. The film's ending resolves happily with Selam's recovery in hospital, negative HIV test result and marriage to Brook.

The real evil in this film is the HIV disease and its effects on Ethiopian society; beyond this, the filmmakers show that the social insecurities of everyday life create a world in which Selam cannot survive. Using the visual trope of blind characters to symbolise the blindness of youth and Ethiopian society to HIV, and after Selam demonstrates a moral strength in her abstinence and other virtuous acts throughout the film, she is rewarded somewhat fatalistically through a negative HIV test result. This result opens the way for a happy resolution, allowing true love to be realised and reflecting the prevalent sentiment *"ፍቅር ያሸንፋል - fiker yashenifal/love conquers all*". The *yefiker film* can thus be seen to be imbued with resolutions that affirm local Ethiopian moral codes, teaching people how to face life's obstacles without compromising their values, while

simultaneously promising a romantic love which does not have to be sacrificed because of familial or societal pressures.

In *Gudifecha*, as in other *yefiker film* movies, couples do not always live happily ever after. Like *Kezkaza Welafen*, *Gudifecha* similarly adopts a romantic social melodrama mode with its narrative focusing on a wealthy family and the various issues of love that ensue after Meron (played by Meseret Mebraté) and her adopted brother Josie (played by Tesfu Berhane) have a romantic affair. Meron's circumstances become complicated after she becomes pregnant with Josie's child, forcing them to go into hiding and Meron to drop out of university. The wealthy father Meshesha (played by Fekadu Teklemariam) manipulates the couple, forcing them to abort the baby despite Meron knowing that, because of her haemophilia, it will most likely cause her own death. Left with little choice, Meron decides to take traditional medicine in an attempt to abort her child. In a highly stylised scene, accented by low-key lighting and strong shadows, Meron and Josie arrive at the house of the medicine woman (see Figure 15). After

Figure 15. Stills from *Gudifecha* after Meron and Josie enter the house of the medicine woman.

Meron commences her procedure, Josie explains that Meshesha had told them to abort after revealing that he (Josie) is actually Meshesha's real son, given birth to by Meron's aunt, thus making Meron and Josie agnate siblings. The film then cuts to a lake-side resort two years later where Josie explains his life to his new love (intercut with flashbacks) describing that after Meron's death he was deemed mentally unstable and forced to undergo both Orthodox and Pentecostal Christian healing which he found to be of little use compared to the help he received from a psychologist, augmenting the film's advocacy of modern medical techniques over traditional and spiritual practices.

Much like in *Kezkaza Welafen* and central to both plots are their youthful perspectives and outlooks (reflecting the young population of Ethiopia with over 70 percent of its estimated 105 million people under the age of 30). It is the youth who are burdened with the problems of older generations, and who explore the impacts of both modern and traditional medicine, and express their desire to marry for romantic love and not for family. Whilst in *Kezkaza Welafen* all of these competing claims are happily resolved through good fortune, in *Gudifecha*, the death of Meron is deeply symbolic and fatalistic as she is the victim of her father's patriarchal sins (adultery with his wife's sister) and lies (withholding that he was in fact Josie's legitimate father), with Meshesha ultimately becoming paralysed due to the stress of the situation and paying the price for his daughter's death.

In *Gudifecha*, the opening sequence uses sweeping crane shots and tracking shots to frame the familiar location of the Sidist Kilo campus of Addis Ababa University, symbolising, as in *Kezkaza Welafen*, a prototype of modern Ethiopia where lived tensions between Ethiopia's modern society and past traditions come to the fore in what was once the palace grounds of the last Emperor of Ethiopia (see Figure 16). This university setting is central in many Amharic films, engaging the aspiring younger generations as well as older generations familiar with the history of the location. In such a way, the *yefiker film* proves successful as it attempts to rationalise and comprehend the social and cultural insecurities of everyday life through a moral structure, reflecting and expressing the hopes, dreams, pressures, anxieties and vulnerabilities of contemporary Ethiopia. These Ethiopian melodramatic imaginations speak to Ethiopia's broader opening up, both culturally and economically, to an "imaginaire of consumption" (Mbembe 2002, 271) and echoes Garritano's observations in the Ghanaian context where the moralisations are at the same time "highly critical of

materialism and capitalistic values" (2013). The genre's early prevalence and patriotic sensibilities were also forged in an era of hostile tensions following the aftermath of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War,[52] breaking out in 1998 and informally ending in 2000,[53] which destabilised the very fabric of Ethiopian national identity and created social and economic uncertainty.

Figure 16. Stills of Addis Ababa University's Sidist Kilo Campus from (top) *Gudifecha* and (bottom) *Kezkaza Welafen*.

[52] Since Eritrea achieved independence from Ethiopia in 1993 after a referendum was held in the aftermath of the Ethiopian Civil-War, the two countries could not agree to issues arising from Eritrean independence. Relations worsened until the nations were finally at war, costing an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 lives.

[53] The peace deal was only formally signed by PM Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia during the final writing up of this thesis which caused an immediate détente between the two nations.

The Ethiopian melodramatic imagination being self-perpetuated by the *yefiker film* was crucial in affecting and reflecting these popular sentiments of the time. This new form of a popular, Ethiopian specific melodrama, whose representations are rooted in the everyday rumours and beliefs of Ethiopian society reflect the particular idioms of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church of an "eternal Ethiopia" as mythologised throughout the centuries. Ethiopia is not immune, however, from what Brian Larkin describes as the general everyday insecurities that "drive a range of disparate domains of African life" from the "rise of informal markets" to the "spread of new religious movements such as Pentecostalism and Islamism, [and] the powerful resurgence of religious and ethnic conflicts accompanied by frequent outbreaks of violent conflict" (2008, 169-170). The nationalistic Ethiopian narrative of the Tewahedo Church, then, offers a strand of stability, clarity and peace to many and this nationalistic and spiritual *fiker*/*love* has become a central counterbalance to modern notions of love and the desires of youth.

With further comparisons to Larkin's discussion on the melodrama of Hausa films in Northern Nigeria, although Amharic films don't share the single formal similarities Hausa films seem to have with Bollywood, they do engage "an imaginative template from which the tensions over arranged marriages and love marriages can be imaginatively explored and critiqued" (2008, 205). In both *Kezkaza Welafen* and *Gudifecha*, romantic love is the emotional charge that leads the female protagonists down paths strewn with melodramatic extremes of self-sacrifice as Selam comes out of her ordeal with her 'happy ever after' while Meron suffers the ultimate price for her father's lies and manipulations. It is in coming to terms with emotional fears and fantasies of romantic love in Ethiopian scenarios that the *yefiker film* and the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination successfully resonate with Ethiopians. The success of Amharic films lies not only in challenging the social norms of Ethiopian society but also in creating a crucial continuity with the nationalist and religious sentiments that create an imaginative stability by rooting this commercially incentivised film industry in the mythologised narratives of Ethiopia's past (see Chapter 3).

Emergent Genres and the Rise of the "*assikiñ yefiker film*"

In the years that followed the commercial success of the *yefiker film*, between 2002 and 2006, more privately owned cinemas were built. Agona Serawit and Sebastopol opened around two years after Alem Cinema (Tewodros Teshome, interview, 2016, February

18) and these three privately-run cinemas were solely dedicated to screening Amharic features. Dominated at the time by the *yefiker film*, this trend also opened up privately-run cinemas to a wider audience demographic, dispelling the perceived exclusivity of Alem Cinema. As the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination imbued an early body of commercially successful films identifiable as the *yefiker film* genre, so too other branches in the system of Amharic genres grew from the *yefiker film* employing a similar Ethiopian-style melodrama.

Developing early on was the *lib anteltay film/suspense film* which includes the key melodramatic imagination intrinsic in the *yefiker film* genre while foregrounding thriller-type narrative structures and aesthetics to create suspense. Discussed in more depth in the following chapter, what is relevant here is that this genre also engages with the *fiker* of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination by running romantic plots parallel to lines of threat and action, often concluding with a romantic coupling. The early success of *Semayawi Feres* (2005) is a case in point, as the film follows Dr. Iskinder (played by Serawit Fikré) who successfully develops a method of creating rainfall from the Blue Nile River for the Ethiopian government and people only for his plans to be sought after by corrupt businessmen wanting to sell the valuable research to the highest foreign bidder. Firéselam, hired to seduce Iskinder and steal his research, ends up falling in love with him after he was taken hostage by her employers. She refuses to share her information and manages to stall the villains enough for the Ethiopian army to save the day and for her to be reunited with Iskinder. In 2005 the popular and critically acclaimed *Hermela* (winning the Best Feature Film award in the first Ethiopian International Film Festival - ETHIOIFF) had a similar nationalist and moralising message about 'true love' as the film dramatised a true story of a stalker and his victim that had been a national news sensation. Then in 2007, perhaps the most well received and popular *lib anteltay film*, *Siryet* (winning the Best Feature Film award at the second edition of ETHIOIFF) caused much debate on how the nation deals with the bloody violence of its recent past during the Derg era and Civil War 1974-1991 and the need for absolution. It is the younger generation who become the victims of the historical crimes of their fathers and who, in the film's conclusion, are finally free to love each other.

Alessandro Jedlowski rightly points out that in Ethiopia "the period around 2007/2008 can be considered something of a golden age […] with different film genres being

equally successful with local audiences" (2015, 181). The most commonly mentioned films in this period, described as some of the most successful films in the history of cinema in Ethiopia, are: the *lib anteltay film*, *Siryet* (2007); the tragic *yebeteseb film*, *Wisané* (2008) and the *assikiñ yefiker film* (humorous love film), *Yewendoch Gudday* (2007). As also noted by Jedlowski and confirmed by industry insiders,[54] after the success of *Yewendoch Gudday*, the *assikiñ yefiker film* became more common due to their relatively small budgets and short production times. This had the effect of saturating the market, pushing "producers […] to invest mainly (if not only) in projects that guarantee good (and safe) economic returns, provoking […] repetition of plots and genres" (Jedlowski 2015, 182).

This is not to say, however, that all *assikiñ yefiker film* movies are stagnant, unoriginal copies of each other or of Hollywood romantic comedies or devoid of generic innovation. Instead, the *assikiñ yefiker film* can be seen as closely related to the *yefiker film* in that it often confronts social tensions and inequalities by using romance and love to bridge class, ethnic and familial divisions, but unlike the *yefiker film*, always results in laughter, the overcoming of obstacles and ends happily with the union of the couple. Crucially, these genres can be distinguished by their different affective natures; while the *yefiker film* is serious and often provokes tears, the *assikiñ yefiker film* is evidently oriented towards making audiences laugh and feel a sense of joyousness. Both genres, however, can be regarded as projecting a similar Ethiopian-style melodrama and engaging with an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination in their aesthetic form and moralising tendencies.

Proving the syncretic nature of cinema, film "genres can be taken over by other nations and cultures" (Teo 2017, 2) and although Stephen Teo is referring to the emergence of a distinct film genre in Asia he calls "Eastern Westerns", I propose a similar relationship between the Hollywood romantic comedy and the *assikiñ yefiker film*. Although representing sexual desire, the *assikiñ yefiker film* does this in a far more modest way than modern Hollywood romantic comedies. In fact sex itself is hardly mentioned in most Amharic films and the humour of the *assikiñ yefiker film* is often built on the

[54] Each one of my interviewees agreed that *Yewendoch Gudday* was the instigator of the trend in the *assikiñ yefiker film*. This included, Tewodros Teshome, Yidnekachew Shumete, Behailu Wassie, Tatek Tadesse, Tesfaye Mamo, Hermon Hailay, Eyerusaleam Kassahun, Paulos Regassa, Mesfin Haileyesus, Mikael Million, Abreham Gezahegn, Sewmehon Yismaw, Naod Lemma and Henok Ayele who jokingly also referred to the blame and contempt he receives from others for starting a filmmaking trend in what many perceive as a "low brow" genre.

awkwardness of courtship between a man and a woman in an Ethiopian context. In his detailed study of Hollywood romantic comedies, Leger Grindon explains how "[t]he humor depends on the rise and release of sexual tension rather than any inherently funny dialogue" (2011, 71) but in the Ethiopian example of the *assikiñ yefiker film* this statement can be true only if it is reversed. As Behailu Wassie (interview, 2016, March 8) and Henok Ayele (interview, 2016, February 11) mention in relation to their *assikiñ yefiker film*s, it is the dialogue as well as the scenario that are key to a popular *assikiñ yefiker film*. Indeed, it is the joke fuelled dialogue and the manner of its delivery which, it can be argued, are the central appeal of the *assikiñ yefiker film*s that feature Netsanet Werkneh (mentioned above) who draws crowds and elicits laughter through his unique delivery of dialogue and performance style.

Although the *assikiñ yefiker film* has similar plot structures and character types that are common in romantic comedies in other contexts, the Ethiopian-style melodrama that permeates the system of Amharic film genres influences the form and content of the genre. Like in the *yefiker film*, common Addis Ababa locations act as crucial backdrops that localise narratives of lovers who overcome diverse obstacles to realise their union. Such examples range from different domestic settings depending on class and urban/rural dynamics, the Addis Ababa University Sidist Kilo campus, hotels, bars, restaurants and popular lakeside resorts or other tourist attractions around the country. These settings are familiar in an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination that becomes further localised by familiar aesthetic and narrative choices, as referred to by Behailu Wassie (interview, 2016, March 8), that build on the simple structures of *teret* stories (children's folk stories from the Amharic oral tradition) and their moralising dénouements (see Chapter 3). As such an aesthetic similar to that of the *yefiker film* is seen in the *assikiñ yefiker film* with the prolific use of the two-shot that establishes a confrontation/dialogue and sets up a shot/reverse editing convention as the dialogue between protagonists and third parties drives the plot.

In textual terms, *Yewendoch Gudday*'s success lay in its searing narrative which plays upon the common male anxiety of women who leave their boyfriends in Ethiopia for members of the Ethiopian diaspora abroad. When such a scenario presents itself in the film's opening, the protagonist, Aimero (played by Admasu Kebede), is heartbroken to such an extent that he becomes house-bound. Aimero's close friends (all colleagues at a carpenter's workshop) are so disgusted by the situation that they vow revenge by

establishing the "*yewendoch gudday*" group with the sole aim of avenging shunned men, victims of women who willingly trade love for riches and the prospect of life abroad. A farcical scene plays out mid-way through the film in which Aimero begrudgingly goes to the wedding of his ex-girlfriend while his friends hatch a humorous plan which involves them gate-crashing the wedding. It is at the wedding that Aimero catches the eye of Helina (played by Rekik Teshome) who believes Aimero also to be a wealthy member of the Ethiopian diaspora. The lies and deceit which build up between the two as they start dating are finally dispelled in the film's climax which is then resolved as the love between the couple is laid bare after they are forced to come clean, admitting in earnest their wrongdoings and, in turn, true feelings for each other.

The comedic nature of the supporting characters in *Yewendoch Gudday* has become one of the genre's most defining features. This is particularly evident in relation to Aimero's carpentry colleagues who help him in various hilarious ways to win over Helina and each represents a different stereotypical Ethiopian/Addis Ababa characteristic. Mesfin Haileyesus, who plays his namesake in the film (Mesfish or "*Tejju*" because of his love of the traditional Ethiopian alcoholic beverage *tejj*) refers to how people constantly quote jokes and comedic lines from the film to him, and even while walking in public and riding on public transport with Mesfin, he is accosted by strangers shouting out "*Tejju*" and quoting excerpts of dialogue from the film (Mesfin Haileyesus, interview, 2016, March 7). The popularity of these supporting comedic characters is such that all of the actors who performed such roles in *Yewendoch Gudday* have become some of the most popular comic actors in the industry, often type-cast in similar comedic roles. Building more on the work of Grindon (2011) by emphasising the cultural turn in Film Studies with particular regards to genre, the *assikiñ yefiker film* has infused its leading and supporting characters, such as friends, helpers and obstacle figures (such as a controlling fathers) with stereotypical and prototypical Ethiopian characteristics that are deployed in order to engage with the specific cultural and social conflicts felt by Ethiopian audiences. The popularity of the comedic friend(s)/sibling/helper in the *assikiñ yefiker film* has been deemed to be such a significant component of the genre's success that they also now often appear in the more serious *yefiker film* which further blurs the supposed boundaries between the two genres.[55]

[55] Comedic supporting characters have become so popular and pervasive that they are now liable to appear in a film associated with any Amharic film genre.

The humour of other *assikiñ yefiker film* movies is often born out of extremes, and these extremes can be characterised in male and female protagonists in the sense that 'opposites attract' as in the film *ሰለ ኦንቺ - Silä Anchi/For You* (2008), in which a beautiful, extrovert waitress falls in love with an awkward looking, stiff and introverted high-school student. These comedic extremes may also be represented through a 'clash of cultures', which play on the challenges of speaking foreign languages (often English) such as in *Yefiker ABCD* (2012); or also on other such binaries as poverty/wealth (in *Yewendoch Gudday* and *Yanchiw Léba* [2011]); rural/urban, such as in *ላውንደሪ ቦይ - Lawnderi Boy/Laundry Boy* (2011), *ኣይራቅ - Ayrak/Don't Be Distant* (2014); and even films that combine many such dichotomies as in *ጥለፈኝ - Tilefeñ/Abduct Me* (2015). The changing social context of Ethiopia from 2007 up to the present influences the *assikiñ yefiker film* as films explore a diverse array of mores surrounding courtship in Ethiopia and between Ethiopians from an array of different social backgrounds that enables the genre to enact subtle changes and innovations while maintaining its popular appeal.

There is a stark absence of romantic comedy type genres such as the *assikiñ yefiker film* in research on other sub-Saharan African contexts where commercial film industries have emerged. Scholars such as Haynes (2016), Garritano (2013) and Larkin (2008) do not mention an equivalent romantic comedy genre in Nigeria or Ghana despite them all discussing the presence of contextually influenced melodramatic-styles apparent across films in a similar manner to the Ethiopian case. The diverging structure of distribution and exhibition in the Amharic film industry, sustained by theatrical releases and not reliant on 'straight to video', as has traditionally been the case in these other African industries may be a factor here. Although the act of film viewing is still highly social in Nigeria, Larkin explains that females who attend cinemas are derogatively called prostitutes and are vulnerable to sexual harassment (2008). In Addis Ababa, such open sexism and other barriers to women attending cinemas are not apparent. The fact that the commercial Amharic film industry depends on theatrical exhibition and box-office revenues for its income, makes it logical for the *assikiñ yefiker film* to be popular due to the relative openness and popularity of cinemagoing among women and ritualisation of cinemagoing within courtship practices worldwide. The communal act of watching a comedy film amongst a crowd activates the infectious nature of laughter which further enhances the pleasures of the cinemagoing experience.

The added aspect of Ethiopian cinemagoers often frequenting the cinema in groups or in couples (see Chapter 5) adds to the idea that the *assikiñ yefiker film* is a favourite 'date movie'. The enduring nature and popularity of the genre in Ethiopia can be associated, therefore, as in the American example with the communality of cinemagoing and courtship. Mernit describes the desires and expectations of audiences of romantic comedies as wanting "to feel what it's like to love and be loved… to be deeply moved, and at the same time they want to laugh" (2000, 252). Similarly, the tone of the *assikiñ yefiker film* is one of safety, not of anxiety or jeopardy like the *yefiker film* or *lib anteltay film*. The audience are already expecting to laugh, if they wanted to cry, more likely than not they would have chosen to attend a *yefiker film*. For it is the emotional power and joyful tone of the *assikiñ yefiker film* which distinguishes it from the anxiety fuelled uncertainties of the *yefiker film*. Echoing Grindon's American example, "[t]he plot of most romantic comedies could be presented with the earnestness of melodrama, but the humorous tone transforms the experience" (2011, 2). What links these two most prominent film genres in Ethiopia, and the system of Amharic film genres in general however, is the competing and omnipresent idea of *fiker* which becomes the centralising concept through which an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination and the commercial Amharic film industry is sustained and developed.

Indeed the *assikiñ yefiker film* continues to draw on the melodramatic imagination intrinsic to the *yefiker film* and other genres in their didactic dénouements. This is evidenced in the neat and often idealised unifying resolutions of films which, although intended to create laughter, also prove instructive. Just as the *yefiker film* may end in tragic circumstances there is always a justification and moral to be learnt at its close. The moralising power and emotional force that the concept of *fiker* instigates in an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination heightens nationalistic, spiritual, familial and locally acceptable ideas of romance for Ethiopian audiences. This resonates with how Brian Larkin describes Hausa films where "melodrama represents a world where truth, justice, and ethics have been thrown into question and where political conflicts are shifted onto a personal plane and sublimated into domestic conflicts about love and betrayal" (2008, 208). Through the sentimentality evoked by both genres through the manipulation of *fiker* (through laughter and extreme agitation) they manage to entertain whilst drawing nationalistic didactic conclusions that teach audiences how to negotiate between romantic love and the love of family and nation, whilst confronting social and moral obligations.

The development of these two dominant generic strands in Ethiopia and the dual demands on popular films to educate and entertain have meant that there is a genre kinship between the *assikiñ yefiker film* and *yefiker film* in Ethiopia much like that which has been suggested by Neale and Krutnik where "comedy can come surprisingly close, in its concerns as well as in many of its structural features, to the genre we tend now to think of as melodrama" (1990, 13). Thus there is heavy cross pollination in terms of themes and style, as well as in terms of industry personnel, which has resulted in the fluid and often ambivalent nature of film genres in Ethiopia with the melodrama of the *yefiker film* genre remaining ever-present.

The prevalence of the *assikiñ yefiker film* since 2007 in Ethiopia has contributed to the rise of the Amharic film industry to such an extent that a rough estimate of 40% of all Amharic films screened in Alem Cinema in 2014 were associated with this genre. It is interesting to note, however that this figure dropped to roughly 20% in 2015 which signals another shift in the popularity to other genres, or at least a drop in popularity of the *assikiñ yefiker film* as evidenced in screening programmes of Alem Cinema. In fact, it is apparent that from 2013/2014 onwards there has been a resurgence in the *yefiker film* genre, with films combining a more developed aesthetic integrity (with original sound-tracks, symbolic locations, more stylised and detailed mise-en-scène and more sophisticated cinematography) with melodramatic narratives of fatalistic incidents and significant moral address dispersed by occasional moments of comic relief. Of particular note, due to its commercial success and wide distribution in cinemas and on VCD and extensive critical acclaim, is Kidist Yilma's tragic *yefiker film*, *ረቡኒ - Rebuni/Teacher*[56] (2014). The film centres on the relationship between a rich Addis Ababa-based businessman, Leul (played by Amanuel Habtamu), and the unassuming, traditionally moral girl-like land-owner, Gela/Adey (played by Ruta Mengistaeb). Highlighting the disillusionment of big corporations and the lessons business-minded folk can learn from traditional values of love and family, *Rebuni* explicitly addresses the growing tensions and inequalities experienced in 21st century Ethiopia between society and irresponsible capitalism. Other recent *yefiker film* movies which focus on an introspection of contemporary Ethiopian society are: *ትራፊክ - Traffikwa/The Traffic Policewoman* (2013) which focuses on police corruption and the damaging effects of

[56] Not a school teacher but a teacher of moral everyday instruction and traditions.

gossip; *ሰኔ 30 - Sené*[57] *30* (2015), which focuses on drawing parallels between older and more recent notions of romance and love in a story of intergenerational moral exchanges; and *ምዕራፍ ሁለት - Mieraf Hulet/Chapter Two* (2016) detailing the story of a victim of the malpractice and manipulation of the law by wealthy businessmen.

There are also specific thematic trends that are often represented in the form of the *yefiker film* but have emerged in instances of the *yebeteseb film* and *assikiñ yefiker film*. An example of this being films that focus on protagonists or families suffering from mental illnesses, as initiated in *ኣብሮ ኣበድ - Abro Abed/Together Crazy* in 2012. This thematic trend included the *yefiker film* movies: *ሰለ እናት ልጅ - Silä Enat Lij/For My Mother's Son* (2015); *ሄረየት - Hereyet* (2015); *እስክትመጪ ልበድ - Eskitmechi Libed/Let me be Crazy until you Return* (2015); *መባ - Meba/Meba (Tithe)*[58] (2016) and *ትዝም - Tizm/(Au)tism* (2016). Stories of immigration and the desire to emigrate abroad also make up another recent trend in the *yefiker film* that have been present throughout the history of the commercial Amharic film industry but proliferated in recent years and crossed genre boundaries to be considered more in line with the *lib anteltay film*.[59] The evidence of these trends in Amharic genres which may even be incorporated into different genres, such as the example with the comedic friend character, often complicates attempts at defining genres. Likewise the thematic trend in focusing on mental illness often shares similarities with the broader conventions of the *yebeteseb film* where romantic love is often absent. In a similar way the theme of immigration often suits the employment of suspense to dramatise the dangers of undocumented migration and so also partakes in the conventions more associated with the *lib anteltay film*.

Conclusions

The deeply emotional element which engenders the term *fiker* in relation to commercial Amharic film genres can take romantic, devotional, nationalistic and spiritual forms, resulting in a term that can be seen to embody a deep attachment to idealistic notions of hegemonic Ethiopian culture. As an Amharic term for melodrama does not exist, the word *fiker* can appear somewhat amorphous in its use to describe both melodrama and

[57] Sené is the tenth month in the Ethiopian Calendar which generally falls between June and July.
[58] An obligatory payment to the Church or other religious institution.
[59] Examples of these are: *ሶስት ማዕዘን - Sost Meazen/Triangle* (2013); *የገጠር ልጅ - Yegeter lij/The Country Girl* (2016); *ሶስት ማዕዘን 2 - Sost Meazen 2/Triangle 2* (2016) and films such as *እንቆጳ - Enkopa* (2015) and *እውር ኣሞራ ቀላቢ - Ewir Amora Kelabi/Feeder of the Blind Amora (Black Kite)* (2016).

comedy, the two strains which Altman describes as foundational to American narrative cinema but as markedly distinct genres (1996). Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik identify a "kinship between comedy and melodrama" (1990, 13) in their study on popular film and television comedy in Euro-American contexts. A similarly close bond is conjured by '*fiker*' in the naming of the Amharic genres *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker film* and in the aesthetics of an Ethiopian-style melodrama they employ, and in the specifically Ethiopian socio-cultural issues Amharic films address.

While the *yefiker film* seems to be a distillation of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination that has emerged in response to the demand for – and commercial potential of – Amharic films in Ethiopia, the *assikiñ yefiker film* may be seen more as an 'Ethiopianised' romantic comedy. Instead of seeking universal archetypes, notions of genre can be better comprehended when their meaning and purpose are considered in context. Here, the discussion on the influence of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination on commercial Amharic cinema has offered new ways of perceiving local Amharic genres in relation to the socio-cultural issues they address and the industrial context in which they play. Comparisons with other film cultures such as the Hausa example of melodrama and the Hollywood example of the romantic comedy help identify similarities between different cinemas and cinema in Ethiopia while also helping to distinguish how local cultural and historical developments have affected an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination and system of Amharic film genres infused with *fiker*.

To this end, this chapter offers a more nuanced understanding of how the genres of commercial cinema operate in the Ethiopian context, with a particular focus on the *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker film* genres. It has also been made clear that genre systems and genres themselves have multiple interpretations and forms and are organised vis-à-vis a logic inherent within their particular cinematic context in which foreign (English in this case) normality and academic critical assertions should be questioned. Instead of universalising genre definitions from the classic Hollywood model, it is necessary to investigate the very manifestation, role and purpose of cinematic genres in each locale, leading to more refined and less restrictive understandings of genre in cinema. Indeed, in order to apprehend the very concept of 'genre' or 'a film's type' it is necessary to explore the origins of genre systems (both local and foreign sources), their ideological and social purposes, as well as their cinematic credentials.

More generally, the interaction between the melodramatic, the comedic and romance (more precisely *fiker*) have emerged as the most popular genres in Ethiopia; as represented in the *yefiker film* and the *assikiñ yefiker film*. Both accented by their participation within the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination the *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker film* can be read as embodying the two core principles anticipated by audiences and filmmakers in Amharic cinema, balancing entertainment with spiritual and moral guidance, providing both nourishment for the body and the soul (Behailu Wassie, interview, 2016, March 8). Whereas the narrative world of the *yefiker film* is characterised by the restrictions and obstacles concocted by the dangers of malign fate, social inequality and hierarchical power, the *assikiñ yefiker film* offers a safe passage through these same obstacles for its protagonists where quick wittedness, playfulness and benevolent goodwill help overcome differences which in the *yefiker film* are only resolved after violence, threats, pain and/or suffering have run their course. Since the early 2010s, and as exemplified with *Rebuni*, the comic has also become commonly deployed in the *yefiker film* in order to provide occasional relief in what is fundamentally still an endlessly melodramatic world that provides support for real experiences of Ethiopian audiences. The logic of exploring other Amharic film genres, the subject of the following chapter, results from a desire to examine more closely whether the influences of a perceived Ethiopian melodramatic imagination, and indeed relationships between the *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker film*, hold sway in more recent expressions of Amharic cinema.

CHAPTER 7

From *Fiker* to *Fiker*?
Affective Genres in a World of Melodrama

> While at any given point a generic system may appear perfectly balanced and thus at rest, the look of stability is actually produced by a momentary equilibrium of countervening concerns. […] In fact, it is precisely the continued contestation among producers, exhibitors, viewers, critics, politicians, moralists, and their diverse interests, that keeps genres ever in process, constantly subject to reconfiguration, recombination and reformulation.
>
> Rick Altman (1999, 195)

In the previous chapter, I showed how important the term *fiker* has been in the formation of the two main Amharic genres at opposite ends of the emotional spectrum but both championing culturally embedded ideals of love (romantic, familial, religious and patriotic) in opposition to the selfishness and greed associated with wealth. An active engagement with an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination guides core thematic tendencies in films but can also be ascertained in recurring narrative structures and aesthetic choices that characterise commercial Amharic cinema, influencing the whole system of Amharic film genres. This chapter investigates how the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination is manifested, both in the narratives and style of more recent Amharic genres and also how they can be understood as distinct and why they are promoted as different from the *yefiker film* or *assikiñ yefiker film*. By looking at these genres, their development, cinematic elements, and contexts of production and reception, a more comprehensive picture of commercial Amharic cinema will be provided. These genres, although less voluminous than the *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker film* have, nevertheless, had an important impact and helped to shape the film industry and the reception of Amharic films in Ethiopia. The analysis of films attributed to these less numerous genres will challenge assumptions of stable definitions of genre and explore the culturally rooted yet fluid nature of film genres and their formulae.

Distinctions between genres are subject to constant debate and (re)negotiation as Amharic cinema proliferates. Indeed, it is important to note that even when commercial cinema in Amharic became viable in the early 2000s, there were a number of films with

differing themes and narratives made, now recognisable as belonging to the *yebeteseb film/family film* (with the example of Helen Tadesse's *የበረዶው ዘመን - Yeberedow Zemen/The Ice Age*, 2002) and what I will refer to as "village" (Stoneman 1996) or rurally set films (with the example of Abreham Tsegaye's *የነፃ ትውልድ - Yenetsa Tiwild/The Free Generation*, 2002). As these films were not commercially successful, however, there was little incentive for producers to emulate their generic motifs in other films. Instead, the early *yefiker film*s – such as *Kezkaza Welafen* (2002) and *Gudifecha* (2002) – displayed key narrative and thematic melodramatic prototypes in how they engaged, particularly with romantic notions of *fiker/love* that characterise this key genre. In turn, as the commercial success of the *yefiker film* gave rise to a film industry it also allowed for the development of a system of Amharic genres to be founded upon an intrinsically Ethiopian melodramatic imagination suffuse with competing concepts of *fiker*. It is this specific instance of melodrama, embedded within the dramatic mode of commercially successful Amharic films, which becomes the catalyst through which genres are fused and emerge in relation to one another.

As the aim of this chapter is to map out the emerging genres of Amharic cinema and to scrutinise their contemporary and social relevance, popularity, relationships with other genres, and their embodiment of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination, I will start by analysing one of the most influential films of 2014, Kidist Yilma's *yefiker film*, *ረቡኒ/Rebuni*.[60] This film won praise from critical commentators and was awarded the Best Feature Film award in the two most prestigious film awards in Ethiopia (from the 9th Ethiopian International Film Festival[61] and the 2015 Gumma Film Awards[62]). I want to explore to what extent it can be considered an innovative film within the *yefiker film* canon, and a key contributor in the development and commercial viability of other emerging genres and cycles with particular reference to its deployment of a tragic dénouement.

Tragic dénouements across certain genres

Rebuni's narrative focuses on the inspirational female protagonist, Gela (also called by her nickname Adey, a type of yellow daisy and also meaning "mother"), played by Ruta

[60] A teacher of moral everyday instruction and traditions.
[61] *Rebuni* won the Audience Choice Award and award for Best Feature Film, along with writer/director Kidist Yilma winning Best Director and Original Screenplay. Lead actress Ruta Mengistaeb was awarded Best Female Actress while Yeabsira Tekilu was given the award in the Best Promising Child category.
[62] Similarly *Rebuni* won the Best Film award (jointly with *Nishan*), Kidist Yilma won Best Original Screenplay and Ruta Mengistaeb won Best Main Actress.

Mengistaeb in her break-out role. We are introduced to Gela as she inherits the land her grandfather uses to grow plants for traditional medicines and as she assumes the position of matriarch in her family. She is both responsible for the land and her family (her grandfather and her young brother who is in school), a burden many daughters in families across Ethiopia bear. However, despite these common female responsibilities, she is afforded relative freedom as she assumes her position as a land-owner. Gela is portrayed as being grounded in the traditions and knowledge of her grandfather's apothecary which has given her a deep understanding of her community and the role people play in maintaining a peaceful and caring society. The tranquillity of Gela's surroundings and community, however, are threatened by businessmen looking to buy up land on the outskirts of the city. Gela is forced to confront this intrusion head-on when the wealthy executive, Leul, decides Gela's land is the perfect site for the planned development of his paint-making factory.

Through scenes which juxtapose the suits, offices, and formal business meetings of Leul and his colleagues with Gela's disregard for formal business etiquette, represented in her playful and teasing mannerisms, her unkempt/relaxed dress and her companionship with her young brother, the world of global business and of customary Ethiopian lifestyles are put into stark opposition. Gela deliberately misleads Leul into thinking that she may be willing to sell her land, and as is custom, she welcomes the businessman and his colleagues into her humble home. After experiencing the cold, unwelcoming and uncaring nature of Leul and his business acumen, Gela takes it upon herself to teach him the meaning of social responsibility with the intention of reconnecting him with his natural and cultural surroundings.

It is in the relationship which blossoms between Gela and Leul, making up the most significant part of the film, that *Rebuni* harnesses the conventions of the *yefiker film*. Leul's marriage breaks down as he spends more time with Gela; the two are seen meeting multiple times as Gela strives to teach Leul about the virtues of her grandfather's communal life with messages from the heart (she responds to his pursuit of buying land by asking him how much he would sell his heart for), but at the same time Leul is portrayed as becoming romantically attracted to her as he buys her a new dress and other treats. Most of these sequences are shot in the rural setting of Gela's home with bright greens and blues, colours reflecting Gela's personality and the life, wisdom and faith she represents as she and Leul come to embody the dialectics of the

Ethiopian melodramatic imagination. Unlike the montages of couples playing and enjoying romantic activities together, more common in the *assikiñ yefiker film*, in *Rebuni* the short montage suggestive of a romantic connection between the couple depicts one scenario - that of crossing over a stream's stepping stones – through slow motion and the editing of shots from multiple angles and distances. The effects of the slow-motion, dissolve cuts and shot-reverse-shot editing suggests a tender connection between the two, stressing the uncertainty between their touch and gaze (see Figure 17 and 18). It is from the beginning of this montage which the still image depicted on the film's main poster is taken and which clearly communicates the film as employing conventions associated with the *yefiker film* (see Figure 19).

From this short montage of slow motion, shot-reverse-shot, exchanged glances and hand-holding much is communicated while the sky overhead remains leaden with dark clouds, a sense of foreboding heralding the final act. It seems, here, that Gela has fallen for Leul – that is until their next meeting when she discovers Leul is married after his wife, Ribka, finds them together in the woods, accusing Gela of being his mistress. Despite Leul's marriage already having broken down due to their inability to conceive, and despite Leul explaining that he and Gela are just friends, Gela becomes ridden with guilt and shame, urging Leul to make things better with his wife only for Gela to return home and discover Ribka slandering her with accusations of adultery outside her family home.

Figure 17. Stills from *Rebuni* in sequential order starting from top left, then bottom left then top right.

Figure 19. Stills from *Rebuni* in sequential order starting from top left going down, continued from Figure 17.

Figure 18. A *Rebuni* poster with its image taken from the setup of Figure 17.

The final meeting between Gela and Leul occurs on the holiday of the transfiguration of Christ, a key festival in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. In this rain-drenched meeting amongst the trees of Gela's rural home, Gela is dressed fully in white for the first time (see Figure 20), indicating her purity and ultimate sacrifice, symbolism heavily entrenched in the Ethiopian Orthodox church and the colour of traditional Ethiopian garments (still commonly worn on feast days). Gela resolves the issue of the land by telling Leul it is not for sale but forgives him for the previous incident and tells him to consider the virtues of nature and urges him to reconcile his quarrel with his wife, despite Gela confiding her love of Leul to her grandfather after Ribka's accusations. Leul brings it upon himself to return to his wife after Gela uncharacteristically asks him to stay a while with her as the rain falls, kissing him on the cheek before he leaves. Her kiss is reciprocated by Leul who kisses Gela on the forehead as they seemingly acknowledge the mutual but non-romantic *fiker* between them, only for Gela to turn back as they depart, telling of her ultimate sacrifice (see Figure 20).

In the next scene, in which Leul returns to Gela's house to enquire about her after a period of absence, the true message of the film and the true meaning behind Gela's actions are revealed as Leul discovers Gela has passed away due to a cancer that has been concealed from Leul and the audience's knowledge throughout the duration of the film. This is made all the more painful and poignant as the discovery of Gela's passing is depicted through a visceral long take in slow motion, underscored by *Rebuni*'s title track praising the virtues of Aday (Gela's nickname) as the camera focuses on the denial, disbelief, bewilderment, shock and inconsolable grief Leul experiences as he sees Gela's body. This is interspersed with flashbacks of scenes showing Gela throwing both the audience and Leul off the scent of her ill-health.

The revelation of Gela's higher intentions, however, is only made manifest by a montage of flashbacks, intercut in the final scene where Leul is seen at Gela's grave in the warm light of the setting sun, reading her final words to him written in a letter. Gela's voice is heard in voiceover reciting the letter and revealing her true intentions and reason for finally relinquishing her land to him, saying: "The land bears fruit if given good seed. So I entrust you to sow the seed in the deep ground". Leul is seen offering his hand to Gela's younger brother and is joined by his (now pregnant) wife who is seen thanking Gela and asking Leul: "Did you hate me after you met her?" Leul

Figure 20. Stills from the final meeting of Gela and Leul in *Rebuni*.

in turn replies, saying: “Actually, it’s after I met her that I learned what love is” (see Figure 21). This final dialogue is then emphasised through the theme song of the film which has been playing intermittently since Leul’s discovery of Gela’s death and which poetically tells of how Gela’s actions teach society to appreciate and care for its good customs, the environment and to care and appreciate one another.

Just as it is Gela who has taught Leul “what love is” this is a lesson not learnt through romance and the successful union of a couple in the face of adversity but with Gela directly referencing the sixteenth century Ethiopian philosophy of Zara Yacob, rooted in the teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, saying: “My life in this world was in the good will of the potter […] Leul, ask the lord for your happiness with your truest heart and He will grant you it. But you have to ask honestly”. This reference clearly situates the film within the schematics of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination emanating from “the rationality of the human heart” as philosophised by Zara Yacob (cf. Teodros Kiros 2005) and symbolising the culmination of Gela’s faith after she is heard referencing and following the teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church throughout the film.

Furthermore, the didacticism of this final sequence is put together through flashbacks and dissolve cuts which are all edited together with a fast tempo. The speed of the cuts may seem unnerving and unsuited to the meditative atmosphere of the film’s conclusion, but this is also characteristic of the melodramatic nature of Amharic films. The dissolve cuts help link and bridge characters, forging new relationships between Leul and Gela’s young brother Abule, and repairing the trust between Leul and his wife. The negative space of one shot is quickly filled and embodied by a character in a reverse shot, emphasising Gela’s message of social cohesion and the importance of loved ones, as they are able to see eye-to-eye for the first time (see Figure 21). As Gela’s message of love, social and environmental responsibility and kindness is heard in voiceover, each dissolve shot seemingly washes away and reconstitutes the elements of the previous frame in an ethereal manner, the blur of the dissolve even mimicking the tears shed at the unexpected death of Gela.

The ethereal manner of this closing sequence is further emphasised by the lighting, as the natural light from the setting sun shines a halo of backlight outlining Leul and Ribka as Leul kisses her on the forehead, reminiscent of the kiss he last gave to Gela (see

Figures 20 and 22). This is enhanced by out-of-focus light shimmering off golden leaves and grass (contrasting with the greens of previous scenes) in the background emanating a sparkling bokeh-effect that adds to the serenity of the sequence (see Figure 21). With the final shot of Leul and Abule silhouetted, hand-in-hand in a long shot reminiscent again of the romance and closure common in the *yefiker film* (see Figure 22).

Figure 21. Stills from *Rebuni*'s closing sequence.

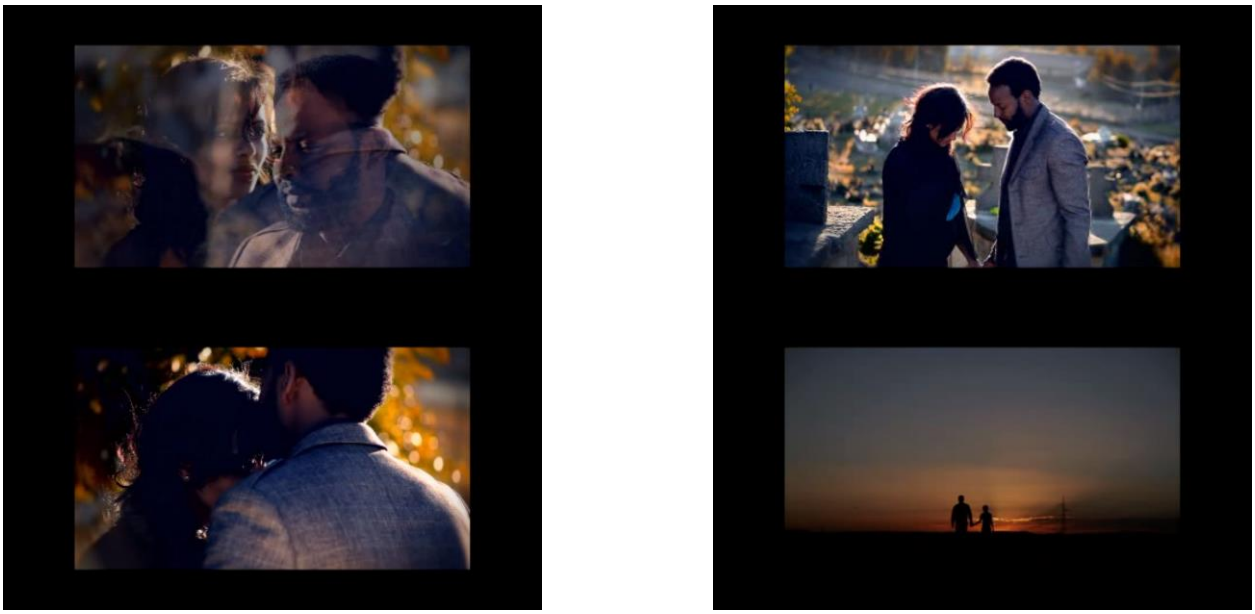


Figure 22. Stills from *Rebuni*'s closing sequence, continued from Figure 21.

The restoration of hope and belief in Gela's final message offers a resolution to *Rebuni* which is typical of the *yefiker film* in its moralisation. However, instead of the romantic union being the vector of social and moral realignment, such as is the convention in the *yefiker film*, *Rebuni*'s dénouement explicitly offers lessons on maintaining cultural roots and customs within contemporary society as the *fiker* that wins out here is family love and patriotic love. The golden colours and use of radiant lighting is representative of the spiritual and moral revelation the characters experience, suggestive of a moment of transfiguration, referencing the feast day that has only recently passed in the film's narrative. The relationship between Leul and Gela, the focus of much of the film, then becomes a narrative device used to entice the audience into familiar romantic territory, only to reject their generic expectations in order to turn their attention to the serious matters of contemporary life and the place of traditional Ethiopian customs and the environment, giving rise to a turn of the *assazañ/tragic* in the *yefiker film*.

This element of tragedy, and in particular the death of the female protagonist, echoes the earlier success of the pioneering *yefiker film*, *Gudifecha* (2002), discussed in the previous chapter. *Rebuni*, then, represents a successful recycling of a convention that had become less common in other *yefiker film*s as elements of *assikiñ/humour* rose to prominence during the intervening years on the back of the success of the *assikiñ yefiker film*. This trend in the *assikiñ yefiker film* may be related to the positivity emanating from the so called 'Ethiopian renaissance' and strong economic performances overseen by the Meles Zenawi administration that had been in power since 1991. After the death

of Meles Zenawi and Abune Paulos (the patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church) during the same period in 2012 there was a national outpouring of grief that was particularly felt in Addis Ababa. *Rebuni* came at a time that reignited the grief many felt at the loss of these preeminent Ethiopian political and spiritual leaders during a period in Ethiopia characterised by political uncertainty and increasing ethnic tensions.

The Absence of Romance and the *የቤተሰብ ፊልም* - "*yebeteseb film/family film*"

The hugely popular *ውሳኔ* - *Wisané/Decision* (2008), is frequently mentioned by film practitioners and cultural commentators in Ethiopia for multiple reasons, and can be considered the first tragic *yebesteseb film/family film*. *Wisané* is often said to be the most commercially successful film in the history of cinema in Ethiopia, renowned for attracting crowds of all ages and genders and not leaving a dry eye in the house (Jedlowski 2015). The film's story follows a family coping with the stress of the mother being diagnosed with cancer. The father is an alcoholic who cannot cope with the pressures on him as the main bread winner and the prospect of losing his wife, and when he discovers his wife's friend intends to break-up the marriage the confrontation costs him his life. The murder of the father causes the mother to make the decision to have her four children adopted by respectable families before she passes, but this can only seemingly be achieved by each of the children going to separate families, breaking their familial bonds. The tragic circumstances that take place break up a family but the final positive act is of one family adopting all the children, which offers a resolution and closure as the guidance of the priest and the Orthodox Church along with divine intervention result in the last child being given a loving home with his siblings.

Wisané also became notorious due to accusations of plagiarism from cultural commentators, critics and other industry personnel, as the film adopts the exact plot of the Indian Hindi film *Tulsi: Mathrudevobhava* (2008) into an Ethiopian scenario (Yidnekachew Shumete, interview, 2016, March 3). This revelation only occurred after the success of the film in cinemas. And when it was discovered that Ethiopian Orthodox Christian motifs and symbols had merely replaced the mixture of religious elements referred to in the Indian film (which makes use of Hindu, Islamic and Christian symbols), the film was considered by many as betraying a key institution that makes up the national (and Ethiopian melodramatic) imagination (Yidnekachew Shumete, interview, 2016, March 3; Behailu Wassie, interview, 2016, March 8; Henok Ayele, interview, 2016, February 11). The third reason for this film's significance is that

although many people felt betrayed by the film, accusing the unofficial remake of hiding its Indian origins, it nevertheless paved the way for films to focus on renderings of *fiker* other than the dominant romantic types and explore socially relevant themes through narratives centred on nuclear families and single parenting, highlighting the potential for more *አሳዛኝ/assazañ/tragic* dénouements and the emergence of the *yebeteseb film/family film*.

As evidenced in my audience interviews, most people regard cinema as a form of *መዝናኛ - meznanya/entertainment*. This suggests there is a preference for enjoyment and relaxation in the cinema that is most commonly associated with the emotional release provided by humour and laughter. But other genres affect different emotions as can be evidenced in the cathartic release of emotion linked to the relief filled moralisations common across the system of Amharic genres. However, combined with the commercial constraints on film production that have resulted in an emphasis on low cost and quick turnaround, the *assikiñ/humorous* film has become more prevalent and, therefore, been the term commonly used to distinguish between more serious and comedic genres. The sheer quantity of *assikiñ* films produced and the perception that audiences are more likely to be looking to laugh rather than to cry (Tewodros Teshome, interview, 2016, February 18; Behailu Wassie, interview, 2016, March 8) has meant that the term *assikiñ/humorous* and not *assazañ/tragic* has become attached to genre labels as an identifier of tone.

The difference between the *yefiker film*, as discussed in the previous chapter, and the *yebeteseb film* is in their narrative strategies and prevalence of certain characters. Importantly the *yebeteseb film* does not focus on narratives of romantic love between unmarried couples. Instead their narratives focus on the breakdowns, pitfalls and tragedy of family life in modern Ethiopia while structuring space in their narrative worlds similar to that of the *yefiker film* by evoking contrasts between the domestic (private) and (public) outside world. Whereas in the *fiker film* couples are constrained by society and family structures and attempt to overcome existing hierarchies, the *yebeteseb film*'s predicaments ensnare children. The strength of family members (young or old) offer a narrative focus in which a resolution is sought to salvage the disintegration (or overcome the absence) of the support structures traditionally provided by an extended family.

Similar narratives and character types are common in other cinematic cultures. In Indian films from the 1950s to 1980s, for example, Ravi Vasudevan explains that "[t]he diegetic world of this cinema is primarily governed by the logic of kinship relations, and its plot driven by family conflict" (2011, 99). In Jonathan Haynes' description of the "family film" in Nollywood, however, romantic love remains prevalent (2016). All three examples, however, seem to have at their core a melodramatic mode of dramatic expression that Vasudevan explains as "displaying the characteristic ensemble of Manicheanism, bipolarity, the privileging of the moral over the psychological, and the deployment of coincidence in plot structures" (2011, 99). Although not explicitly political, however, the *yebeteseb film* is heavily embedded within the current affairs of Ethiopian society and often creates narrative scenarios where child characters are positioned as metaphors for the greater injustices young generations are subject to in contemporary Ethiopia. The mother character, for example can often be read as emulating Mother Ethiopia as she selflessly and tirelessly gives herself for her child - i.e. her people.

Clear nationalist and familial sentiments are close to the surface in the *yebeteseb film ኮሞሮስ - Comoros* (2008), based on the true life events of the Ethiopian Airlines plane crash off the coast of the Comoros islands in 1996. This national tragedy is crystallised in the film through the narrative which follows the lives of husband, Mike (Yigerem Dejené), and wife, Edie (Hana Yohannes), an airline hostess as they come to terms with the loss of their child, Babi (Ididiya Tekaleñ), in the plane crash which Edie survives at the cost of being unable to bear any more children. After miraculously conceiving again, and as Mike rushes to hospital to be at the bedside of his wife, the film's climax is reached through cross-cutting between close-ups of Edie's labour – panting, sweating and screaming while being administered gas and air – and shots from the roadside as Mike's car rushes through the streets of Addis in an attempt to arrive for the birth of his child. Just as it seems Edie has given up through exhaustion, the film once again cuts to Mike as his car screeches and the camera angle is jarred and shaken – signifying a crash and cutting to the lifeless body of Mike slumped over the steering wheel of his car.

This second tragic incident in *Comoros*, like the tragedy in *Wisané*, can be read as an allegory of the internal political and social strife within Ethiopia. *Comoros* starts by framing the narrative within the realms of a loving family (representing the nation) when, at roughly twenty five minutes into the film, the tragic events of the airplane

disaster are depicted in great detail. The five minutes of screen-time devoted to the disaster lacks any dialogue and is underscored by fast tempo thrilling music led by a strong drumbeat and interspersed with staccato synths. The pacing of the film picks up as a quick succession of cuts occur of close-ups of heads, hands and feet, almost dismembering the plane's passengers before the impact itself occurs. By focusing on the hijackers, the sequence cuts between their signalling to each other and further quickens in tempo as the hijackers are seen running to the cockpit and rapidly taking control of the plane causing it to swerve dramatically. The sequence cuts to scared passengers consoling each other and praying, constantly returning to shots of Babi and Edie as they are separated and unable to find each other. A reverse shot back to the cockpit shows that the plane is losing power and the canted angles signifies the plane's uncontrollable descent. As passengers hurriedly put on lifejackets a point-of-view shot from the cockpit is shown depicting the aquamarine coast of the Comoros speeding towards the camera moments before impact. The camera becomes ever shakier as interior shots of passengers praying, Babi's confusion, sweating hijackers and Edie's desperate search for her son then cuts to the actual footage of the plane's impact, spliced into the previously fictionalised action and then proceeding in devastating slow-motion.

The sequence of the plane crash, although fully expected, is shown in such a way, intercutting a computer simulated exterior with the personal loss and horror of protagonists and including actual footage of the crash in slow motion, emphasises the horrific detail of the plane's destruction and loss of life on board flight ET961. The slow motion of the actual footage is then quickly integrated into the fictional world of the film as the shaky camera movements, quick cutting, thrilling music and images of the on-board passengers continues. This sequence ends as Edie is seen swimming out of the wreckage and calling out to her son in desperation. The intensity and unrestricted nature of this sequence and the film's first tragedy overshadows the ensuing domestic heartbreak and breakdown of Edie and Mike's relationship as Mike struggles to come to terms with the death of his son. Finally, however, the struggles the couple go through to salvage their relationship is cruelly undone by another twist of fate in the form of the sudden tragedy of Mike's car crash, intercut with Edie giving birth to their second child and representing the ultimate rupture of the patriarchal family nucleus, leaving Edie, her new-born daughter and her mother-in-law as the surviving members of the family (see Figure 23).

Figure 23. Stills from the closing sequence of *Comoros*.

Comoros clearly links the national tragedy of the plane crash with the personal and private tragedy of the family bringing gender dynamics to the fore as both male family members (the son and father) perish while it is the women who survive, repair their relationships (Edie and her mother-in-law), give birth and are born. This female-centric narrative and dénouement echoes popular initiatives of female empowerment by the Ethiopian government and NGOs during this period and can be seen as an example of how popular Amharic cinema employs an appetite for socially progressive narratives. The film concludes, as expected, on a high moral note as Edie is depicted within a frame bleached by a sepia induced yellow colour tone (a colour seen to represent hope in

Ethiopia, as the yellow meskel/adey flower is synonymous with the Enkutatash Ethiopian New Year celebrations) narrating her story with her young daughter playing in their garden. As her daughter jumps into her arms Edie explains "As promised, I named our daughter Metasebia. 'In Memory' of both my husband and my son, in memory of the love and the anguish. This is my life. I still have a hard time accepting it is true. God bless all those we have lost in unfortunate circumstances. Amen!!!" (See Figure 24). This references the near-ubiquitous fatalist attitudes and belief in the greater power of God in Ethiopia and clearly points to the schematic order of the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination as the film ends with a reaffirmation of hope and faith.

Figure 24. Final frame of *Comoros* continued from Figure 23.

Both *Comoros* and *Wisané* feature two tragic incidents in which two separate family members die in both films, the only real difference of these two early and tragic *yebeteseb film*s being the focus on a poor family in *Wisané*, and a wealthy family in *Comoros*. The Ethiopian melodramatic imagination in *Wisané* proliferates through close-up images of Ethiopian Orthodox symbols and icons both in the private family home and as the family often frequent the Church to pray and as a local priest constantly aids the family throughout the film and is instrumental in securing the children's future, organising them all to be adopted by one family. In *Comoros*, although the whole narrative has as a backdrop the very public national tragedy of the Ethiopian Airlines plane crash, the film is also augmented by Ethiopian Orthodox imagery. This is not only evident in the final prayer of the film but also through the protagonists visiting church prior to the final climax of the film and Christian symbolism evident at their son's funeral, in the graveyard where he is buried and Mike's workplace.

Despite the tragic similarities between these two early *yebeteseb film*s, they also diverge in striking ways. *Wisané* fits the pattern of the more internationally recognisable "family melodrama", such as is common in West Africa (Garritano 2013, Haynes 2016), India (Vasudevan 2011; Nandy 1998) and other film cultures across the world including America (Elsaesser 1972). Set predominantly in the private domestic realm, *Wisané* is closed off from the public where emotions are heightened and intimate relationships between husband, wife and children are exposed at their fullest. This type of *yebeteseb film* is heavily reliant on character development and relationships, with its success depending on the construction of an empathetic relationship between the audience and the main protagonist. To this end, the family in *Wisané* are not wealthy, the wife is not afforded any luxuries and handles her cancer diagnosis with dignity and courage and with the constant support of her faith in God and with constant and palpable assistance from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church itself. Conversely, the very public circumstances of *Comoros* are framed on a national scale. The personalised emotional response and events suffered by the family in *Comoros* has the effect of elevating their private trauma onto the national stage as the local audience would have undoubtedly experienced some level of trauma following the real events. Being framed in this way, *Comoros* offers a wider perspective than that solely of the family, as a representation of the nation's emotional state; however, the film's narrative also manages a critique of socio-political circumstances in Ethiopia through the very public nature of the family's suffering and final prayer: "God bless all those we have lost in unfortunate circumstances. Amen!!" This ending has the effect of turning the film itself into a prayer and implies a similar sense of emotional catharsis as a result.

Both *Wisané*, an Ethiopian remake of an Indian film, and *Comoros*, a film framed by a national tragedy and based on a true Ethiopian story, offer interesting comparisons of how the *yebeteseb film* serves as an allegory of the national story. The rapid succession of incidents such as murder, car crashes, miracle births, life-threatening illness and other traumatic instances are enveloped within the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination through key references to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity in both films as the church acts as a refuge. In this way, the melodramatic imagination in the *yebeteseb film* negotiates between the private sense of fatalism inspired in many Ethiopians by Orthodox Christianity and the public failings of the modern Ethiopian nation. The Ethiopian melodramatic imagination, then, goes beyond the pursuits of romance and romantic love in this society and becomes crucial in helping to situate, explore and

formulate a modern mind-set within Ethiopian audiences heavily grounded in Ethiopian Orthodox Christian teaching.

It is perhaps relevant here to discuss in more detail the abstract version of Ethiopian national identity envisaged by the melodramatic imagination commercial Amharic films engage with. Indeed, the domestic hegemony of Amharic films in Ethiopian cinemas may strike ambivalent tones amongst the diverse ethnolinguistic and religious perspectives of Ethiopian audiences in Addis Ababa and further afield. As highlighted in Chapter 3, commercial Amharic cinema and its Ethiopian-style melodrama does not adhere to an ethnically Amhara worldview but to an abstract nationalist identity that has more in common with the Habesha cultural identity associated with ideas that embrace urban, majoritarian and Orthodox Christian perspectives. The process of abstraction that commercial Amharic cinema enacts through an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination limits the exposure of alternative ethnic, rural, political and other religious identities and if they do appear they are often through stereotype. The commercial Amharic film industry in Addis Ababa emerged in 2002 as the nation was recovering from the 1998-2000 war with Eritrea, a country that had only seceded from Ethiopia in 1993, and as such the abstraction of a modern Ethiopian identity from nostalgic memories of Habesha pride crystallised the position of Amharic and Orthodox Christianity in these national fictions.

The innocence of youth and the role of the child actor

The central role of children in the narratives of films, as also evidenced in *Wisané* and *Comoros*, is the most obvious (but by no means compulsory) marker of a film belonging to the *yebeteseb film* genre. Furthermore, the appearance of specific child actors, such as Ididiya Tekaleñ who plays Babi (the son who dies in the plane crash) in *Comoros* and Abel (the last son to be adopted) in *Wisané* came to represent the very innocence and victimhood of youth in the genre as narratives highlight the plight of children as family structures fail them. More recently, the child actor Eyob Dawit has risen to prominence as a versatile performer both capable of playing the victim but also of delivering skilled comedic performances, he often takes the lead (or key supporting) role and due to his age, romantic elements of narratives are relegated to sub-plots, if evident at all. Instead, it is the *fiker/love* between mother/father, child and siblings that is most commonly the focus of the *yebeteseb film* with child characters usually fundamental in reaching a resolution.

The first *yebeteseb film*s to feature child actors in more prominent roles, however, were more tragic. Ididiya Tekaleñ, who appeared in *Wisané* and *Comoros* plays a central role as the youngest son Dani in ኤልዛቤል - *Elzabel/Jezebel* (2009) with it being common for specific child actors to be markers of continuity within the genre. *Elzabel* is a name strongly associated with what Haynes calls the "Jezebel" (2016) story (a biblical character associated in Christian lore as manipulative and sexually promiscuous) in reference to its appearance in Nigerian films in which female characters are represented in overtly sexist ways. The villainous Sara (Seble Tefere) is similarly painted in *Elzabel*, recently married to the wealthy Leykun, she becomes step-mother to his two sons, Tariku and Dani (who has been diagnosed as suffering from depression after the death of his mother), only to murder Leykun by giving him an overdose of his medication. Assuming the role of the head of the family, Sara mistreats Tariku and the more vulnerable Dani, whilst pampering her (much older) daughter Kiki (Meron Getnet) who is selfish, spoilt, depicted enjoying violent video-games and seen getting drunk at night-clubs with her friends while being uncontrollably envious of Dani. Sara then conspires to kill Leykun's remaining sister, Melat, in order to secure herself as the recipient of Leykun's full 30 million dollar inheritance. She seduces Melat's እሬሾኛ - *echoña/fiancé* and manipulates her own boyfriend (Mesfin, played by Solomon Bogale) into murdering Melat only for Dani to overhear their conspiracy.

After Melat is murdered, Sara suggests Melat's fiancé as a suspect to the police and while Tariku runs away, Sara decides to poison Dani, fearing what he knows. As the house guard tracks down Tariku with the aid of a house maid, they both begin to comprehend Sara's crimes and they decide to report her to the police. The climax of the film develops as Dani is left alone to drink his poisoned Mirinda (a brand of soft drink) while Sara goes out to meet Mesfin. When Sara arrives at Mesfin's house she discovers him in bed with Kiki (her daughter), prompting Kiki to run back home while Sara gets a gun from her car and shoots Mesfin. Kiki returns home before Dani gets a chance to drink his (poisoned) Mirinda. She grabs it from him, drinks the whole bottle and is soon frothing at the mouth and writhing in pain on the floor. Sara returns home to discover her daughter dead and instantly blames Dani who is sole witness to the events. Just as Sara pulls her gun on Dani, Tariku returns to defend his brother and before Sara can fire, the police arrive. Instead of dropping the gun, Sara decides to use the weapon on

herself. Dani is seen symbolically replacing Sara's photo with that of his mother's before the credits roll.

The child characters of Dani and Tariku are central to *Elzabel* as Sara's jealousy and fear of her young and innocent step sons grows throughout the film. Although the audience are privy to Sara's dream of being awarded the billionaire of the year award, the character whose thoughts and dreams are afforded most narrative time are those of Tariku and Dani as we see Tariku's flash-back in which his birth-mother explains why she called him Tariku (translated as "the history") and in a nightmare through which his paranoia of being murdered is horrifically laid bare. Through the narrative focus on the brothers, the strength of Tariku's love for Dani becomes the only unbreakable and undying bond in the film.

The sensational and multiple cases of murder that occur in *Elzabel* are characteristic of an extreme melodrama that bears little resemblance to Addis Ababa reality, where violent crime rates are particularly low compared to other major African cities (Gardner 2017). The stark contrast between wealth and poverty, however, is particularly enlightening and in keeping with an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination. In *Elzabel*, it is wealth that represents danger, jealousy and entrapment. When Tariku escapes the family mansion (that has become his prison) onto the streets it is here that he finds refuge in poverty as he is taken in by a group of street boys/men after he tells them his story. It is the street boys who contact the police who in turn arrive in time to save Dani. Like in *Comoros* the root cause of disaster and evil deeds can be traced back to the privileges and wealth of the families at the centre of the narratives. While in *Comoros* material poverty is only briefly alluded to in a shot contrasting the imminent birth of Edie's new child with that of a mother on the street with her child (Figure 25), in *Elzabel* however, as Tariku finds himself benefitting from the camaraderie of street-life the opulence of their family's mansion symbolically imprisons his brother.

A similar story is told in the successful *yebeteseb film* released in 2011, *ቤተሌሔም - Betelihem*, eponymously named after the child protagonist of the film. The film is Betelihem's account of a year in her life in which her mother and father argue about the father being seduced by one of his friends only for this argument to cause a car accident in which the mother dies. The film's narrative is told from the point-of-view of Betelihem, whose voice is heard narrating at the opening and closing sequences, with

the film's narrative focusing on her experiences and the effects adult actions have on her childhood. Both *Elzabel* and *Betelihem* are set within wealthy households, which in themselves represent hot-beds of immorality.

Figure 25. The only shot in *Comoros* that alludes to material poverty.

In these films, as with the films of Ghana (Garritano 2013) and Nigeria (Larkin 2008; Haynes 2016), material wealth comes with jealousy, greed and selfishness which in turn lead to acts of betrayal, abuse and ultimately death. It is the children who are the survivors of the carnage brought on by the greed of materialism and capitalism which is demonised and portrayed as opposite to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. This is starkly portrayed in an important transition scene in *Elzabel*, painting the ideological juxtaposition of Sara and her sister-in-law through a graphic cut. This cut depicts the sister-in-law, in black clothing (still in mourning after the death of her brother) offering food to a crowd at a church gathering which is juxtaposed with Sara and her friends overly made-up and wearing tight fitting and revealing clothes as they are gathered around a plate loaded with ቁርጥ (*kurt* - raw meat, considered a delicacy), drinking wine and laughing, seemingly celebrating the murder of her husband (see Figure 26). The contrasting sets of images, in such a juxtaposing graphic cut, clearly positions the polarities of good and evil within simple moral and spiritual binaries.

Figure 26. Stills from the sequence in *Elzabel* depicting a Manichean juxtaposition in a graphic cut as food is given at the Church and it is opulently taken by the wealthy.

Following *Elzabel* and *Betelihem* was *ያልታሰበው - Yaltasebew/Unthinkable* (2013), one of the most highly viewed Amharic films on YouTube, which can be seen as a significantly innovative film in the *yebeteseb film* genre as it is one of the first to focus on a materially poor *and* non-nuclear family. The film's opening sequence, intercut with the opening credits, communicates the situation of the child protagonist, Abush (Eyob Dawit), from his perspective. An opening shot of innocent looking Abush eating a biscuit on the roadside of Churchill Avenue (a central road populated with many significant cultural, social and political institutions) is accompanied with his voiceover heard narrating: "I'm Abush, I like biscuits", clearly establishing Abush as the film's central character with the narrative emanating from his perspective and experiences.

Abush's condition quickly becomes apparent as he is wearing rags and covered in dirt, a street-child living with his mother in a tarpaulin ramshackle shelter on the roadside (see Figure 27). Abush is then seen hiding his biscuits as his mother approaches and is instantly chastised for eating without her and physically pushed onto the street to beg on her behalf (Figure 27). Abush is street-wise and manages to attract a lot of charity in

Piassa[63] whilst his voiceover narration continues, explaining his plight and his mother's alcoholism as he is seen buying *areké*[64] for her and contemplating his misfortune instead of playing with other children (Figure 27). After the opening credits, Abush is seen counting his earnings for the day when his money is stolen. As soon as he returns to his mother empty handed, she beats him and tells him to get away from her, leaving Abush alone and without shelter. This opening sequence quickly and effectively establishes the plight of *Yaltasebew*'s protagonist and conveys his material poverty through his costume, his performance and by often depicting Abush from a high angle, making him look ever more diminutive, especially when contrasted with the reverse low angle shots of his mother that emphasise the entrapment and abuse he has suffered at her hands.

Figure 27. Stills from the opening sequence of *Yaltasebew*.

[63] The old commercial district in Addis Ababa.
[64] A clear, traditionally made anise-flavoured alcoholic drink of between 40-65% similar to Arak.

Abush's plight quickly turns more hopeful as he is taken in by two male friends, Wendé (Mikael Million) and Shewa (Kassahun Fiseha) who work on a construction-site and share a house together, after Abush asks them to take him in as they drunkenly stumble out of a hotel bar. *Yaltasebew* uses humour to off-set this socially dubious scenario as the two friends wake up oblivious to their drunken act of adopting Abush for the night, only to discover that he has also wet the bed. In a panic, the two friends, not knowing what to do, decide to leave Abush with Shewa's mother (whom he avoids) as Wendé resolves to take him to the police after they finish work. As the police only offer a single room packed with other children as shelter for Abush, Wendé decides they will take care of him until they find his mother, while unbeknown to them Abush deliberately misleads them, unwilling to return to his mother. The film then develops its comedy as Wendé becomes irked by Shewa's irresponsible actions and lack of care for Abush as the friends argue about looking after Abush and struggle to balance their work and social lives whilst caring for a child. As Abush realises he is to blame for the arguing he decides to go back to living on the street only for Wendé and Shewa to track him down and both agree to take him in again after a distraught Abush explains his reasons for leaving them. Only after Abush falls violently ill and is rushed to hospital, where both his temporary guardians take responsibility for the child, do the makeshift family's fortunes begin to improve. Abush's affability and sharp eye allow him to advise the friends on their relationships and for them to become enlightened and bond around the child's affable nature.

Finally, Abush's birth mother tracks him down after her narrative of begging and searching for Abush has been intercut throughout the film and police take him away just when Wendé and Shewa are celebrating his birthday. After she wins her child back mother and son return to the street but Abush becomes unresponsive despite her buying him biscuits. A montage of flashbacks of Abush, Wendé and Shewa playing and enjoying themselves is then intercut with Abush's mother still drinking, resigned to her failure. She resolves to take him back to Wendé and Shewa but despairs at her addiction while offering up her child to what she believes is a better life. Then, after a fade to black, Abush's voiceover narration can be heard (as in the opening sequence), now he is wearing a school uniform and seen admiring flowers as he says "Now I am happy" and after he is shown greeting Shewa at the construction site, Abush happily notices his mother has also found work on the site (see Figure 28).

Figure 28. Stills from the closing sequence of *Yaltasebew.*

Yaltasebew manages to construct a loving family relationship between its three male protagonists – two best friends and a street boy – in part through the skilled, sensitive yet comedic performances of its three stars, Eyob Dawit, Mikael Million and Kassahun Fiseha. Although being child star Eyob Dawit's breakout role, Mikael Million and Kassahun Fiseha were already well-known, popular and versatile actors. Finding a skilled young actor to play Abush was paramount and in Eyob Dawit, Hermon Hailay (the film's director), explains she was confident that the actors were capable of making a film with such an innovative narrative a success in Ethiopia (interview, 2016, February 17). The poverty Abush experiences, in the film's opening is quickly contrasted with the relative security provided by Wendé and Shewa intercut with the

plight of Abush's mother attempting to track down her son as she begs outside Orthodox churches and receives great charity from attendees and passers-by. The influences of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church are also constantly evident in the behaviour of Wendé and Shewa as their mannerisms and costumes (wearing necklaces of the orthodox cross) clearly denote their faith while, in their house there are two prominent posters, one of Jesus and the other of the Virgin Mary, that are commonplace icons in Ethiopian Orthodox households. It is important that both Wendé and Shewa have their struggles with their romantic pursuits and that they represent hardworking, lower-middle class Addis Ababa residents. They do not represent wealth but instead a more nuanced image of charity and salvation for Abush and it is his mother who is seen as the abusive parent who fuels her addiction through her son's begging. The film's narrative goes through peaks and troughs along with the precarious nature of Abush's existence. Nonetheless, the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination is balanced by the performance of Eyob Dawit as he portrays Abush not just as a victim of an abusive parent but as a resourceful, kind and humble child who brings out the best in Wendé and Shewa.

Eyob Dawit's performance as Abush is what director Hermon says was a key reason the film was such a success (interview, 2016, February 17) with the child actor quickly becoming a box-office draw with his comedic abilities and coy charm. Overwhelmingly, due to the appearances of Eyob Dawit, the *yebeteseb film* has been transformed from films depicting the tragic breakdown of modern and wealthy (nuclear) families to the hopeful experiences of poor and already broken homes with the term *assikiñ* or *comedy* being attached to the *yebeteseb film* term to indicate its comedic intentions. In a similar way to how *assikiñ* is used to differentiate between the *yefiker film* and *assikiñ yefiker film*, so too, a *yebeteseb film* without any markers of humour in its marketing (comedic actors, poster colours and design or even the explicit mentioning of the term "*assikiñ*") is likely to feature violence, death and trauma. On the other hand, an *assikiñ yebeteseb film/humorous family film*, clearly promoted as such, denotes the relative safety of its protagonists in a melodramatic world that lacks shocking violence and trauma; inviting audiences to relax and be entertained with a 'feel-good' conclusion.

In the successful 2015 film *የ'ኣራዳ ልጅ - Ye'Arada Lij/Cocky Child*, Eyob Dawit plays a very similar character to that in *Yaltasebew*, with the film's popularity garnering the

Best Film award, as voted on by the public through SMS, at the 2016 Gumma Film Awards. Just as with *Yaltasebew*, Eyob is also heard in the opening of *Ye'Arada Lij* in a voice-over narration explaining his circumstances (from his own birth to explaining he has no choice but to be a beggar and a thief); this time, however, his character, Teleku ("the great/big") is raised solely by his father, ironically called Tinish ("the small", played by Alemseged Tesfaye), who is destitute but caring and making a living by recycling plastics found in rubbish heaps.

Ye'Arada Lij also has some of the buddy comedy narrative elements of *Yaltasebew*, particularly brought out in the son and father relationship. *Ye'Arada Lij*, however, employs the dialectics of the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination to a higher degree through its rags to riches story as the father and son (Tinish and Teleku), after falling ill, get cared for by a loving lady who then falls in love with both the child and father. This romantic narrative is set within the wider perspective offered by the child character Teleku, who is the centre of affection and the cause for hope and humour. In keeping with melodramatic tendencies, Teleku's birth-mother soon tracks down the family, her presence disrupting the recently formed family nucleus and forcing Teleku's step-mother to attempt to take her own life because of her shame. Fortunately, she fails as Teleku's birth-mother is seen pushing the wheelchair-bound, but healthy looking step-mother in the final scene. This shows the whole family – birth-mother, step-mother, father and son – reaching an amicable resolution after Teleku thanks his birth-mother with the remark "Tinish's old wife, we thank you so much, may He replace what you have lost". This recognition by the young boy portrays great emotional intelligence and although he refuses to call his birth-mother "mother" due to her absence, he understands the great feeling of loss she has experienced and calls upon God to watch over her.

Although romance is an important narrative strand in *Ye'Arada Lij*, the romantic union of Tinish and his new wife is not resolved in the film's dénouement. Instead the needs of family support and love for the younger generation is prioritised. The emotional power of Eyob Dawit's performance as he represents Teleku, is far greater than romantic empathy or desire felt towards the older generation (represented by Tinish) who are to blame for their personal failures but are also representative of society's wider failings.

The rise of Eyob Dawit's star power has coincided with the rise of the *yebeteseb film* with many other child actors also becoming more prominent, such as Yeabsira Tekilu and Selamawit Legesse. Their importance to the industry is recognised each year in the awarding of the "most promising newcomer" at the Gumma Film Awards, given to Eyob Dawit in its first edition in 2014. The particular prominence of Eyob Dawit in the *yebeteseb film* also added more light-hearted and comedic elements to a genre which, in its early formation in films such as *Wisané*, *Comoros*, *Elzabel* and *Betelihem*, often relied on tragic circumstances in order to communicate social messages. The popularity of this one child actor should not be underestimated; the very fact that he is a capable and versatile actor, able to make audiences laugh and cry and not ignoring the very fact that he is a child, allows for *yebeteseb film* narratives to form around his presence in a film. Audience expectations of Eyob's performance are tempered by the conventions of the *yebeteseb film*, which has also developed and evolved to facilitate such accomplished acting from a child in which the child's perspective of the world dictates the story. A recognition of Eyob Dawit's impressive filmography, in which he has appeared in a leading/supporting role in no less than 16 successful films in five years,[65] brings to the fore how his rise and the rise of the more humorous *yebeteseb film* have mutually coincided since 2013.

Comedy and the Infiltration of Humour into the System of Amharic Film Genres

Since the emergence of the *assikiñ yefiker film* in 2007, humour has appeared more frequently in multiple genres, as evidenced in the discussions of the more recent iteration of the *yebeteseb film*, particularly those that feature Eyob Dawit. The comedic mode often denoted by the genre prefix *assikiñ*, is used as a marker by producers, promoters and exhibitors to harness an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination while offering a comedic safety-net. The humour of these films, therefore, often acts as comic relief to momentarily distract audiences with bouts of laughter in order to add emphasis and depth to the impact of the movie's social, moral or ideological message. Where

[65] Eyob Dawit's filmography includes: *Yaltasebew* (2013); *ሳቅልኝ - Sakilign/Laugh For Me* (2016); *Ye'Arada Lij* (2015); *ይመቸሽ የአራዳ ልጅ 2 - Yimechesh: Ye'arada Lij 2/May You Be Comfortable: Cocky Child 2* (2016); *ያበደች የአራዳ ልጅ 3 - Yabedech: Ye'arada Lij 3/She is Crazy: Cocky Child 3* (2017); *ሞኙ የአራዳ ልጅ 4 - Moñu: Ye'arada Lij 4/The Fool: Cocky Child 4* (2018); *ብላቴና - Biletena/The Young Man* (2014); *ሀ እና ለ - Ha Enna Le/Ha and Le* (2016); *ደስ ሲል - Des Sil/When Happy* (2017); *አፄ ማንዴላ - Etse Mandela/Emperor Mandela* (2017); *አንፋታም - Anfatam/Inseparable* (2018); *እስክትመጪ ልበድ - Eskitmechi Libed/Let me be Crazy until you Return* (2015); *ሔሮል - Herol* (2016); *ጊዜ ቤት - Gize Bet/House of Time* (2016); *ሔራን - Heran* (2015); *የልጅ ሃብታም - Yelij Habtam/Rich Kid* (2016).

comedy is used in this way and the narrative lacks primary romantic elements, then the film is usually referred to as simply *comedy*, *assikiñ film/humorous film* or even *dramatic comedy* (or a variant of combining aspects of drama and comedy).

It is common for the most successful Amharic comedy films to use cultural and social oppositions in order to create their comedy. The gender role reversal narrative, for example is used in the comedy, *መፈንቅለ ሴቶች - Mefenkil Setoch/Revolt against Women* (2011). But instead of attempting to deliver a serious social message common in the didacticism of film denouements in most Amharic genres, this film revels in the comedic scenario played out throughout its narrative of men rebelling against a female-only dictatorial regime. This type of comedy, using stark oppositions and exaggerated scenarios to make fun of typical Ethiopian behaviours, is common in Amharic comedy films as they are more restrained as purveyors of social change, and remain more content with inspiring humour through sociocultural commentary (see Jedlowski and Thomas 2016). The comedy in these films espouses the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination in the way they highlight specific contrasts and with endings that integrate and restore opposing sides within the realms of sociocultural accepted norms.

Comic characters and moments of comic relief have become an increasingly common feature across all Amharic genres. It is how, and to what extent a comedic mode is embedded and sustained in any film that designates whether a film can be classed as *assikiñ/comedy*. A film such as *Rebuni* features comedic scenarios and Gela's younger brother often inspires laughter in his overprotective actions towards his sister, but the film's key style and structure is that of the *yefiker film*. Similarly, Behailu Wassie's *ዩቶፒያ - Utopia* (2015) features Mesfin Haileyesus in a characteristically comic supporting role as an English teacher called Dejené who lacks any proficiency in the language and who inspires laughter in every scene in which he appears. Dejené, however, later becomes a key character who epitomises the absurdity of relegating Amharic and other indigenous Ethiopian languages throughout the educational system in Ethiopia in exchange for English. The result of using English in the classroom seems to have caused selective mutism in one of the students, Abush (Mikael Shimelis), who is only cured by the non-conformist, Amharic and Ethiopianist inspired teaching of Cambridge educated Zerihun (Demoz Goshmé). Despite the key comedy inspired by the appearances of Dejené, the character plays a supporting role to that of the more serious messages communicated by Zerihun.

Unlike the term *dramatic comedy* used to describe *ነፃ ትግል - Netsa Tigil/Wrestle* (2012) (another gender role reversal narrative), *Utopia* was described, for example in Alem Cinema, purely as *drama* although it had elements consistent with both the *yefiker film* (the narrative strand that sees Zerihun fall in love with Abush's mother), the *yebeteseb film* (the key role played by the child character Abush) and comedy. The use of the English term *drama* as a genre in Amharic cinema, however, causes more ambiguity than clarity as the term is more commonly deployed in relation to television serials. The film perhaps can be noted as an example of how the different generic elements of three key genres discussed so far can all be integrated in one film, therefore resulting in a lack of clear generic identity while still heavily influenced by the schematic of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination.

Violence and Order in the *ልብ አንጠልጣይ ፊልም* - "*lib anteltay film/suspense film*"

The Amharic term *lib anteltay/suspense* almost always acts as a defining generic term for films that utilise formal and narrative elements that are closely associated with the thriller genre, highlighting the emotional shock factor the film intends to provoke in its audiences. Like the terms *assikiñ* or *comedy* used to indicate emotional expectations associated with humour, as they prefix a romantic *yefiker film* or family/child centred *yebeteseb film*; the term *lib anteltay/suspense* works in a similar way. Whereas comedy is commonly cited by film practitioners as easy to make, the *lib anteltay film* has developed into a recognisable genre in its own right because suspense is considered aesthetically and technically more sophisticated and specific to the medium of film (Yidnekachew Shumete, interview, 2016, March 3). The *lib anteltay film* like the *assikiñ yefiker film/romantic comedy* emerged from the *yefiker film* with early iterations maintaining strong romantic narratives and links to the older genre in the use of the term *lib anteltay yefiker film/suspenseful love film*. Yidnekachew Shumete's 2007 film *ሰርየት - Siryet/Absolution* is highly regarded in this genre, winning its director many plaudits in Ethiopia and even the recognition of world renowned Burkinabe director Gaston Kaboré along with an invitation to study at his film school, Institut Imagine, in Ouagadougou (Yidnekachew Shumete, interview, 2016, March 3). Despite emerging not long after the establishment of the commercial Amharic film industry, evidenced for example with the release of Serawit Fikré's *ሰማያዊ ፈረስ - Semayawi Feres/Blue Horse* (2005), the genre demands higher production values and more technical skills than other genres to maintain the desired suspenseful effects associated with it. The necessity of

creating a continuous atmosphere of threat and suspense is paramount, both in the plotting and aesthetic choices of these films with sensational events of violence and revenge providing the key narrative thrust.

The formal qualities of these films are more distinct from other genres, for example low-key and chiaroscuro lighting are prominent tools in these films to accentuate shadows in a menacing way, or staccato sound designs that heighten audience expectation of imminent threat. These features, also common in thrillers throughout the world, make this genre more easily distinguishable and will be discussed in more detail below. The fictional worlds of the Amharic *lib anteltay film*, however, are deeply embedded within the fantasies of an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination where emotional acts of anger, revenge, lust or jealousy drive characters to extreme acts instead of the more psychological issues associated with Hollywood thrillers. Furthermore, the *lib anteltay film* always concludes by resolving any residual threat through the intervention of police and/or fate to produce moralistic resolutions to issues and salvation for the virtuous and repentant.

The formal accomplishments of the *lib anteltay film* genre are numerous in the context of Amharic cinema with obvious influences from Hollywood thrillers and film noir, appropriated through the local melodramatic imagination. Two of the most successful and well known movies associated with the *lib anteltay film* genre are *ሔርሜላ - Hermela* (2005) and the aforementioned *Siryet* (2007), both recipients of the Best Feature Film award at the Ethiopian International Film Festival in their respective years. Both films follow the stories of deranged stalkers, determined not to let anything get in the way of them achieving their aims. In Hermela, the innocent title character of the film is oppressively stalked day and night with her and her family suffering severely. *Siryet*, however, follows the lives of two brothers, Mesfin and Nati, as they investigate a mysterious man who monitors their house each night, only for them to be caught in a web of peculiarly linked murders.

Hermela, and other *lib anteltay film*s made in Ethiopia, are heavily influenced stylistically by the globally intelligible film noir and thriller genres harnessing aspects of the mise-en-scène, such as colour, lighting, performance and costume/makeup along with disorienting camera angles, obscure shot scales and editing patterns that mirror the pace and mystery of suspense. A form of suspense is often achieved by juxtaposing

slower paced sequences, which may include longer takes or slow-motion shots, with faster paced chase sequences. In *Hermela*, for example, the intentions of Hermela's unknown stalker, (Kassahun) are heightened by scenes occurring at night and by characterising the silent stalker as with film-noir tropes such as depicting him smoking a cigarette or casting window pane shadows (reminiscent of venetian blind shadows) on the wall of his room (see Figure 29). The identity of the character is further obscured by fractured extreme close-ups of different body parts or he is depicted with his back to the camera and often lit by a single top/key light with no filler, casting the character half in shadow, particularly evident when he cold calls Hermela early in the film (see Figure 29). Other noticeable aspects of the character's identity are his costume; his long black trench-coat, dark sunglasses and ring in the shape of the Amharic fidel "ሐ", the first fidel of Hermela's name, signifying his obsession with her (see Figure 29, second frame).

Figure 29. Stills from the opening of *Hermela*.

In an early scene depicting Hermela being stalked, Kassahun's movements almost dictate the film's temporality. After Kassahun vacates the frame, time is momentarily still as the shot lingers a few seconds, depicting the empty street (see Figure 30, top left). A private taxi then arrives, perfectly framed in the centre of the shot where Kassahun had been standing previously, the staged choreography of the shot arousing our suspicions. Hermela emerges from the taxi and walks off into the background darkness of the low-key lit scene while the taxi drives off, out of shot. Kassahun's dramatically elongated shadow then suddenly appears in pursuit of Hermela in film noir style and accompanied by a staccato in the film's music, breaking the natural sound effects of the sequence and alerting the audience to Kassahun's sinister intentions (see Figure 30, bottom left). After this long take, the quickening pace of music, editing and action all ratchet the suspense as a close-up of Hermela's legs steadily walking is followed by a graphic-cut showing the larger strides of Kassahun in pursuit (see Figure 30, top right). The intensity of the music and cutting from character to character repeats, then as Hermela turns, suspecting someone is following her, the reverse shot of the empty street is shown. Adding to this opening ambiguity, the shot then lingers after Hermela has left the frame; this pause confirms the emptiness of the street and adds to the mystery of Kassahun, building the audience's sense of anticipation and suspense as Hermela arrives at her house only to fumble her keys, entering just as a figure approaches from the smoke (see Figure 30, bottom right).

The film noir aesthetics of *Hermela* are enhanced by the film's cinematography as can be noted in the close ups of body parts, such as feet, faces and hands. Furthermore there are numerous angled shots deployed throughout the film such as the use of a low-angled canted shot depicting Kassahun putting on his trench coat in the film's opening, attaching an aura of omnipresence to the character as his whole figure engulfs the frame, with the extreme high-angle shot of Kassahun at his desk as he sketches Hermela having a similar effect and further obscures his identity.

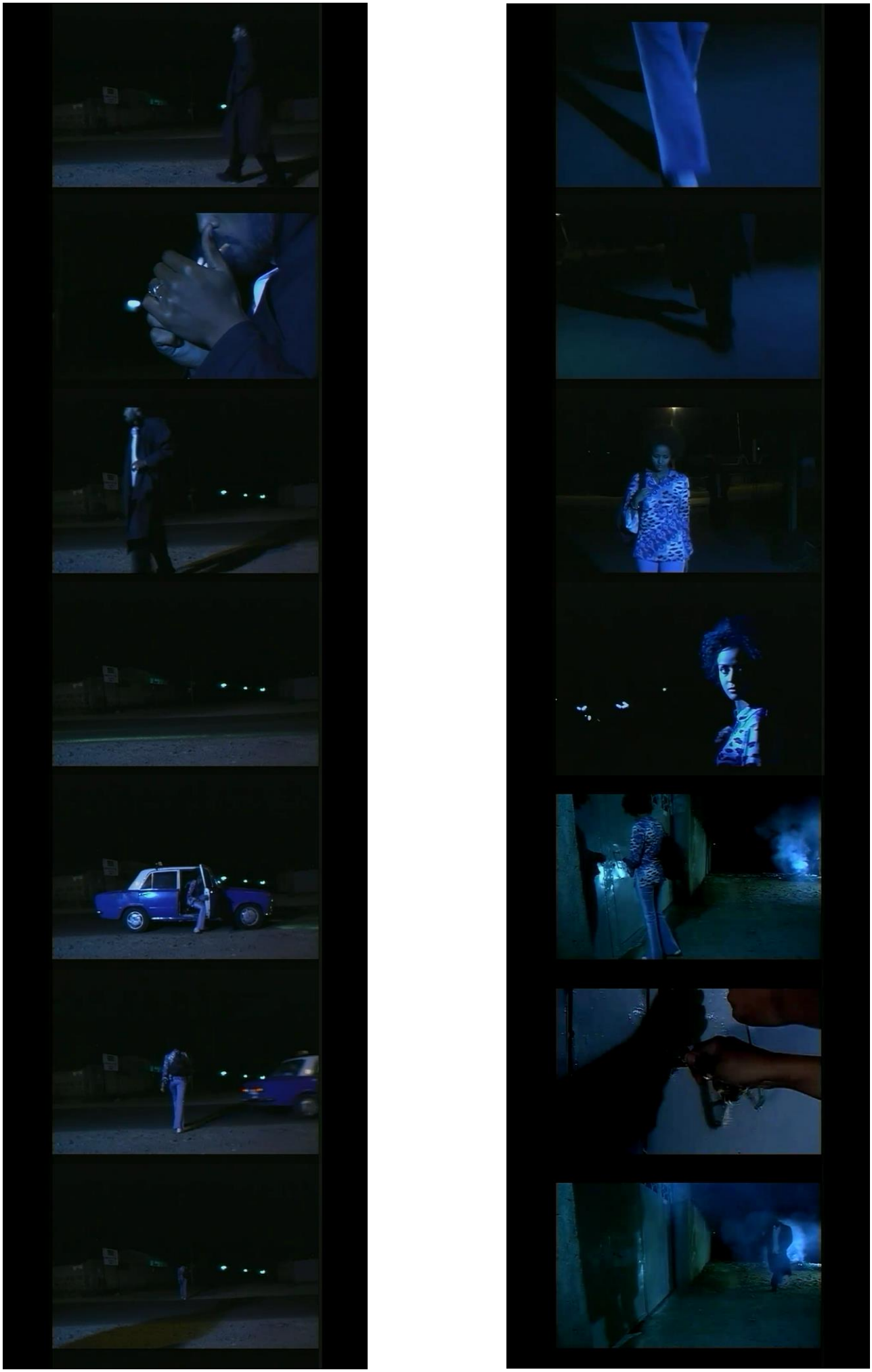


Figure 30. Stills from stalking sequence in *Hermela*.

While *Hermela*'s opening is clearly stylistically influenced by film noir aesthetics, the narrative is based on true events that occurred in Addis Ababa and the structure is fairly linear as the stalking and crimes committed by Kassahun intensify before the police finally have enough evidence to act. *Siryet*, on the other hand, borrows more noticeably from the narrative structures of film noir and thrillers by obscuring the murdering motives of the antagonist, Gaga. Before committing each murder, the muted, one-eyed Gaga forces his victims to read his final message, asking "ረሳሽኝ/ረሳኸኝ" - *resashiñ/resaheñ/Did you forget me* (see Figure 31, left). This complicates the plot as the audience is left guessing the logic behind the murders and relationships between the characters. Only through a flashback, during the lead up to the climax of the film, does Gaga's murderous logic become clear. The flashback shows Gaga being tortured (see Figure 31, right) by (what appear to be) Derg officials, therefore revealing the relationship between Gaga and his victims, as the people he has recently murdered are now seen to be his tormentors. The despairing Gaga is forced to watch the officials kill his daughter in a botched threat to make him speak and as Gaga mournfully vows vengeance, he is silenced by his captors as they cut out his tongue.

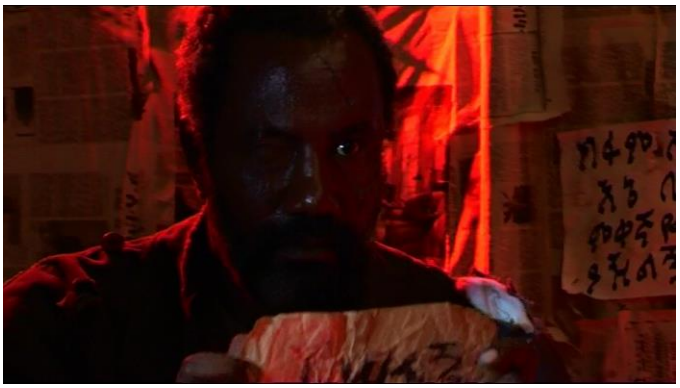



Figure 31. Stills of Gaga from *Siryet*. The left still is prior to his first murder. The right still is during a flashback of him being tortured.

The flashback here introduces the moral ambiguity associated with film noir, making the audience feel sympathetic towards a brutal murderer who continues to carry out his last act of vengeance. Gaga's scarred face and emotionally absent cold expression, for example in the moment before he murders his first victim, is juxtaposed by the distress etched across his unscarred face when the flashback provides the motive for Gaga's murderous acts (see Figure 31). With Gaga's accidental death in the penultimate scene of the film, along with the murders of all those complicit in his torture, *Siryet* reaches an equilibrium and peace in its closing. The final scene shows the older brother, Mesfin

and his fiancée in a lush green park enjoying a romantic embrace, free from the darkness of the previous scenes and murders committed mostly during the night. While the deaths of Gaga and the ex-torturers absolve their whole generation's complicity in the atrocities committed under the Derg, the concluding sequence in *Siryet* urges Ethiopia's younger generation to strive for compassion and happiness. The colour palette (light green and blue) of this sequence is notably different from the red back-lighting and strong use of shadows in the rest of the film with the colour green, in particular, symbolising the coming harvest season in Ethiopia and reminiscent of the lush atmosphere of many *yefiker film* such as *Rebuni*, thus offering a sense of expectation for the country's future led by its younger generations (see Figure 32).

Figure 32. Still from the closing sequence of *Siryet*.

The highly emotive tones and moral outcome of the *lib anteltay film*, unlike the more mysterious and psychological dénouements associated with American and European thrillers, particularly those of Alfred Hitchcock, is normally positive and didactic. *Hermela* (based on a true story) ends in the successful arrest and sentencing of Kassahun (Hermela's stalker), which ultimately leads to his death after he attempts to escape custody. Hermela's voice is heard over the final shot of the film, explaining in her own words that nothing bad can come as a result of true love, echoing the common Amharic saying "*ፍቅር ይሸነፋል*" (*fiker yishenefal* – "love wins in the end") similarly echoed in the loving images of Mesfin and his fiancée at the end of *Siryet*. The

moralising intent of *Hermela* is further made apparent as the film's dedication reads, "to those who fight in the name of justice, truth and fairness". Hermela's concluding remarks speak of the pain she and Ethiopian communities have gone through in recent times, urging a similar message to *Siryet*, stressing the social responsibilities people are expected to show each other according to Ethiopian custom and as set out in law. Both of these conclusions feed off the didactic tendencies inherent in the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination with both stories heavily embedded in Ethiopian reality (the true story on which *Hermela* was based and the historical overtones of *Siryet* grounded in past atrocities).

In the *lib anteltay film* families who experience violence are usually wealthy, or at least living comfortably, when malign forces interfere in their lives, as is the case in both *Hermela* and *Siryet*. Films in this genre highlight corrupt practices and failures of justice, often with violent consequences and romantic subplots. Although gun crime is relatively non-existent in Addis Ababa, guns saturate these films often in a manner reminiscent of American action movies such as in the opening of *የሞሪየም ምድር - Yemoriyam Midir/The Land of Moriah* (2008) (see Figure 33), in the bank robbery in *ቤርሙዳ - Bermuda* (2006), or in the attempted murder of the protagonist Abel (Girum Ermias) in *ፅኑ ቃል - Tsinu Kal/The Binding Word* (2014) by the sadistic and manipulative stalker of his fiancée Beza (Maheder Asefa). The more prevalent criminal networks of people traffickers in Ethiopia and the plight of economic migrants seeking a better life abroad have led to the most recent cycle in the *lib anteltay film*. These films highlight the sweat, blood and tears of crossing desserts and character relationships between fellow migrants (often resulting in romantic attachments) and their suffering and inhumane treatment at the hands of both foreign and Ethiopian traffickers.

Like *Siryet*, another common narrative of the *lib anteltay film* is to have the violent backdrop of Ethiopia's recent past bear on films' narratives such as is the case with *ቀይ ስህተት - Kay Sihtet/Red Mistake* (2006), *የራስ አሽከር - Yeras Ashkir/Personal Servant* (2013), *79 (ሠባ ዘጠኝ) - 79 (Seba Zetegn)/79 (Seventy Nine)* (2016) and *የነገን አልወልድም - Yenegen Alweldim/I Will Not Be Born Tomorrow* (2016), three films set in the Derg era. While *ታዛ - Taza/Taza (Eave)* (2017), also set in the Derg era, is a *yefiker film*, focusing on the romance between its protagonists, the violence of the Derg is not explicitly depicted unlike in these other films which use violence in a dramatic way in tune with the *lib anteltay film*. There is then *የእግር እጣ - Yeger Ita/The Foot's Lot* (2010) that traces

migration attempts and fleeing political persecution under the Derg regime, so combining both the violence of the Derg and the threats of human trafficking in its narrative.

Figure 33. Still from the opening of *Yemoriyam Midir*.

Other important films in the *lib anteltay film*, like the cycle of migration films, highlight corrupt forces (either business or state actors) that pose threats to the Ethiopian nation and people. In the early *Semayawi Feres* (2005), the engineer protagonist, Iskinder (Serawit Fikré) and his loved ones are tracked down, threatened and tortured after his research outlines how the Abay (Blue Nile) can be harnessed to help poor farmers in the region. In *ሒሮሺማ - Hiroshima* (2011) and *ዲፕሎማት - Diplomat* (2012) the threats are national in scale. While *Hiroshima*'s protagonist Merid (Serawit Fikré), a pilot, has been manipulated by his fiancée's wealthy father to smuggle nuclear waste to be dumped in Ethiopia, in *Diplomat* a bomb is brought into Ethiopia by an international fugitive who is harboured by the Egyptian Embassy in Addis Ababa. As the plot develops, it appears Egyptian and American secret operatives jointly plan to use the bomb to assassinate the Sudanese president visiting Ethiopia and it is the task of the Ethiopian security forces, starring Mahelet Shumete as the female protagonist to foil the plot.

Female heroines feature prominently in the *lib anteltay film*. As well as *Diplomat* and *Yemoriyam Midir*, *ወርቅ በወርቅ - Werk Bewerk/Gold By Gold* (2012) centres on a female protagonist, Dinknesh (Lucy), a champion long distance runner who overcomes being

poisoned by a retired Ethiopian athlete in cahoots with Lucy's foreign rival to win gold at the Olympics. Lucy clearly represents the pride of Ethiopia with her name derived from the name of the 3.2 million-year-old fossilised hominin skeleton found in 1974 in Ethiopia. Instead of bringing back a gold medal, in *የጥቁር ፈርጥ - Yetikur Fert/The Black Jewel* (2015), Aziza Ahmed (sometimes credited as Aziza Mohamed) plays the field agent tracking down a stolen antique cross from Lalibela. Films that use martial arts in Ethiopia are called '*action*' and have a much lower production value than the average *lib anteltay film*. Nonetheless the female protagonist in the *akshin/action (Kung Fu)* film *ሴት - Set/Woman* (2011), played by Miskia Farta, carries the same mantle and symbolism of other strong female characters in the *lib anteltay film* who represent the strength of 'Mother Ethiopia' as they defeat (predominantly) outside forces who plunder her history, sabotage her efforts for glory or take advantage of her.

The *akshin/action Kung Fu* genre in Ethiopia is sponsored mainly by the popular taekwondo clubs around Addis Ababa as they use films to exhibit the talents of their members who choreograph and act-out fight sequences. The genre is also predominantly enjoyed by men and features male protagonists, with *Set* (2011) the only example of a film from this genre having a female protagonist The *action* genre, however, includes examples of the truly hybrid nature of Amharic film genres already evidenced by the other amalgamations of the *lib anteltay film*, such as the limited number of *lib anteltay saynsawi libweled film/suspense science fiction film* (one such example the 2012 film *የሲኦል ሙሽሮች - Yesiol Mushiroch/Hell's Bride and Groom*) or the more frequent *lib anteltay assikiñ film/suspense comedy film* (such as the 2013 films *ሄሎ ኢትዮጵያ - Hello Ethiopia* or *ሰበበኛ - Sebebeña/The Provoker*). For, even though the term *lib anteltay film* has become a broad genre in its own right in Ethiopia, the term can be coupled with practically every other major genre term there is such as *fiker*, *assikiñ* (or *comedy*) and even *yebeteseb*.

The Curious Case of the *lib anteltay yebeteseb film/suspenseful family film*

In 2013 a film unlike any other in the commercial Amharic film industry was released. *ገዳይ ሲያረፋፍድ - Geday Siyarefafid/When the Killer was Late* (2013) was shot entirely in the surroundings of a small village south of Gondar and to the east of lake Tana with a cast of actors and amateur performers gathered from a local theatre in Bahir Dar (apart from Meaza Takela who only plays a minor role). There are no star actors to associate

with any genre and the film was also the directorial debut of Naod Lemma, a relative unknown in the industry at the time (Naod Lemma, interview, 2016, March 5).

In Alem Cinema's listings, *Geday Siyarefafid*'s genre is described as *lib anteltay yebeteseb film/suspenseful family film*, the first time I have observed this combination of genre terms used to identify a film. Furthermore, the fact that the film was not shot in Addis Ababa (or any other recognisable urban Ethiopian location), had no recognisable actors and was directed and produced by newcomers to the industry (in those respective roles), it may seem somewhat surprising how quickly the film garnered critical acclaim amongst film professionals and secured relatively good box office receipts and screening schedules throughout Addis Ababa (Naod Lemma, interview, 2016, March 5).

Geday Siyarefafid tells the story of the feared *shifta/bandit* Sindeku (Getnet Adane, see Figure 34) and husband (Birara) and wife (Widé) (Melaku Tadesse and Meskerem Nega Bogale) farmers who struggle with conceiving a child. Birara then has an affair with the mistress of Sindeku, only for the *shifta* to learn of this slight against him, leading to his pursuit of the farmer who, in turn, is dramatically saved by his slighted wife and best friend.

Describing *Geday Siyarefafid* with the term *yebeteseb* can be viewed as somewhat arbitrary as children do not feature in the film contrary to what is usually expected in the *yebeteseb film*. The film certainly has the action, suspense and shoot-outs (Figure 34) that have become associated with the *lib anteltay film* but its purely rural setting and the fact that it was produced outside the more established order of the commercial Amharic film industry, raises questions as to how suitable or useful are any, if not all, categories of Amharic film genres. If *Geday Siyarefafid* is read from a purely textual perspective then it could well be viewed as, what Rod Stoneman termed, a "village film" (1996, 178). In this sense, and with some elements (such as characters and setting) comparable to the West African film *Tilaï* (1990), the film tells the perennial outlaw story, set in a rural village relatively untouched by modern ways.

Figure 34. Extreme close-ups of Sindeku, the *shifta/bandit* character in *Geday Siyarefafid*.

Like *Geday Siyarefafid* in 2013, Michel Papatakis' *ጉማ - Gumma/Blood Money* (1974) was hailed as an artistic and cultural success in Ethiopia, approved by Emperor Haile Selassie who was in attendance at its premiere at the National Theatre shortly before his forced abdication. More in common with the "village films" described by Stoneman (1996) in the African context, *Gumma* had French financial backing and used French crew, thus, emerging from a different production context than *Geday Siyarefafid*. Similar to Stoneman's critique that the "village film" genre is "not based on productive interaction with its own social context [and so] is displaced, adrift" (1996, 179), is the idea *Gumma* was made as a cultural export to be screened in international film festivals. Despite its positive reception by Ethiopian audiences, however, the international distribution was restricted as *Gumma* failed to return a profit, and as the producers could not make good on investments and loans, the film's original print was seized by the bank when the producer attempted to take the film abroad (Debebe Eshetu, interview, 2016, March 10).

Gumma was shot on the outskirts of Dessie in Wello, famed as a place of social integration and cohesion where Ethiopian Orthodox, Muslim, Amhara and Oromo people have lived side-by-side for centuries. Apart from *Geday Siyarefafid*'s rural setting and financial risks, other features common to what may be deemed an Ethiopian version of the "village film" genre can be seen to originate with *Gumma*. These include the use of mainly non-professional actors from the area surrounding where the film shoot was located, and for the film crew and cast to live on-location (on set) in the villages for the entirety of the shoot, not just for ease of access but, crucially, during pre-production in order to gain the trust and permission from the locals and village elders. Therefore, unlike the typically short production and sometimes non-existent, pre-production schedules of many contemporary popular Amharic films (due to the commercial pressures of the industry), the production and pre-production time frames of "village films" are necessarily long, with these production circumstances already making them a riskier financial proposition.

Pre-production and production of *Yenetsa Tiwild/The Free Generation* (2002), one of the first films to be released in cinema in the era of the commercial Amharic film industry, reflects that of *Gumma* made nearly thirty years previously and also that of *Geday Siyarefafid*, produced ten years afterwards. Although *Gumma* and *Yenetsa Tiwild*

were amongst the first films to be granted cinema exhibition in their respective eras of Ethiopian film history, their financiers failed to recuperate the costs of film production.

There was, however, a period in the 1990s which bore witness to several films that conform in part to Stoneman's concept of "village films". These feature length videos made and distributed straight to VHS were mostly directed and written by Bemnabu Kebede. Unlike Stoneman's definition of the "village film" as "generally and imprecisely located in the precolonial epoch" (1996, 178), these films directly addressed harmful traditional practices and superstitions with conclusions that commend modern systems of justice. Films such as *የከንፈር ወዳጅ - Yekenfer Wedaj/Lovers* (N/A), *ጎጆ መውጪያ - Gojo Mewichiya/To Begin a Household* (N/A), *ፍዳ - Fidda/Recompense* (1999) and even *ብራ - Bira/Brightness* (2006) all feature a recurring cast, including Bemnabu himself and are all seemingly set in the same Wello area where Bemnabu is from and which enabled quicker turn-around times in the production of films. Mostly released in the 1990s, in the early years of the political EPRDF era, the narratives of these films reflect the authority of the new government as disputes are often resolved in recently established local courts. Harmful traditional customs deemed inhumane are of particular interest in the films of Bemnabu Kebede. The narrative of *Fidda*, for example, tells the story of a young farmer's daughter who is abducted for marriage and raped by her neighbour. The girl has a miscarriage, suffers a fistula and is taken to a care-home in Addis whilst the perpetrator is sentenced to jail by a local court in the closing scene, despite his disbelief that the once common practice of marriage by abduction had become a criminal offence.

Films which may be attributed to the "village film" genre are deeply embedded within traditional Ethiopian customs and culture, what Stoneman calls the "anthropological and folkloristic" (1996, 178) and tend to be more rooted in rural, as opposed to urban settings. Because the genre is ultimately defined by its setting, film aesthetics – particularly aspects of the mise-en-scène – are conventionally rural and traditional. Films feature panoramic landscape shots of the Ethiopian highlands with important scenes and shots featuring water sources (such as streams and lakes) as symbolism for fertility, restoration and places of respite and relaxation, not uncommon in the *yefiker film*. Characters are seen in traditional clothing with men commonly seen with staffs and even rifles, signifying their virility. Images of farming with oxen are prominent in Bemnabu Kebede's films and feature in what can be described as the epic "village

films" አሸንጌ - *Ashenge* (2007) and *Yenetsa Tiwild*, which feature other daily farming activities, such as depictions of hand milling flour in *Gumma* accompanied by work songs and punctuated by sounds of farm animals and bird song.

The use of traditional music, often appearing from within the diegesis of films themselves, such as characters playing the ዋሽንት - *washint* (traditional reed flute) or ማስንቆ - *masinko* (traditional single stringed fiddle) and vocalisations of melodies, songs and forms of Amharic poetry often carry symbolic and narrative importance and represents another formal convention now more common throughout Amharic cinema. This is the case with the use of ሽንጎ - *shengo* (seeking the counsel of an elder) in *Yekenfer Wedaj* and similarly the use of an Azmari in *Ashenge*. In *Ashenge*, the protagonist tells the itinerant musician (Azmari) to repeat insulting verses at a public gathering in order to uncover the dark past of Italian collaboration hidden by the local lord who has reached a position of power by lying through boasts of his own heroic resistance in poetic ፉከራ - *fukkera* (heroic recitals used to boast of one's own prowess). Narratively, this common folkloristic device consists of insults between two factions that are first voiced in song and poetry before physical fights break out in climactic scenes as differences often fail to be resolved by words. Such a scene also comes to mind in ባለገሩ - *Balageru/The Countryman* (2012), the previously mentioned 'buddy comedy' about two 'countrymen' arriving in Addis Ababa and experiencing the urban way of life for the first time. In these films oral traditions and music played on traditional instruments are strongly associated with rural characters and also help identify nationalistic moments in films.

Geday Siyarefafid also harnesses folkloric traditions in the form of *fukkera* and as heard in the film's music. It is interesting, here, to consider Stoneman's concept of "village films" in the Ethiopian context. The success of *Geday Siyarefafid*, for example, has considerable contextual and formal differences compared to Yared Zeleke's Cannes Film Festival accredited film *Lamb* (2015). Both films perfectly fit Stoneman's description of "village films", set in the rural Ethiopian highlands but *Lamb* was deemed a "documentary" by local cinemagoing audiences in Ethiopia (as discussed in Chapter 3). The differences between these two films becomes apparent when considering how *Lamb* lacks key aesthetic and thematic conventions common in more commercially successful Amharic films that harness an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination. The faster pacing, cutting, dialogue-driven narratives and clear didacticism

common across the spectrum of Amharic film genres is in stark contrast to the longer takes, sparse dialogue and outdoor scenes of *Lamb* that reflect the slower nature of rural life in a film that reserves judgment and leads to a more open, contemplative and indefinite ending. This observation also helps explain why the more commercially established *lib anteltay film* category is used to define the rurally set *Geday Siyarefafid*, instead of an untested generic term such as "village film".

The suspense conventions of the *lib anteltay film* are invested in the landscape and rural setting of *Geday Siyarefafid* through the threat of a *shifta/bandit* character as the film's antagonist. A similar character, played by the popular actor Solomon Bogale, is the protagonist in *አሜን - Amen* (2012), another example of a successful *lib anteltay film* that traces the journey of a member of the Ethiopian diaspora in America as she travels to rural Ethiopia and falls in love with a *shifta* who saves her. The final death of the antagonist in *Geday Siyarefafid* at the hands of a slighted woman, rooted in her rural surroundings and saving her husband despite his infidelity, also echoes the patriotic heroics of strong home-grown female protagonists in other *lib anteltay film*s.

The rural setting in Amharic films, furthermore, does not necessarily imply a "village film" as Stoneman describes. Unlike *Geday Siyarefafid*, *Amen* uses a female character (a member of the Ethiopian diaspora) as a vector through which rural Ethiopia is experienced, a strategy more common in the *yefiker film* or *assikiñ yefiker film*. Often stereotypical in their representations of female outsiders as culturally ignorant and unable to properly comprehend Amharic, these films feature narratives of diasporic or wealthy urban women discovering their cultural roots. Although the main action of these films occurs in rural settings they often either begin or end in Addis Ababa. This narrative is exemplified in the more recent *ሃገርሽ ሃገሬ - Hagerish Hageré/Your Country is my Country* (2016) which opens with establishing shots and archive footage of Addis Ababa before moving to the countryside.

There are then films such as *ላሎምቤ - Lalombe* (2010) and *ላ-ቦረና - La-Borena* (2013) which belong to the *yefiker film* genre but use anthropologist characters in order to explore the rural lives and cultures of the Hamer people and the Borena Oromo of southern Ethiopia, respectively. Despite the seemingly stable definition of "village films" as "located in the precolonial epoch" by Rod Stoneman (1996, 178), in the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination that permeates commercial Amharic cinema, the

rupture of European colonialism, as experienced in other African contexts, does not exist. Therefore, historically, socially and culturally, in the Ethiopian melodramatic imagination there is a clearer, older and more continuous nationalism.

Such emotive nationalism is linked to the pre-modern Ethiopian narratives exemplified in the discussion of the *Kebra Nagast* in Chapter 3. Modern abstractions of Ethiopian nationalism are maintained through the patriotic national holidays that celebrate the victory of the Battle of Adwa over Italian colonial forces, the continual references that honour *jegena/heroes* or patriots and the nationalist and spiritual sentiments of *fiker* maintained through the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Such nationalist abstractions or reifications are common features throughout popular cinema cultures across the world as evidenced by Haynes (2016) and Vasudevan (2011) with regards to Nollywood and Bollywood respectively, and almost ubiquitous in American genre films (Crosson 2013). With such strong emotions of attachment and love towards a national identity it is of little surprise that a commercial film industry has emerged to continue the production of national fictions and hegemony through the medium of cinema.

The film *ኦቴጌ ፪/Etege 2* (2010/11) is commonly referred to as an important and inspirational film for contemporary filmmakers for its ideological and formative influences, but also as it seems to distil the essence of the emotive nationalism of Ethiopian-style melodrama, as well as the nature and purpose of Amharic cinema as a whole (Behailu Wassie, interview, 2016 March 8). In the closing sequence of the film (Figure 35), which shows ethnographic-style footage of rural inhabitants in montage, both doing rural tasks such as farming and fetching water but also dancing *eskesta* and smiling, one of the key characters of the film, Mesfin is heard in voice-over narration saying: “While I was in the countryside, I noticed severe poverty, disease and similar hardships, but what surprised me was the peace, love, contentment and satisfaction people had!” He continues to talk of the artificial pleasures of urban life which drive people to addiction and sinful acts and references Ethiopian Orthodox teachings of the virtues of poverty before venerating the wise old Aba Sahilu for his teachings throughout the film. The images of the film then focus on close-ups of Aba Sahilu looking into the camera intercut with shots panning meditatively up and down, framing the elder’s silhouette and windswept grey hair against the setting sun (see Figure 35).

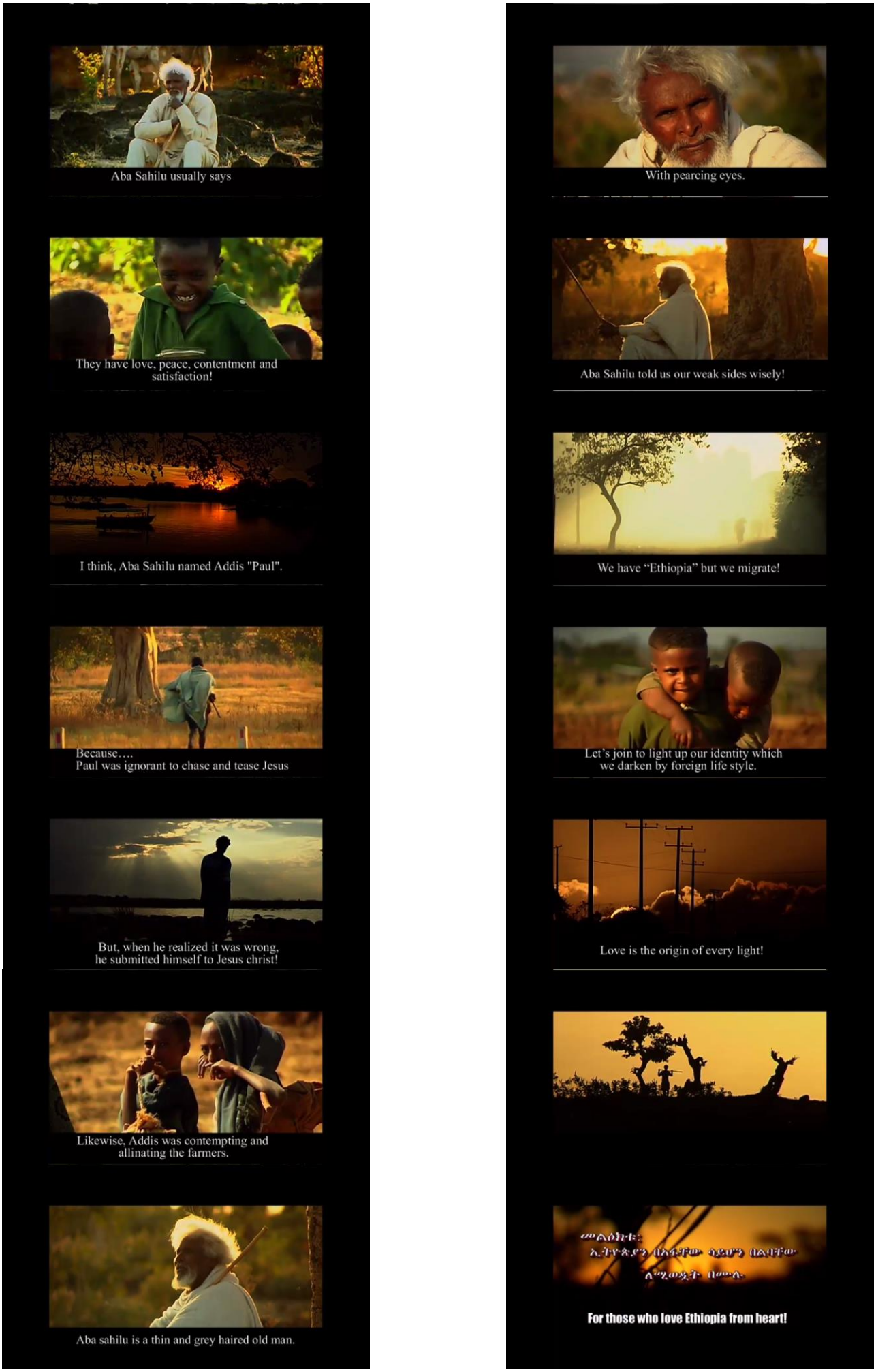


Figure 35. Stills from the closing sequence of *Etege 2*.

Finally, Mesfin's narration questions the very concept of knowledge, comparing modern education's focus on creating an atmosphere of selfish individualism and competitiveness in contrast to the respect and humility taught in traditional Ethiopian Orthodox church education. The rising inequality in Ethiopia is then referred to with the narration continuing: "We have houses but no shelter! We have cars but no shoes! We have Ethiopia but we migrate! […] To conclude, as light wins in the darkness, let us join to light up our identity which we darken by living foreign lifestyles. Love is the source of all light!" This "*fiker/love*" refers mostly to patriotic love, but the film's entire narrative negotiates the very concept of *fiker* in its romantic, familial, religious and patriotic senses and this was frequently mentioned by many film industry stakeholders and cinemagoers to whom I spoke (Behailu Wassie, interview, 2016, March 8; Kebede Mesfin, interview, 2016, March 4; Abreham Gezahegn, interview, 2017, November 2; Henok Ayele, interview, 2016, February 11; Biniyam Tefere, interview, 2016, March 11; Naod Lemma, interview, 2016, March 5; Mikael Million, interview, 2016, February 15; Sintayehu Taye, interview, 2016, March 7; Paulos Regassa, interview, 2016, February 9; Kidus, interview, 2016, March 3). This notion of national patriotic love is embedded in the spiritual discourse of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and in the fast pacing, sensational incidents and emotionally oriented characters of commercial Amharic cinema represented in an Ethiopian-style melodrama as espoused throughout the system of Amharic genres. Genres such as Rod Stoneman's "village films" and the spectrum of Nollywood genres that Haynes describes as "often defined by their setting" (2016, xxvi) do not appear in Amharic commercial cinema where genres are more clearly defined by their affective power and emotional tones.

Conclusions

What becomes clear from the analysis in this chapter is that in the commercial Amharic film industry of Ethiopia and the system of Amharic genres that has developed since 2002, there are five broad genres: *yefiker film/love film; assikiñ yefiker film/humorous love film*; *assikiñ film/comedy*; *yebeteseb film/family film* and *lib anteltay film/suspense film*. The early dominance of the *yefiker film* and proceeding success of the *assikiñ yefiker film* meant that these two closely related categories quickly became distinguishable due to the number of films of each genre being produced and screened. The term *assikiñ* or *comedy*, although also often coupled with terms such as the *yebeteseb film* and *lib anteltay film*, are much less common compared to the *assikiñ yefiker film* and so it is difficult to make more formal distinctions between those films

named, for example, as *yebeteseb film* and those named as *assikiñ yebeteseb film*. Even more difficult is the broadly defined *lib anteltay film* as it denotes a film's inclination towards a suspenseful and thrilling narrative. Whereas the term is often coupled with *fiker*, denoting a common strand as the *lib anteltay yefiker film*, it also accompanies lesser used terms which are regarded as standalone genres in mainstream scholarship resulting in its umbrella usage to define action, science fiction, thrillers, film-noire, crime dramas, or even comedic parodies of any of these.

The discussion of the above genres and analysis of a selection of films attached to the different terms is indicative of the critical appraisal and the commercial or popular success these films have achieved in Ethiopia. This approach is integrated within the industry itself and engages with the genre terms used in cinema listings and in film promotions to understand how films can be understood as belonging to specific genres in the specific context of filmmaking and consumption in Ethiopia. The terms may seem to be arbitrarily attached to films that do not always conform to a particular genre but there do seem to be broader formal and particular emotional similarities shared within the specific genres. The contestation of different concepts of *fiker*; both romantic, familial, patriotic and spiritual are organised into affective genres that employ an Ethiopian-style melodrama conditioned by and suited to the industrial structures of the Amharic film industry. As *fiker* remains the dominant theme that colours the melodramatic imagination, the genres also employ other dramatic modes of address such as comedy, tragedy and suspense that affect how the ambivalences of this *fiker* are translated into felt emotions amongst audiences.

CONCLUSION

> Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a "production," which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.
>
> (Stuart Hall 1996, 210)

This thesis has presented a sustained 'cultural turn' to the study of cinema history, melodrama and film genres in the context of Ethiopia and the commercial Amharic film industry centred in Addis Ababa. In attempting this work, I have positioned my research in relation to the mainstream scholarship on melodrama and film genres and more specifically in relation to African Screen Media Studies. These are the areas of study to which my thesis contributes as the example of the under investigated Amharic film industry in Ethiopia offers insights into the usages of genre from a media industries perspective and the manifestations of genre and melodrama in popular film. As films generate the majority of their revenues from cinemas throughout Ethiopia, but particularly from Addis Ababa; and as films compete to be shown in the limited slots and space available, genre becomes a tool to secure and promote exhibition by promising to make an audience "laugh or cry in the first five minutes" (Dawit Tesfaye, interview, 2016, February 27). To this end, genre and melodrama engage and inspire strong emotional feelings in audiences which are heightened by the experience of cinemagoing and shared participation; watching films in large auditoriums and sharing the public mood and experience with fellow members of the crowd. Films circulate on VCD (increasingly now DVD) after their runs in the private and state-run cinemas and most are also available on YouTube. Rarely does the VCD or online release achieve strong financial rewards given, in particular, the problems of pirating, despite a film's online popularity (Hermon Hailay, interview, 2016, February 17; Eyerusaleam Kassahun, interview, 2016, February 26). In short, popular Amharic cinema diverges in many ways from the structures that have characterised the Nigerian (Larkin 2008; Haynes 2016) and Ghanaian (Garritano 2013) examples of popular cinema. Nonetheless, there are many productive comparisons between popular Amharic films and those produced in other African, and indeed, other popular and commercial film

producing contexts of which Indian and American comparisons have featured in this thesis.

I have not been able to meet and speak to every filmmaker, producer or industry professional in Ethiopia and in my analysis of films I have centred my attention on films that have come up in my discussions with the many people I have been fortunate enough to interview about Ethiopian cinema. Tewodros Teshome's films, *Abay vs Vegas* and *Sost Meazen 2* have not been available to me but Alessandro Jedlowski's (2018) insights into Tewodros Teshome's work and life are most enlightening. I have not attempted to discuss every important Amharic film but instead to trace the parameters, associated aesthetic conventions, narrative plots, historical eminence and social values to help position Amharic film genres as a productive tool for comprehending cinema in Ethiopia. My aim, therefore has been to historicise Amharic genres through a serious and systematic consideration of popular Amharic cinema. In doing this, an Ethiopian-style melodrama has been uncovered by understanding the emotions and ambiguities it espouses through Amharic films and their genres.

Equally, I have attempted to balance the local/global dichotomy by addressing melodrama in more detail. This has resulted in the identification of a culturally conditioned Ethiopian-style melodrama (or melodramatic imagination) through which the contestation of competing ideas of *fiker/love* are staged. From conversations with film professionals and audiences it is clear that popular Amharic films are considered in terms of the moral guidance and entertainment they provide. The moralisms and messages that present neat closure to nearly every popular Amharic film reinforce and reconstitute the hegemonic norms of an abstracted Ethiopian nationalism reacting to the dislocations and provocations that threaten the very nature of community and society in contemporary Ethiopia. The aesthetics of Ethiopian-style melodrama express and contain the socio-political context by displacing it from larger institutionalised realities and depositing it onto the personal by eliciting emotional reactions towards individual actors/characters and fatalistic circumstances. My analysis has sought to evidence how Amharic film genres are organised by way of the emotional response they elicit from audiences and how an organising melodramatic aesthetic is rooted in Amharic cinema's contexts of production and reception, which at the same time may resonate outside the local context.

Popular cinemas around the world can be regarded as expressions and "practices of the self" (Mbembe 2002) through which individuals find connections and similarities with their own life experiences and narratives of personal identity. Cultural and national markers of identity are activated within personal imaginations as local films engage with global forces. Carmela Garritano details how popular Ghanaian films mobilise a dialectical imagination caught between the moral register of religion and the capitalist, immoral register of consumerism (2013, 198). In the case of Amharic films, similar registers are certainly at play. I have argued that it is specifically through the engagement with an Ethiopian melodramatic imagination that emotional registers are activated and through which notions of *fiker/love* (romantic, familial, spiritual and patriotic) compete. It is in the emergence of the system of Amharic film genres characterised by this mode of dramatic expression that melodrama affects Amharic cinema with genres roughly characterised and delineated along boundaries of emotional expectations in relation to *fiker*. I hope these findings inspire similar explorations of how the melodramatic mode activates and organises deep emotional sensibilities in other cultures.

This thesis, therefore, hopefully represents a furthering of important research in Film Studies that puts culture at the centre of investigations into melodrama and genre. The Ethiopian case study offers experiences of a locally popular and commercially orientated film industry whose industrial organisation and films deserve to be valued as a distinct and powerful form of cultural production which attracts not only urban Addis Ababa cinemagoers but millions of viewers through online platforms such as YouTube. Furthermore, the historical approach of this thesis offers a scaffold through which cinema in Ethiopia and more precisely Amharic films and their genres have been organised. I have constructed this history through primary and secondary information from sources available to me and I have no doubt that other researchers, and particularly Ethiopian colleagues, can detail more nuanced, in-depth histories of cinema in Ethiopia from multiple perspectives. A prime example is to detail the work on filmmaking in other languages such as Oromo, Tigrinya and Somali and how they relate to the more centralised position of the Amharic example. Similarly, the opening up of scholarship to engage with other screen media production in Ethiopia, such as the proliferation of Ethiopian television stations that emerged in 2016, needs to be encouraged and done in a way that reflects the integration of the Addis Ababa film industry and many of its key stakeholders in the production of television content. Confronted with the new threats

that are posed by the competition of television, many film industry professionals speak of Amharic cinema's demise (Paulos Regassa, interview, 2016, February 9). At the same time, others see television as providing a more stable income and cinema as an outlet for more artistic possibilities, particularly as a long awaited government film policy (still at the time of writing only emerging on the horizon) holds the promise of many new opportunities and developments with regards to cinema.

Whatever future organisational and structural adjustments are made to cinema in Ethiopia, there is no doubt that the sheer size and growing population of Ethiopia will result in a growing demand for locally produced cultural products of which audio-visual content such as film remains the most emotionally potent form. In such an era characterised by technological innovation and often volatile social, economic and environmental transformations, culture remains a crucial strand of human activity that offers continuity and stability to individuals as well as imagined communities. Nevertheless, in order to fully appreciate cultural activities, more work needs to be done to preserve and understand its history. Films made in Ethiopia between the 1960s and 1990s are either lost or left to decompose in inadequately resourced institutions. Contemporary films also need to be systematically archived. The loss of Michel Papatakis, director of the second fictional Amharic feature film *Gumma* (1974), who, born in Ethiopia to an Ethiopian mother and Greek father passed away in 2014 (a month prior to the commencement of this PhD) represents such a case of how invaluable cultural memory and insight may disappear. With this in mind, I urge greater collaborations between scholars and screen media stakeholders in Ethiopia and a greater appreciation of different cultures and their artistic expressions and hope that this thesis represents a way of helping to facilitate such endeavours in the future.

Bibliography

AACHA (Addis Ababa Cinema Houses Administration). 2007. "History of Cinema in Addis." In *Addis Ababa: In the Past and Its Prospects in the New Millennium*, edited by Hailu Habtu, 40–41. Addis Ababa: The Addis Ababa Millennium Secretariat.

Abel, Richard. 2002. "A Nation for Exports. American Westerns (1911–1912)." In *France/Hollywood. Échanges cinématographiques et identités nationales*, edited by Martin Barnier and Raphaëlle Moine, 147–172. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Adejunmobi, Moradewun. 2002. "English and the Audience of an African Popular Culture: The Case of Nigerian Video Film." *Cultural Critique* 50: 74–103.

— 2007. "Nigerian Film as Minor Transnational Practice." *Postcolonial Text* 3 (2): 1–16.

Adorno, Theodor W. 1975. "Culture Industry Reconsidered." *New German Critique* 6 (4): 17.

Adorno, Theodor W. and Max Horkheimer. [1944] 1977. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." In *Mass Communication and Society*, edited by James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott, 349–377. London: Edward Arnold.

Agee, James. [1949] 2016. "Comedy's Greatest Era." In *Notions of Genre: Writings on Popular Film Before Genre Theory*, edited by Barry Keith Grant and Malisa Kurtz, 14–33. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Airriess, Hannah. 2018. "Global Melodrama and Transmediality in Turn-of-the-Century Japan." In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 69–82. New York: Columbia University Press.

Allen, Richard. 2018. "The Passion of Christ and the Melodramatic Imagination." In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 31–47. New York: Columbia University Press.

Alloway, Lawrence. 1963. "Iconography and the Movies." *Movie* 7 (Feb-March): 4–6.

— 1971. *Violent America: The Movies 1946–1964*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

Altman, Rick. 1984. "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre." *Cinema Journal* 23 (3): 6–18.

— 1986. Expanded Version of "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre." In *Film Genre Reader*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, 26–40. Austin: University of Texas Press.

— 1987. *The American Film Musical*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

— 1996. "Cinema and Genre." In *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, edited by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 276–285. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— 1999. *Film/Genre*. London: British Film Institute.

Anderson, Benedict [1983] 2016. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso Books.

Appleyard, David L. 2003. "Amharic." In *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica,* vol. 1: *A-C*, edited by Siegbert Uhlig, 232–234. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Arefaynie Fantahun. 2006. "Ethiopia: Historical Overview on Ethiopian Film Industry." *Daily Monitor (Addis Ababa),* September 24.

Arefe. 2006. "Haile Gerima on Current Movies." *Addis Journal*, September 23.

Ashagrie, Aboneh. 1996. "Popular Theatre in Ethiopia." *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 24 (2–3): 32–41.

Bakker, Freek L. 2009. *The Challenge of the Silver Screen*. BRILL.

Barber, Karin. 2003. *The Generation of Plays: Yoruba Popular Life in Theatre*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Barthes, Roland. [1957] 1972. *Critical Essays*. Translated by Richard Howard. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Bayman, Louis. 2014. *The Operatic and the Everyday in Post-war Italian Film Melodrama*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

— 2018. "The Sorrow and the Piety: Melodrama Rethought in Postwar Italian Cinema." In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 273–287. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bazin, André. [1952] 2016. "The Western, or the American Film Par Excellence." In *Notions of Genre: Writings on Popular Film Before Genre Theory*, edited by Barry Keith Grant and Malisa Kurtz, 93–102. Austin: University of Texas Press.

— [1957] 1971. "The Evolution of the Western." In *What is Cinema? Volume 2*. 149–157. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ben-Ghiat, Ruth. 2003. "The Italian Colonial Cinema: Agendas and Audiences." *Modern Italy* 8 (1): 49–63.

— 2015. *Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Ben-Ghiat, Ruth and Mia Fuller, eds. 2005. *Italian Colonialism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bentley, Eric. 1964. *The Life of the Drama*. New York: Athenaeum.

Bhaskar, Ira. 2012. "Emotion, Subjectivity and the Limits of Desire: Melodrama and Modernity in Bombay Cinema, 1940s–1950s." In *Gender Meets Genre in Postwar Cinemas*, edited by Christine Gledhill, 161–176. Urbana: University of Illinois.

— 2018. "Expressionist Aurality: The Stylized Aesthetic of *Bhava* in Indian Melodrama." In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 253–272. New York: Columbia University Press.

Black, Gregory D. 1966. *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics and the Movies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boltanski, Luc. 1999. *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bonnano, Ettore Million. 2003. "Cinema." In *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 1: *A–C*, edited by Siegbert Uhlig, 745–746. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Booth, Michael. 1965. *English Melodrama*. London: Herbert Jenkins.

Bordwell, David and Kristen Thompson [1979] 1986. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York: Knopf.

Bottomore, Stephen. 1996. *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema: A Worldwide Survey*. London: British Film Institute.

Bourget, Jean Loup. 1985. *Le Mélodrame hollywoodien*. Paris: Stock.

Bromber, Katrin. 2013. "Improving the Physical Self: Sport, Body Politics, and Ethiopian Modernity, ca. 1920--1974." *Northeast African Studies* 13 (1): 71–99.

Brooks, Peter. 1976. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Buckley, Matthew. 2018. "Unbinding Melodrama." In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 15–29. New York: Columbia University Press.

Budge. Sir E. A. Wallis. 1932. *The Queen of Sheba and her only son Menyelek (I)*. London: Oxford University Press.

Burton. Julianne. 1997. "Film Artisans and Film Industries in Latin America, 1956–1980: Theoretical and Critical Implications of Variations in Modes of Filmic Production and Consumption." In *New Latin American Cinema, I:*

Theory, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations, edited by Michael T. Martin, 157–184. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Buscombe, Edward. 1970. “The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema.” *Screen* 11 (2): 33–45.

Capital Ethiopia. 2011, October 31. “Two Movies for the Weekend.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2011/10/31/two-movies-for-the-weekend/#.W4eRquhKiM8

— 2011, December 8. “The Line that Divides.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2011/12/08/the-line-that-divides/#.W4eTeOhKiM8

— 2012, January 2. “Two New Films to the Growing Film Industry.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2012/01/02/two-new-films-to-the-growing-film-industry/#.W4eQ8-hKiM8

— 2012, April 19. “Standing Ovation for ‘Amen’.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2012/04/09/standing-ovation-for-amen/#.W4eZvOhKiM8

— 2012, April 22. “Roman[t]ic Film ‘Alu’ Opens Monday.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2012/04/22/romanic-film-alu-opens-monday/#.W4eUrehKiM8

— 2012, September 4. “Ayehush: New Romantic Comedy with a Life Lesson.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2012/09/04/ayehush-new-romantic-comedy-with-a-life-lesson/#.W4eUQOhKiM8

— 2012, September 12. “Rare Suspense Film Opens.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2012/09/12/rare-suspense-film-opens/#.W4eQKOhKiM_

— 2012, September 24. “Evangadi.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2012/09/24/evangadi/#.W4eWpehKiM8

— 2012, November 5. “Ha-Ge’ez a New Film about Love.” [Viewed August 30 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2012/11/05/ha-geez-a-new-film-about-love/#.W4eXJuhKiM8

— 2012, December 24. “’Melhik’: Valuable Lesson on Illegal Human Smuggling.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2012/12/24/melhik-valuable-lesson-on-illegal-human-smuggling/#.W4ea0OhKiM8

— 2012, December 31a. “Colliding Worlds.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2012/12/31/colliding-worlds/#.W4eVTuhKiM8
— 2012, December 31b. “Murder Mystery.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2012/12/31/murder-mystery/#.W4eZxehKiM8
— 2013, January 21. “Paying Dues.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2013/01/21/paying-dues/#.W4eZxuhKiM8
— 2013, February 7. “’Sost Meazen’ to hit cinemas.” [Viewed 29 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2013/02/04/sost-meazen-to-hit-cinemas/#.W4abg-hKiM-
— 2013, February 18. “Saving the Face of Ethiopian Cinema.” [Viewed 28 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2013/02/18/saving-the-face-of-ethiopian-cinema/#.WSL2SRPyh0s
— 2013, March 4. “The Amharic Film ‘Kemeten Belay’ Hits Theatres.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2013/03/04/the-amharic-film-kemeten-belay-hits-theatres/#.W4eSOehKiM8
— 2013, March 18. “The Triumph of Love.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2013/03/18/the-triumph-of-love/#.W4eUTuhKiM8
— 2013, March 27. “Local Films on the Rise (Two Movies Premiered).” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2013/03/27/local-films-on-the-rise-two-movies-premiered/#.W4eVxOhKiM8
— 2013, May 27. “’Nishan’ Screened at International Film Festivals.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2013/05/27/nishan-screened-at-international-film-festivals/#.W4eY4-hKiM8
— 2013, October 22. “Losing Love, Finding Love.” [Viewed 30 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2013/10/22/losing-love-finding-love/#.W4eXuehKiM8
— 2016, January 15. “Sebastopol Bullied Film Producers to Sink Eyoha, Says Witnesses.” [Viewed 28 August 2018]. Available from: http://capitalethiopia.com/2016/01/15/sebastopol-bullied-film-producers-to-sink-eyoha-say-witnesses/#.W4adNOhKiM8

Cawelti, John G. 1976. *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Celli, Carlo. 2011. *National Identity in Global Cinema: How Movies Explain the World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Certeau, Michel de. 1986. *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota press.

Cohen, Ralph. 1986. "History and Genre." *New Literary History* 17 (2): 203–218.

Comaroff, Jean and John Comaroff. 2012. *Theory from the South: Or How Euro-America Is Evolving Towards Africa*. London: Paradigm Publishers.

Cook, Pam, ed. 1984. *The Cinema Book*. London: British Film Institute.

Cowcher, Kate. 2018. "The Revolution has Been Televised: Fact, Fiction, and Spectacle in the 1970s and 1980s." In *Cine-Ethiopia: The History and Politics of Film in the Horn of Africa*, edited by Michael W. Thomas, Alessandro Jedlowski and Aboneh Ashagrie, 45–66. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

Clarke, Joseph Calvitt. 2011. *Alliance of the Colored Peoples: Ethiopia and Japan before World War II*. Oxford: James Currey.

Crosson, Seán. 2013. *Sport and Film*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Dennison, Stephanie and Song Hwee Lim, eds. 2006. *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics in Film*. London: Wallflower Press.

Diawara, Manthia. 1992. *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Dilalew Million. 2008. "An Investigation into the Appropriation and Use of Bollywood Movies by Ethiopian Youth from a Poor Family Background in Addis Ababa." MA diss., Addis Ababa University.

Dissanayake, Wimal, ed. 1993. *Melodrama and Asian Cinema*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

— 2000. "Issues in World Cinema." In *World Cinema: Critical Approaches* edited by John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson. 143–150. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Donham, Donald Lewis. 1999. *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Donham, Donald L and Wendy James, eds. 2002. *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*. Oxford: James Currey.

Dovey, Lindiwe. 2010. "African film and video: pleasure, politics, performance." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 22 (1): 1–6.

— 2015. *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

— 2016. "Close-Up: The Marginalization of African Media Studies: On the Matter of Fiction: An Approach to the Marginalization of African Film Studies in the

Global Academy." *Black Camera: An International Film Journal* 7 (2): 159–173.

Dovey, Lindiwe, and Angela Impey. 2010. "*African Jim*: Sound, Politics, and Pleasure in Early 'Black' South African Cinema." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 22 (1): 57–73.

Durovicová, Natasa and Kathleen E. Newman, eds. 2009. *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Dwyer, Rachel. 2000. *All You Want Is Money, All You Need Is Love: Sex and Romance in Modern India*. London: Cassell.

Dyer, Richard. [1986] 2004. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, second edition. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Elsaesser, Thomas. [1972] 1987. "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations of the Family Melodrama." In *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, edited by Christine Gledhill, 43–69. London: British Film Institute.

Ethiopian Film Corporation. 1986/1987. *Kefilm Madaberiyana Mekotateriya Wana Kifil Eske Ityopya Film Korpreshin/From the Film Development and Control Board to the Ethiopian Film Corporation*. Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Film Corporation. [*ከፊልም ማዳበሪያና መቆጣጠሪያ ዋና ክፍል እስከ ኢትዮጵያ ፊልም ኮርፖሬሽን*]

Ezra, Elizabeth and Terry Rowden, eds. 2006. *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*. London: Routledge.

Fair, Laura. 2009. "Making Love in the Indian Ocean: Hindi Films, Zanzibari Audiences, and the Construction of Romance in the 1950s and 1960s." In *Love in Africa*, edited by Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas, 58–82. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

— 2010 "Songs, Stories, Action!: Audience Preferences in Tanzania, 1950s–1980s." In *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century: Art Films and the Nollywood Video Revolution*, edited by Mahir Şaul and Ralph A. Austin, 108–130. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Fantu Getachew. 2016. Cited in the documentary *Tizitachen BeEBS*. Season 1, Ep 9, "Cinema Ethiopia."

Fikadu Limenih. 2013. *Yefilm Guday: Ye'abujedi Girgir/Film's Affair: Calico's Hustle and Bustle*. Addis Ababa: Littman. [*የፊልም ጉዳይ: የአቡጀዲ ግርግር*]

Fuller, Mia. 2007. *Moderns Abroad: Architecture, Cities and Italian Imperialism*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Gabriel, Teshome H. 2001. “The Intolerable Gift.” In *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema: Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image*, edited by June Givanni, 97–102. London: British Film Institute.

— 1982. *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press.

Gagliardone, Iginio. 2011. “The Technopolitics of the Ethiopian Nation.” In *Knowledge Development and Social Change through Technology: Emerging Studies*, edited by E. Coakes, 206–222. Hershey: IGI Global.

Gardner, Tom. 2017. *A Painful Lesson in Ethiopia* [viewed 28 August 2018]. Available from: https://ecadforum.com/2017/02/08/a-painful-lesson-in-ethiopia/

Garritano, Carmela. 2013. *African Video Movies and Global Desires: A Ghanaian History*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Gartley, John. 1997. “Early Development of Radio in Ethiopia, 1930–1953.” In *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the 13th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, edited by Katsuyoshi Fukui, Eisei Kurimoto, and Masayoshi Shigeta, 82–96. Kyoto: Shokado.

Gebre-Egziabher, Lucy. 2006. *Digital Filmmaking: Panacea or Scourge for African Cinema* [viewed 24 August 2018]. Available from: http://www.teretproductions.com/images/african_cinema_article_final.pdf

Gebremedhin, Naigzy. 2007. “Hotel(s).” In *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 3: *He–N*, edited by Siegbert Uhlig, 73–74. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Naitonalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Genette, Gerard. 1997. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Geschiere, Peter, Brigit Meyer and Peter Pels eds. 2008. *Readings in Modernity in Africa*.

London: International African Institute in association with Indiana University Press, James Currey, Unisa Press.

Ghosh, Bishnupriya. 2013. “Sensate Outlaws: The Recursive Social Bandit in Indian Popular Cultures.” In *Figurations in Indian Film*, edited by Meheli Sen and Anustup Basu, 21–43. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gili. Jean Antoine. 1983. *La Comédie Italienne*. Paris: Henri Veyrier.

Gledhill, Christine. 1986. “Dialogue: Christine Gledhill on Stella Dallas and Feminist Film Theory.” *Cinema Journal* 25 (4): 44–48.

— ed. 1987. *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. London: British Film Institute.

— 1996. "'An Abundance of Understatement': Documentary, Melodrama and Romance." In *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson, 213–229. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

— 2000. "Rethinking Genre." In *Reinventing Film Studies*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 221–243. London: Arnold.

— 2018. "Prologue: The Reach of Melodrama." In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, ix–xxv. New York: Columbia University Press.

Gledhill, Christine and Linda Williams. 2018. "Introduction." In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 1–11. New York: Columbia University Press.

Grant, Barry Keith. 2007. *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*. New York: Wallflower.

— 2012. "Experience and Meaning in Genre Films." In *Film Genre Reader IV*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, 133–147. Austin: University of Texas Press.

— ed. 2012. *Film Genre Reader IV*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Grant, Barry Keith and Malisa Kurtz. 2016. "Introduction." In *Notions of Genre: Writings on Popular Film Before Genre Theory*, edited by Barry Keith Grant and Malisa Kurtz, 1–10. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Grant, Catherine, and Annette Kuhn. 2006. *Screening World Cinema: The Screen Reader*. New York: Routledge.

Green-Simms, Lindsey. 2012. "Occult Melodramas: Spectral Affect and West African Video-Film." *Camera Obscura* 27 (2): 25–59.

Grimstead, David. 1968. *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theatre and Culture, 1800–1950*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

— 1971. "Melodrama as Echo of the Historically Voiceless." In *Anonymous Americans: Explorations in Nineteenth-Century Social History*, edited by Tamara K. Hareven, 80–98. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Grindon, Leger. 2011. *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Gunning, Tom. 1986. "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde." *Wide Angle* 8 (3/4): 63–70.

Haars, Martin, Giovanna Trento, Thomas Zitelmann, Hugues Fontaine, Didier Morin, and Itsushi Kawase. 2014. “Film: Ethiopia and Eritrea in Film.” In *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 5: *Y–Z*, edited by Siegbert Uhlig, 315–328. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Habermas, Jürgen. [1962] 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: Polity.

Hall, Stuart. [1973] 1980. “Encoding/Decoding.” In *Culture, Media, Language*, edited by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, Paul Willis, 117–127. London: Hutchinson.

— 1996. “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation.” In *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, edited by Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Linderborg, 210–222. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hansen, Miriam Bratu. 1991. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

— 1999. “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism.” *Modernism/Modernity* 6 (2): 59–77.

Harman, Gilbert. 1975. “Semiotics and the Cinema: Metz and Wollen.” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 2 (1): 15–24.

Haynes, Jonathan, ed. 1997. *Nigerian Video Films*. JOS: Nigerian Film Corporation.

— 2006. “Political Critique in Nigerian Video Films.” *African Affairs* 105 (421): 511–533.

— 2007. “Video Boom: Nigeria and Ghana.” *Postcolonial Text* 3 (2): 110.

— 2010. “What Is to Be Done? Film Studies and Nigerian and Ghanaian Videos.” In *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century: Art Films and the Nollywood Video Revolution*, edited by Mahir Şaul and Ralph A. Austen, 11–25. Athens: Ohio University Press.

— 2011. “African Cinema and Nollywood: Contradictions.” *Situations* 4 (1): 67–90.

— 2014. “’New Nollywood’: Kunle Afolayan.” *Black Camera* 5 (2): 53–73.

— 2016. *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Heilman, Robert B. 1960. “The Western Theme: Exploiters and Explorers.” *Northwest Review* 4 (1): 5

— 1968. *Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Higbee, Will and Song Hwee Lin. 2010. “Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies.” *Transnational Cinemas* 1 (1): 7–21.

Higson, Andrew. 2002. “The Concept of National Cinema.” In *Film and Nationalism*, edited by Andy Williams, 52–67. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press.

Hillier, Jim. 1992. *The New Hollywood*. London: Studio Vista.

Hjort, Mette and Scott MacKenzie. 2000. “Introduction.” In *Cinema and Nation* edited by Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie, 1–16. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Hoefert de Turégano, Teresa. 2005. “Sub-Saharan African Cinemas: The French Connection.” *Modern & Contemporary France* 13 (1): 71–83.

Hollows, Joanne. 1995. “Mass Culture Theory and Political Economy.” In *Approaches to Popular Film*, edited by Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich, 15–36. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. 1979. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: New Left Books.

Hubbard, D.A. 1954. “The Literary Sources of the Kebra Nagast.” Ph.D thesis. St. Andrews University.

Hutchings, Peter. 1995. “Genre Theory and Criticism.” In *Approaches to Popular Film*, edited by Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich, 59–77. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Ilala Ibsa. 1964. *Hirut, Abatwa Mannew?/Hirut, Who Is Her Father?*. Addis Ababa: Birhanenna Selam Publishing House. [*ሂሩት ፣ አባቷ ፡ ማነው?*]

Inanu Agonafir (pseudonym of Negash Gebre-Maryam). 1962. *Seteñña Adari*/*Prostitute*. Addis Ababa: Birhaninna Selam Publishing House. [*ሴትኛ አዳሪ*]

Iordanova, Dina and Stuart Cunningham, eds. 2012. *Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-line*. St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies.

Jamaneh, Yohannes. 2016. “Film Industry Potent Medium in Building Nation’s Image.” *The Ethiopian Herald* [viewed 29 August]. Available from: https://allafrica-com.ezproxy.soas.ac.uk/stories/201608100914.html

Jancovich, Mark, Lucy Faire, and Sarah Stubbings. 2003. *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption*. London: British Film Institute.

Jauss, Hans Robert. 1982. *Towards an Aesthetics of Reception*. Brighton: Harvester Press.

Jedlowski, Alessandro. 2012. “Small Screen Cinema: Informality and Remediation in Nollywood.” *Television & New Media* 13 (5): 431–446.

— 2015a. “Avenues of Participation and Strategies of Control: Video Film Production and Social Mobility in Ethiopia and Southern Nigeria.” In *Production Studies, the Sequel! Cultural Studies of Global Media Industries*, edited by Miranda Banks, Bridget Connor, and Vicki Mayer, 175–186. Abingdon: Routledge.

— 2015b. “Screening Ethiopia: A Preliminary Study of the History and Contemporary Developments of Film Production in Ethiopia.” *Journal of African Cinemas* 7 (2): 169–185.

— 2016. “Close-Up: The Marginalization of African Media Studies: Studying Media ‘from’ the South: African Media Studies and Global Perspectives.” *Black Camera: An International Film Journal* 7 (2): 174–193.

— 2018. “Ethiopian Cinema and the Politics of Migration, at Home and Abroad.” In *Cine-Ethiopia: The History and Politics of Film in the Horn of Africa*, edited by Michael W. Thomas, Alessandro Jedlowski and Aboneh Ashagrie, 161–179. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

Jedlowski, Alessandro, and Michael W. Thomas. 2017. “Representing ‘Otherness’ in African Popular Media: Chinese Characters in Ethiopian Video-Films.” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 29 (1): 63–80.

Jeyifo, Biodun. 1984. *The Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre of Nigeria*. Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Social Development, Youth, Sports & Culture.

Kaminsky, Stuart M. 1974. *American Film Genres: Approaches to a Critical Theory of Popular Film.* Dayton, OH: Pflaum.

Kapsis, Robert E. 1991. “Hollywood Genres and the Production of Culture Perspective.” In *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics and the Law*, vol. 5, edited by Bruce A. Austin, 68–85. Norwood: Ablex.

Kassahun, Eyerusaleam. 2018. “Women’s Participation in Ethiopian Cinema.” In *Cine-Ethiopia: The History and Politics of Film in the Horn of Africa*, edited by Michael W. Thomas, Alessandro Jedlowski and Aboneh Ashagrie, 119–139. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

Kebede, Mesay. 1999. *Survival and Modernization: Ethiopia’s Enigmatic Present*. Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press.

Keller, Edmond Joseph. 1988. *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People’s Republic*. Bloomington & Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.

Kinder, Marsha. 1993. *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kiros, Teodros. 2005. *Zara Yacob: Rationality of the Human Heart*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.

Kitses, Jim. 1969. *Horizons West*, London: Thames and Hudson/British Film Institute.

Kleinhans, Chuck. 1978. "Notes on Melodrama and the Family Under Capitalism." *Film Reader* 3: 40–47.

Klemm, Peri M. and Leah Niederstadt. 2009. "Beyond wide-eyed Angels: Contemporary expressive culture in Ethiopia." *African Arts* 42 (1): 6–13.

Klinger, Barbara. [1984] 2012. "'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism' Revisited: The Progressive Genre." In *Film Genre Reader IV*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, 93–109. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Korn, David A. 1986. *Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Kracauer, Siegfried. 1947. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

— [1951] 2016. "Silent Film Comedy." In *Notions of Genre: Writings on Popular Film Before Genre Theory*, edited by Barry Keith Grant and Malisa Kurtz, 34–38. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Kuhn, Annette and Catherine Grant. 2006. "Screening World Cinema." In *Screening World Cinema: The Screen Reader*, edited by Catherine Grant and Annette Kuhn, 1–14. New York: Routledge.

Kymlichka, Willa A. 2006. "Emerging Western Models of Multination Federalism: Are They Relevant for Africa." In *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, edited by David Turton, 32–64. Oxford: James Currey.

Langford, Barry. 2005. *Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Larkin, Brian. 1997. "Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel Modernities." *Africa* 67 (3): 406–440.

— 2008. *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Leech, Geoffrey. 1974. *Semantics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Lentakis, Michael B. 2005. *Ethiopia: A View from Within*. Cambridge: Janus Publishing Company Lim.

Lesuisse, Anne-Françoise. 2002. *Du film noir au noir. Traces figurales dans le cin*éma *hollywoodien*. Brussels: De Boek Université.

Levine, Donald N. 1965. *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

— 2003. "Amhara." In *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica,* vol. 1: *A-C*, edited by Siegbert Uhlig, 230–232. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1963. *Structural Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.

Lu, Sheldon Hsiao-pend, ed. 1997. *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Mahan, Deepak 2010. "Gunga Jamuna (1961)." *The Hindu* [viewed 25 August 2018]. Available from: https://www.thehindu.com/arts/Gunga-Jamuna-1961/article16483523.ece

Mains, Daniel. 2012. *Hope is Cut: Youth Unemployment, and the Future in Urban Ethiopia*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Maltby, Richard. 1999. "Introduction." In *Identifying Hollywood Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies*, edited by Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, 1–20. London: British Film Institute.

Marcus, Harold G. 1995. *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia, 1844–1913*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.

— ed.1994. *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies: Papers of the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Michigan State University, 5–10 September 1994*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.

Marzagora, Sara. 2017. "History in Twentieth-Century Ethiopia: The 'Great Tradition' and the counter-histories of National Failure. *Journal of African History* 58 (3): 425–444.

Mbembe, Achille. 2002. "African Modes of Self Writing." Translated by Steven Rendall. *Public Culture* 14 (1): 239–273.

McArthur, Colin. 1972. *Underworld USA*. London: British Film Institute.

Worku, Meaza. 2005. "A Chewed-up Romance: The Ethiopian Video Film Industry." *Addis Guide*. No. 16.

Mengistu Gedamu. 1966/1967. *Meselal*/*Ladder*. Addis Ababa: Birhaninna Selam Publishing House. [መሰላል]

Mérab, (Paul) Pierre Etienne. 1921. *Impressions d'Ethiopie: l'Abyssinie sous Ménélik II*. Paris: H. Libert.

Mernit, Billy. 2000. *Writing the Romantic Comedy*. New York: HarperCollins.

Mercer, John and Martin Shingler. 2004. *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility*. London: Wallflower Press.

Metz, Christian. [1971] 1974a. *Language and Cinema*, translated by D.J. Umiker-Sebeok. The Hague: Mouton.

— 1974b. *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, translated by Michael Taylor. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Meyer, Birgit. 2003. "Ghanaian Popular Cinema and the Magic in Film." In *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment*, edited by Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels, 200–222. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

— 2015. *Sensational Movies: Video, Vision, and Christianity in Ghana*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Michel, Charles. 1900. *Mission de Bonchamps: Vers Fachoda à la rencontre de la Mission Marchand à travers l'Ethiopie*. Paris: Plon-Nouritt.

Milkias, Paulos. 2011. *Ethiopia*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

— 2006. *Haile Selassie, Western Education and Political Revolution in Ethiopia*. London and Amherst, NY: Cambria Press.

Moine, Raphaëlle. [2002] 2008. *Cinema Genre*. Translated by Alistair Fox and Bilary Radner. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Molvær Reidulf Knut. [1980] 2008. *Tradition and Change in Ethiopia*. Hollywood, CA: Tsehai publishers and distributors.

Monaco, James. 2000. *How to Read a Film: The World of Movies, Media and Multimedia Language, History, Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Morley, David. 1980. *The* Nationwide *Audience: Structure and Decoding*. London: British Film Institute.

— 1992. *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.

Morse, David. 1972. "Aspects of Melodrama." *Monogram* 4: 16–17.

Moses, Wilson Jeremiah. 1998. *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mulvey, Laura. [1977/78] 1987. "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama." In *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, edited by Christine Gledhill, 75–79. London: British Film Institute.

Mussie, Yared Menwuye. 2001. "Tsamako—A Step Forward in Ethiopian Cinematography." Ethiopian Students Association (Yahoo Groups) [viewed October 2 2016]. Available from: https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/ESAi/conversations/topics/137.

Nandy, Ashis. 1998. “Popular Indian Cinema as a Slums’ Eye View of Politics.” In *The Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema*, edited by Ashis Nandy, 1–8. London: Zed Books.

Neale, Steve. 1980. *Genre*. London: British Film Institute.

— 1990. “Questions of Genre.” *Screen* 31 (1): 45–66.

— 2000. *Genre and Hollywood*. New York: Routledge.

— ed. 2002. *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*. London: British Film Institute.

Neale, Steve, and Frank Krutnik. 1990. *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. London: Routledge.

Nestigen, Andrew and Trevor G. Elkington, eds. 2005. *Transnational Cinema In a Global North: Nordic Cinema in Transiaiton*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Nikolayeva, O. 1986. “Cultural Reforms in Ethiopia.” In *Ten Years of the Ethiopian Revolution*, edited by N. I. Gavrilov, M. V. Rait, V. I. Sharayev, and Y. S. Sherr, translated by Nadezhda Burova, 149–160. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey. [1977] 1987. “Minnelli and Melodrama.” In *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film*, edited by Christine Gledhill, 70–74. London: British Film Institute.

Odin, Roger. 1983. “Film documentaire, lecture documentarisante.” In *Cinémas et réalités*, edited by Jean-Charles Lyant and Roger Odin, 263–278. Saint-Etienne: CIEREC.

Okome, Onookome. 2010. “Nollywood and Its Critics.” In *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century: Art Films and the Nollywood Video Revolution*, edited by Mahir Şaul and Ralph A. Austin, 26–41. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Oliete-Aldea, Elena, Beatriz Oria and Juan A. Tarancón, eds. 2016. *Global Genres, Local Films: The Transnational Dimension of Spanish Cinema*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

O’Regan, Tom. 1997. *Australian National Cinema*. London: Routledge.

Orgad, Shani. 2012. *Media Representation and the Global Imagination*. Cambridge: Polity.

Owusu, Joyce Osei, and Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo. 2015. “Towards Genre Classification in Anglophone West African Video Films: The Case of *Scorned* as a Women’s Film.” *Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4 (8): 1–11.

Pankhurst, Richard. 1968. *Economic History of Ethiopia: 1800–1935*. Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University Press.

— 1998. “Ethiopia: Innovation and Opposition to Change in Ethiopia, 17—Addis Ababa: The Coming of Photography, the Cinema, Foreign Education—and Menelik’s First Cabinet,” *Addis Tribune*, April 19.

Panofsky, Erwin. [1955] 1974. *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. New York: Overlook Press.

Paulos Ñoño. 1992. *Degmawi Até Minelik/Emperor Menelik the Second*. Addis Ababa: Bolé Printing Press. [*ደግማዊ ኣጤ ምንሊክ*]

Patman, Robert G. 1993. “Soviet–Ethiopian Relations: The Horn of Dilemma.” In *Troubled Friendships: Moscow’s Third World Ventures*, edited by Margot Light, 110–139.London: British Academic Press.

PRB (Population Reference Bureau). 2010. *World Population Data Sheet*. Washington DC: Population Reference Bureau.

Pribram, E. Deidre. 2018. “Melodrama and the Aesthetics of Emotion.” In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 237–251. New York: Columbia University Press.

Pye, Douglas. 1975. “Genre and Movie.” *Movie* 20: 29–43.

— [1975] 2012. “The Western (Genre and Movies).” In *The Film Genre Reader IV*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, 239–254. Austin: Texas University Press.

Raheja. Dinesh. 2002. *The Tragic Irony of Ganga Jamuna* [viewed 24 August 2018]. Available from: http://www.rediff.com/entertai/2002/mar/07dinesh.htm

Reta, Meseret Chekol. 2013. *The Quest for Press Freedom: One Hundred Years of History of the Media in Ethiopia*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Rikli, Martin. 1935. *Wie ich Abessinien sah*. Berlin.

Roberts, Thomas J. 1990. *An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Rodowick, David N. [1982] 1987. “Madness, Authority and Ideology: The Domestic Melodrama of the 1950s.” In *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film*, edited by Christine Gledhill, 268–280. London: British Film Institute.

Rothman, William. 1993. “Overview: What is American about Film Study in America?” In *Melodrama and Asian Cinema*, edited by Wimal Dissanayake, 254–277. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ryall, Tom. 1975. “Teaching Through Genre.” *Screen Education* 17: 27–28.

Sanogo, Aboubakar. 2011. “Colonialism, Visuality and the Cinema: Revisiting the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment.” In *Empire and Film*, edited by Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe, 227–245. London: British Film Institute.

Şaul, Mahir, and Ralph A. Austin, eds. 2010. *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century: Art Films and the Nollywood Video Revolution*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Savarino, Franco. 2004. "La actuación de México en una crisis internacional: el caso de Etiopía (1935–1937)." *Iberoamericana* 16: 17–33.

Scott, William R. 1993. *The Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935–1941*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

— 2004. "The Ethiopian Ethos in African American Thought." *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 1 (2): 40–57.

Selassie, Haile. 1967. "Modern Ethiopianism, 2 November 1961." In *Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie 1918 to 1967*, first ed. *The Imperial Ethiopian Ministry of Information*. Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers Limited.

Shah, Ramendra Harjivan. 2007. "The Advent of Indian Cinema in Ethiopia." http://www.essswa.org.et/BIG%20ISSUE%20FINAL/ENTERTAINMENT/THE%20ADVENT%20OF%20INDIAN%20CINEMA%20IN%20ETHIOPIA.doc

Schatz, Thomas. [1977] 2012. "The Structural Influence: New Directions in Film Genre Study." In *The Film Genre Reader IV*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, 110–120. Austin: Texas University Press.

— 1981. *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking and the Studio System*. New York: Random House.

Singer, Ben. 2001. *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Smith, Lahra. 2013. *Making Citizens in Africa: Ethnicity, Gender, and National Identity in Ethiopia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Solanas, Fernando and Octavio Getino. 1969. "Towards a Third Cinema." *Tricontinental* 14: 107–132.

Solomon, Stanley J. 1976. *Beyond Formula: American Film Genres*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich.

Stoneman, Rod. 1996. "South/South Axis: For a Cinema Built by, with and for Africans." In *African Experiences of Cinema*, edited by Imruh Bakari and Mbye Cham, 175–180. London: British Film Institute.

Tadesse, Bitania. 2016. "Revolutionary Ethiopia through the Lens of the Contemporary Film Industry." *Northeast African Studies* 16 (1): 167–196.

Teo, Stephen. 2017. *Eastern Westerns: Film and Genre Outside and Inside Hollywood*. London and New York: Routledge.

Tesfaye Mamo. 2006. *YeItyopya Sinima Ketilant Iskezaré/Ethiopia's Cinema, from Past to Present*. Paper given at the "Seminar on Copyrights and Related Issues in Ethiopia," Hilton Hotel, August 12, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. [የኢትዮጵያ ሲኒማ ከትላንት እስከዛሬ]

Teshome, Yirgashewa, ed. 2012. *New Cinema*. Addis Ababa: Linkage Arts Center.

Thomas, Deborah. 2000. *Beyond Genre: Melodrama, Comedy and Romance in Hollywood Films*. Dumfrieshire: Cameron and Hollis.

Thomas, Michael W. 2013. "*አትሌቱ* -- *The Athlete*: an Ethiopian voice, a universal appeal." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 25 (1): 114–118.

— 2014. "*Harvest 3000 Years*/*Mirt Sost Shi Amat* (Haile Gerima, 1976): A Revolutionary Ethiopian Film." In *Africa's Lost Classics: New Histories of African Cinema*, edited by Lizelle Bisschoff and David Murphy, 182–189. London: Legenda.

— 2015. "The Local Film Sensation in Ethiopia: Aesthetic Comparisons with African Cinema and Alternative Experiences." *Black Camera* 7 (1): 17–41.

Thomas, Michael. W, Alessandro Jedlowski and Aboneh Ashagrie, eds. 2018 *Cine-Ethiopia: The History and Politics of Film in the Horn of Africa*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

Tibebu, Teshale. 1995. *The Making of Modern Ethiopia (1896–1974)*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.

Tigebu, Tibebeselassie. 2014. "Ethiopia: The Making of a Film Without a Score." *The Reporter* [viewed 25 August 2018]: Available from: https://allafrica-com.ezproxy.soas.ac.uk/stories/201411170238.html

Tipps, Dean. 1976. "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: a critical perspective." In *Comparative Modernization: A Reader*, edited by Cyril E. Black, 62–88. New York: The Free Press.

Triulzi, Alessandro. 2002. "Battling with the Past: New Frameworks for Ethiopian Historiography." In *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After*, edited by Wendy James et al., 276–288. Oxford: James Currey.

Tsika, Noah. 2016. "Close-Up: The Marginalization of African Media Studies: Introduction: Teaching African Media in the Global Academy." *Black Camera: An International Film Journal* 7 (2): 94–124.

Tudor, Andrew. 1973. *Theories of Film*. London: Secker and Warburg.

— [1973] 2012. "Genre." In *The Film Genre Reader IV*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, 3–11. Austin: Texas University Press.

Turton, David, ed. 2006.*Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*. Oxford: James Currey.

Ukadike, Nwachukwu Frank. 1994. *Black African Cinema*. Berkley: University of California Press.

— 2003. "Video Booms and the Manifestation of 'First' Cinema in Anglophone Africa." In *Rethinking Third Cinema*, edited by Anthony R. Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake, 126–143. New York: Routledge.

Ullendorff, Edward. [1968] 2013. *Ethiopia and The Bible: The Schweich Lectures*. *Oxford: Oxford University Press*.

Valdés, Nelson P. 1979. "Cuba y la guerra entre Somalia y Etiopía." *Estudios de Asia y Africa* 14 (2): 244–267.

Vasudevan, Ravi. 2000. "The Political Culture of Address in a 'Transitional' Cinema: A Case Study of Indian Popular Cinema." In *Reinventing Film Studies*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 130–164. New York: Hodder and Stoughton.

— 2011. *The Melodramatic Public: Film and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Walker, Michael. 1982. "Melodrama and the American Cinema." *Movie* 29 (30): 2–38.

Warren, Anita and Herrick Warren. 1978. "The Film Artist in a Developing Nation: Ethiopia." *Horn of Africa* 1 (1): 57–58.

Warshow, Robert. [1948] 2016. "The Gangster as Tragic Hero." In *Notions of Genre: Writings on Popular Film Before Genre Theory*, edited by Barry Keith Grant and Malisa Kurtz, 226–231. Austin: University of Texas Press.

— [1954] 1971. "Movie Chronicle: The Westerner." In *The Immediate Experience*, 135–154. New York: Atheneum.

— 1971. *The Immediate Experience*. New York: Atheneum.

Wendl, Tobias. 2004. "Wicked Villagers and the Mysteries of Reproduction: An Exploration of Horror Movies from Ghana and Nigeria." In *African Media Cultures: Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Rose-Marie Beck and Franck Wittmann, 263–285. Cologne: Köppe.

Williams Alan, 1984. "Is a Radical Genre Criticism Possible?" *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9 (2): 121–125.

Williams, Linda. 1998. "Melodrama Revised." In *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, edited by Nick Browne, 42–88. Berkeley: University of California Press.

— 2001. *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Williams, Raymond. [1961] 1973. *The Long Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Pelican.

Wolde Giorgis, Elizabeth. 2010. "Charting Out Ethiopian Modernity and Modernism." *Callaloo* 33 (1): 82.

Woll, Josephine. 2004. "The Russian Connection: Soviet Cinema and the Cinema of Francophone Africa." In *Focus on African Films*, edited by François Pfaff, 233–240. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Wright, Judith Hess. [1974] 2012. "Genre Films and the Status Quo." In *The Film Genre Reader IV*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, 60–68. Austin: Texas University Press.

Wright, Will. 1975. *Six Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Yates, Brian J. 2016. "From hated to Häbäsha: Oromo identity shifts in Wällo and Shäwa during the late nineteenth century." *African Identities* 14 (3): 194–208.

Zarzosa, Agustín. 2010. "Melodrama and the Modes of the World." *Discourse* 32 (2): 236–255.

— 2013. *Refiguring Melodrama in Film and Television: Captive Affects, Elastic Sufferings, Vicarious Objects*. Lanhham, MD: Lexington Books.

Zeleza, Paul T. 2003. "Introduction. The Creation and Consumption of Leisure: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations." In *Leisure in Urban Africa*, edited by Paul Zeleza and Cassandra Veney, vii–xli. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Zewde, Bahru. 2002a. *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century*. Oxford: James Currey.

— 2002b. *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855–1991*. Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Enterprise.

Zhang, Zhen. 2012. "Melodrama as Global Vernacular: *Daybreak* and Beyond." Paper given at Symposium in Memory of Miriam Hansen. Columbia University.

— 2018. "Transnational Melodrama, *Wenyi*, and the Orphan Imagination." In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 83–97. New York: Columbia University Press.

List of Formal Interviews

Abebe Beyene (veteran filmmaker). 2014. Personal communication (notes taken during unrecorded interview). Ras Hotel, Addis Ababa. July 28.

Abraham Gezahegn (established filmmaker). 2017. Personal communication (audio interview). SOAS, London. November 2.

Behailu Wassie (established filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Giorges, Addis Ababa. March 8.

Biniyam Tefera (emerging filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Oslo Cafe, Addis Ababa. March 11.

Dawit Tesfaye (filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Arat Kilo, Addis Ababa. February 27.

Debebe Eshetu (veteran actor and filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Debebe's home, Addis Ababa. March 10.

Eyerusaleam Kassahun (filmmaker and researcher). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Taitu Hotel, Addis Ababa. February 26.

Henok Ayele (established filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Taitu Hotel, Addis Ababa. February 11.

Hermon Hailay (established filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Kaldi's Coffee (Bole Medhani-Alem branch), Addis Ababa. February 17.

Kebede Mesfin (cinema manager). 2016. Personal communication (written interview). Alem Cinema, Addis Ababa. March 4.

Kidus (VCD vendor). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Outside Sebastopol Cinema Megenaña, Addis Ababa. March 3.

Mesfin Haileyesus (established actor and filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Balderas condominium, Addis Ababa. March 7.

Mikael Million (established actor and filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Mikael's home, Addis Ababa. February 15.

Naod Lemma (filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Pizza Romiya restaurant, Addis Ababa. March 5.

Paulos Regassa (filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). TriLux Pictures office, Addis Ababa. February 9.

Sewmehon Yismaw (established filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Taitu Hotel, Addis Ababa. February 26.

Sintayehu Taye (cinema manager). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Ras Hotel, Addis Ababa. March 7.

Tatek Tadesse (filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Asni Gallery, Addis Ababa. March 12.

Tesfaye Mamo (veteran filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Addis View Hotel, Addis Ababa. March 9.

Tewodros Teshome (established filmmaker and cinema-chain owner). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Sebastopol Entertainment office, Addis Ababa. February 18.

Yidnekachew Shumete (established filmmaker). 2016. Personal communication (audio interview). Kurat Films office, Addis Ababa. March 3.

Filmography

3002: Wondimu's Memories. 1976. Teferi Bizuayehu. Ethiopia: Film Development and Control Board.

79 (Seba Zetegn)/79 (Seventy Nine). 2016. Tekabe Tadiwos. Ethiopia: Harvest Pictures and Sileshi Getahun Film Production. [*79 (ሠባ ዘጠኝ)*]

8:62. 2008. Sewmehon Yismaw. Ethiopia: Mogd Pictures.

9tegn Mot/9 Deaths. 2015. Dawit Tesfaye. Ethiopia: Dir ena Mag Films. [*ዘጠኝ ሞት*]

Abay vs Vegas. 2011. Tewodros Teshome. Ethiopia: Sebastopol Films. [*አባይ ወይስ ቬጋስ*]

A Blast from the Past. 1999. Hugh Wilson. USA: Forge, Midnight Sun Pictures, New Line Cinema.

Abissinija. 1936. Vladimir Yeshurin and Boris Zeitlin. USSR: Soyuzkino Chronika.

Abro Abed/Together Crazy. 2012. Tesfaye Kinfe. Ethiopia: TD Film Production. [*አብሮ አበድ*]

Abstract. 2015. Demere Tsigie Ethiopia: Dreamer Film Production. [*አብስትራክት*]

Abuna Messias/Cardinal Messias. 1939. Goffredo Alessandrini. Italy: Romana Editrice Film.

Addis Ababa. 1985. Tesfaye Sinke. Ethiopia: Ethiopian Film Corporation. [*አዲስ አበባ*]

Adinas. 2015. Henok Ayele. Ethiopia: Kapital Film Production, Teddy Studio. [*አዲናስ*]

Afrika. 1973. Alberto Cavallone. Italy/Ethiopia: Castle Film.

Aladankushim/I Didn't Save You. 2005. Abinet Agonafir. Ethiopia: AB Film Production. [*አላዳንኩሽም*]

Alemé/My World. 2015. Sewmehon Yismaw. Ethiopia: Sabisa Films. [*ዓለሜ*]

Alien. 1979. Ridley Scott. UK/USA: Brandywine Productions, Twentieth Century-Fox Productions.

Alsetim/I Will Not Give. 2016. Bisrat Mohammed. Ethiopia: Gerado Film Production, Tsega Production. [*አልሰጥም*]

Amen. 2012. Aziz Mohamed. Ethiopia: Yared Film Production. [*አሜን*]

Anfatam/Inseparable. 2018. Samuel Teshager. Ethiopia: Geter Film Production, Kibrit Pictures. [*አንፋታም*]

Aradhana. 1969. Shakti Samanta. India: Shakti Films.

Ashenge. 2007. Paulos Regassa. Ethiopia: TriLux Pictures. [*አሸንጌ*]

Asra Andeñña Se'at/Eleventh Hour. 2006. Zelalem Woldemariam. Ethiopia: Zeleman Production. [*አሰራ አንደኛ ሰዓት*]

Aster. 1991/1992. Solomon Bekele Weya. Ethiopia: Ethiopian Film Corporation. [*አስቱር*]

Atletu/The Athlete (2009). Rasselas Lakew and Davey Frankel. USA/Germany/Ethiopia: Av Patchbay, El Atleta, Instinctive Film, Riot Entertainment, BiraBiro Films. [*አትሌቱ*]

Atse Mandela/Emperor Mandela. 2017. Mulualem Getachew. Ethiopia: Charda Film Production, Salkan Film Production. [*አፄ ማንዴላ*]

Atwided Atwilid/Don't Fall In Love, Don't Give Birth (2016). Naod Gashew. Ethiopia: Ge'ez Films. [*አትውደድ አትውለድ*]

Ayrak/Don't Be Distant. 2014. Fikreyesus Dinberu. Ethiopia: Cool Film Production. [*አይራቅ*]

Balageru/The Country Man. 2012. Hermon Hailay. Ethiopia: Asaph Pictures, Sabisa Films. [*ባላገሩ*]

Balekelem Hilmoch/Colourful Dreams. 2010. Fitsum Asfaw. Ethiopia: Cool Film Production and Bogas Film Production. [*ባለቀለም ህልሞች*]

Baletaxiw/The Taxi Driver. 2009. Yonas Birhane Mewa. Ethiopia: EthioFilm P.L.C. and Kapital Film Production. [*ባለታክሲው*]

Bandit of Sherwood Forest, The. 1946. George Sherman and Henry Levin. USA: Colombia Pictures Corporation.

Battleship Potemkin. 1925. Sergei Eisenstein. USSR: Mosfilm.

Behiywet Zuriya/Around Life. 1989. Birhanu Shibiru. Ethiopia: Ethiopian Film Corporation. [*በህይወት ዙሪያ*]

Bengal Brigade. 1954. László Benedek. USA: Universal International Pictures.

Berari Liboch/Flying Hearts. 2010. Biniyam Werku. Ethiopia: KAM Global Pictures. [*በራሪ ልቦች*]

Bermuda. 2006. Fitsum Kassahun. Ethiopia: Dunda Film Production, AB Film Production. [*ቤርሙዳ*]

Betelihem. 2011. Sem Amanuel Haile. Ethiopia: Ergib Film Production, Buze Film Production. [*ቤተልሔም*]

Bilatena/The Young Man. 2014. Kinfe Banbu. Ethiopia: Sheger Film Production. [*ብላቴና*]

Bira/Brightness. 2006. Bemnabu Kebede. Ethiopia: TY Shalom. [*ብራ*]

Black Panther. 2018. Ryan Coogler. USA: Marvel Studios, Walt Disney Pictures.

Bobby. 1973. Raj Kapoor. India: R.K. Films Ltd.

Campus. 2004. Yirgashewa Teshome. Ethiopia: Linkage Film Production. [*ካምፑስ*]

Captain Video, Master of the Stratosphere. 1951. Spencer Bennet and Wallace A. Grissell. USA: Columbia Pictures Corporation.

Chamku. 2008. Kabeer Kaushik. India: Vijayta Films.

Chuhet/Shout. 2005. Shewaferaw Desalegn. Ethiopia: Unique Digital Media Entertainment. [*ጩኸት*]

City Boyz. 2012. Roman Befikadu. Ethiopia: Sabisa Films and Kapital Film Production. [*ሲቲ ቦይዝ*]

Comoros. 2008. Abreham Kenaw. Ethiopia: Abey Film Production and Oz Film Production. [*ኮሞሮስ*]

Delalochu/The Dealers. 2014. Samson Tadesse. Ethiopia: Truth Film Production, Afider Film Production. [*ደላሎቹ*]

Des Sil/When Happy. 2017. Dereje Gashaw. Ethiopia: El-Sofi Film Production, Abayneh Tekle Film Production. [*ደስ ሲል*]

Dezdemona. 2009. Manyazewal Indeshaw. Ethiopia: Hamrawi Film Production. [*ዴዝዴሞና*]

Difret. 2014. Zeresenay Berhane Mehari. USA/Ethiopia: Haile Addis, True Aid.

Diplomat. 2012. Naod Gashew. Ethiopia: Benda Pictures. [*ዲፕሎማት*]

Disco Dancer. 1982. Babbar Subhash. India: B. Subhash Movie Unit.

Don. 1978. Chandra Barot. India: Nariman Films.

Dramma nella Kasbah/The Man From Cairo. 1953. Ray Enright. UK/Italy/USA: Michael David Productions, Societa Italiana Gestioni Manifestazioni Artistiche Italarte.

Elshaday. 2006. Yitagesu Gesit Techane. Ethiopia: Tumim Film Production. [*ኤልሻዳይ*]

Elzabel/Jezebel. 2009. Getahun Tulu. Ethiopia: Jedidiah Film Production [*ኤልዛቤል*]

Enkopa. 2016. Alemtsehay Bekele. Ethiopia: Yodit Getachew Film Production. [*እንቆጳ*]

Eskitmechi Libed/Let me be Crazy until you Return. 2015. Tariku Desalegn and Yohannes Getachew. Ethiopia: Tewodros Teshome Film Production. [*እስክትመጪ ልበድ*]

Eta Fenta/Destiny. 2005. Tesfaye Mamo. Ethiopia: TFP Pictures, Tesfaye Film Production and Promotions. [*ዕጣ ፈንታ*]

Etege 2/Empress 2. 2010/2011. Abiye Fenta. Ethiopia: Studio A. [*እቴጌ ፪*]

Eton/Furnace. 2009. Yonas Berhane Mewa. Ethiopia: Imagine Productions, Ethio Film Production. [*እቶን*]

Ewir Amora Kelabi/Feeder of the Blind Amora (Black Kite). 2016. Sewmehon Yismaw. Ethiopia: Sabisa Films [*እውር አሞራ ቀላቢ*]

F.B.I. 2011. Netsanet Werkneh. Ethiopia: Pagume Theatre and Film Production.

Felashaw/The Falasha (Beta Israel Jew). 2014. Eskender Ali. Ethiopia: Great Walia Pictures, Polygon VDM. [*ፈላሻው*]

Ferenj/European Foreigner. 1990/1991. Unknown Director. Ethiopia: Ethiopian Film Corporation; France: Medaco. [*ፈረንጅ*]

Fidda/Recompense. 1999. Beminabu Kebede. Ethiopia: Electra. [*ፍዳ*]

Fiker ena Dance/Love and Dance. 2006. Birhanu Nigusseie. Ethiopia: Axum Film Production. [*ፍቅር እና ዳንስ*]

Fiker Mecheresha/The Edge of Love. 1994. Tesfaye Mamo. Ethiopia. [*ፍቅር መጨረሻ*]

Fiker Siferd/When Love is Judged. 2005. Tewodros Teshome. Ethiopia: Teddy Studio. [*ፍቅር ሲፈርድ*]

Geday Siyarefafid/When the Killer was Late. 2013. Naod Lemma. Ethiopia: Tana Entertainment. [*ገዳይ ሲያረፋፍድ*]

Gize Bet/House of Time. 2016. Abdisa Mitku. Ethiopia: Eliana Film Production, Ewnet Film Production. [*ጊዜ ቤት*]

Glamour Girls. 1994. Chika Onukwafor ("Christian Onu"). Nigeria: NEK Video Links.

Gojo Mewichiya/To Begin a Household. N/A. Bemnabu Kebede. Ethiopia: Samy Plus. [*ጎጆ መውጪያ*]

Gudifecha/Adoption. 2002. Tatek Tadesse. Ethiopia: Combe Pictures and Black Lion Film Production. [*ጉዲፈቻ*]

Gumma/Blood Money. 1974. Michel Papatakis. Ethiopia: Amara Film Company. [*ጉማ*]

Gunga Jumna. 1961. Nitin Bose. India: Mehboob Studio and Filmistan.

Habayibi kthyr/Much-Loved. 1951. Kamal Attia. Egypt: N/A.

Ha Enna Le/Ha and Le. 2016. Teshale Werku. Ethiopia: Viki Films, Ye'amlak Sira Film Production. [*ሀ እና ለ*]

Hagerish Hageré/Your Country Is My Country. 2016. Mulualem Getachew. Ethiopia: Charda Film Production. [*ሀገርሽ ሀገሬ*]

Hello Ethiopia. 2013. Yohannes Feleke. Ethiopia: Bifawaka Films, BiraBiro Films. [*ሄሎ ኢትዮጵያ*]

Heran. 2015. Zelalem Banteyregu. Ethiopia: Fiar Film Production. [*ሔራን*]

Hereyet. 2015. Birhane Getachew. Ethiopia: Biré Man Film Production. [*ጎረየት*]

Hermela. 2005. Yonas Birhane Mewa. Ethiopia: EthioFilm P.L.C. [*ሔርሜላ*]

Herol. 2016. Eyob Aragaw. Ethiopia: Super Film Production. [*ሔሮል*]

Hiroshima. 2011. Serawit Fikré. Ethiopia: Serawit Multimedia Production. [*ሒሮሺማ*]

Hirut, abatwa mannew?/Hirut, Who Is Her Father? 1964. Lambros Jokaris. Ethiopia: National Film and Publicity Company. [*ሂሩት አባቷ ማነው?*]

Hiyweté/My Life. 2012. Bisrat Mohammed. Ethiopia: Gerado Film Production. [*ህይወቴ*]

Hiywet Indewaza/A Life Not Taken Seriously. 1998. Kidist Bayeliñ. Ethiopia: K. A. Film and Advertising Company. [*ህይወት እንደዋዛ*]

Il fiore delle Mille e una note/Arabian Nights. 1974. Pier Paolo Pasolini. Italy: PEA Produzioni Europee Associate; France: Les Productions Artistes Associés.

Il grande appello/The Great Appeal. 1936. Mario Camerini. Italy: ADIA Films and Artisti Associati.

Kay Sihtet/The Red Mistake. 2006. Tewodros Teshome. Ethiopia: Sebastopol Films. [*ቀይ ስህተት*]

Keletat/Once upon a Time. 2016. Kidist Yilma. Ethiopia: Alen Entertainment. [*ክፅለታት*]

Kemaydersubet/Unreachable. 2009. Netsanet Werkneh. Ethiopia: Tsebet Films. [*ከማይርሱበት*]

Kemis Yelebesku'let/The Day I Wore a Dress. 2014. Henok Ayele. Ethiopia: Yegizébét Pictures, Sabisa Films, Jazz Amba Entertainment. [*ቀሚስ የለበስኩ'ለት*]

Kezkaza Welafen/Cold Flame. 2002. Tewodros Teshome. Ethiopia: Sebastopol Films. [*ቀዝቃዛ ወላፈን*]

Laawaris. 1981. Prakash Mehra. India. PM Productions.

La-Borena. 2013. Belay Getaneh. Ethiopia: Angel Eyes Film Production. [*ላ-ቦረና*]

Lageba New/I'm Getting Married. 2010. Habtamu Mamo. Ethiopia: Solar Film Production. [*ላገባ ነው*]

Lalombe. 2010. Abreham Tsegaye. Ethiopia [*ላሎምቤ*]

Lamb. 2015. Yared Zeleke. Ethiopia: Slum Kid Films, Gloria Films, Heimatfilm and Dublin Films, Film Farms and ZDF/Das kleine Fernsehspiel.

Latamelchign/You Won't Escape Me. 2014. Aschenaki Bekele. Ethiopia: Altemet Production. [*ላታመልጪኝ*]

Lawnderi Boy/Laundry Boy. 2011. Tsegaye Yohannes and Leul Solomon. Ethiopia: Abey Film Production. [*ላውንደሪ ቦይ*]

Living in Bondage. 1992. Chris Obi-Rapu ("Vic Mordi"). Nigeria: NEK Video Links.

Lomi Shita/Scent of Lemon. 2013. Abraham Gezahegn. Ethiopia. Mavrick Films. [*ሎሚ ሽታ*]

Luciano Serra, pilota/Luciano Serra, Pilot. 1938. Goffredo Alessandrini. Italy: Aquila Cinematografica.

Magnificent Seven, The. 1960. John Sturges. USA: The Mirisch Company, Alpha Productions.

Meba/Meba (Tithe)[66]. 2015. Kidist Yilma. Ethiopia: Galaxy Film Production. [*መባ*]

Mefenkil Setoch/Revolt against Women. 2011. Michael Leulseged. Ethiopia: Shebele Films. [*መፈንቅለ ሴቶች*]

Mensut. 2016. Fisiha Getachew. Ethiopia: Eshka Film Production. [*መንሱት*]

Mesenakil/The Obstacle. 1989/1990. Abreham Tsegaye. Ethiopia: The Prime of Life Theater. [*መሰናክል*]

Meswe'at/Sacrifice. 2006. Henok Ayele. Ethiopia: Roha Film Production. [*መሥዋዕት*]

Midstream. 1929. James Flood. USA: Tiffany Pictures.

Mi'eraf Hulet/Chapter Two. 2016. Fikreyesus Dinberu. Ethiopia: Cool Film Production. [*ምዕራፍ ሁለት*]

Mirt Sost Shi Amet/Harvest: 3,000 Years. 1976. Haile Gerima. USA/Ethiopia: Mypheduh Films.

Mister Eks/Mr. X. 2011. Tewodros Tesfaye. Ethiopia: United Film Production. [*ሚስተር ኤክስ*]

Mizewochu/The Groomsmen. 2008. Abraham Gezahegn. Ethiopia: Sublime Creative Arts and Press Works. [*ሚዜዎቹ*]

Moñu: Ye'arada Lij 4/The Fool: Cocky Child 4. 2018. Bruk Tamru. Ethiopia: Shadow Film Production. [*ሞኙ: የአራዳ ልጅ 4*]

Moscow My Love. 1974. Aleksandr Mitta and Kenji Yoshida. USSR/Japan: Mosfilm, Toho.

Mother India. 1957. Mehboob Khan. India: Mehboob Productions.

Noi peccatori/We, Sinners. 1953. Guido Brignone. Italy: Titanus.

Netsa Tigil/Wrestle. 2012. Mohammed Dawud. Ethiopia: Amen Film Production, HaHu Film Production. [*ነፃ ትግል*]

Never Weaken. 1921. Fred Newmeyer. USA: Rolin Films.

Nigus Nahusenay/King Nahusenay. 2006. Arega Solomon. Ethiopia: Hule Woud Film Production. [*ንጉሰ ናሁሠናይ*]

Nishan/Nishan (Medal of Honour). 2013. Yidnekachew Shumete. Ethiopia: Kurat Films. [*ኒሻን*]

Passion du Christ, La/Passion of Christ, The. 1897. Director N/A. France: La Bonne Presse.

Pendulum. 2011. Henok Ayele. Ethiopia: Tom Film Production. [*ፔንዱለም*]

[66] An obligatory payment to the Church or other religious institution.

Piccoli naufraghi/Small Castaways. 1939. Flavio Calzavara. Italy: Alfa Film and Mediterranea Film.

Rebuni/Teacher (of moral everyday instruction and traditions). 2014. Kidist Yilma. Ethiopia: Galaxy Film Production and 123 Studio. [*ረቡኒ*]

Rotten Existence. 1968. Solomon Bekele Weya. Ethiopia: N/A.

Sakilign/Laugh For Me. 2016. Birhanu Werku. Ethiopia: Ewnet Film Production. [*ሳቅልኝ*]

Sara. 2006. Helen Tadessa. Ethiopia: Tilahun Gugsa Advertising. [*ሳራ*]

Sebebeña/The Provoker. 2013. Fitsum Kassahun. Ethiopia: AB Music and Film Production. [*ሰበበኛ*]

Selam New?/Is it Peace? 2016. Kidist Yilma. Ethiopia: 123 Studio, Elna FilmProduction. [*ሠላም ነው?*]

Selayochu/The Spy. 2012. Fitsum Asfaw. Ethiopia: Bogas Film Production, Cool Film Production. [*ሰላዮቹ*]

Semayawi Feres/Blue Horse. 2005. Serawit Fikré. Ethiopia: Serawit Multimedia Production. [*ሰማያዊ ፈረስ*]

Sené[67] *30*. 2015. Fikreyesus Dinberu. Ethiopia: Cool Film Production. [*ሰኔ 30*]

Sentinelle di bronzo/Sentinels of Bronze. 1937. Romolo Marcellini. Italy: Fono Roma.

Set/Woman. 2011. Awol Hayredin. Ethiopia: King Awol Film Production. [*ሴት*]

Seven Samurai. 1954. Akira Kurosawa. Japan: Toho.

Sew Belké/Someone To Suit Me. 2006. Belay Getaneh. Ethiopia: Atronse Pictures. [*ሰው በልኬ*]

Shaft in Africa. 1973. John Guillermin. USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Shotelay/Demon (that inflicts a disease on new-born infants). 2005. Biniyam Addis. Ethiopia: Bini Brue Film Production. [*ሾተላይ*]

Sidet/Exile. 2007. Demere Tsige. Ethiopia: Coster Picture. [*ስደት*]

Siga Yata Menfes/Bodiless Spirit. 1996. Debebe Eshetu. Ethiopia: Dimbulka Productions [*ሥጋ ያጣ መንፈስ*]

Silä Anchi/For You. 2008. Belay Getaneh. Ethiopia: Hanos Film Production and Oz Film Production. [*ስለ አንቺ*]

Silä Enat Lij/For My Mother's Son. 2015. Muluken Teshome. Ethiopia: Sebastopol Entertainment. [*ስለ እናት ልጅ*]

[67] The 10th month in the Ethiopian calendar.

Silemayzenega Wileta/The Unforgettable Favour. 2004. Yeneneh Tesfaye. Ethiopia: Abyssinia Production. [*ስለማይዘነጋ ውለታ*]

Sir Mizewa/Under the Bridesmaid. 2013. Bisrat Mohammed. Ethiopia: Habesha Group Film, Tsega Production, Gerado Film Production. [*ሰር ሚዜዋ*]

Siryet/Absolution. 2007. Yidnekachew Shumete Desalegn. Ethiopia: Tom Film Production. [*ሰርየት*]

Sost Meazen/Triangle. 2013. Tewodros Teshome. Ethiopia: Sebastopol Entertainment. [*ሶስት ማዕዘን*]

Sost Meazen 2/Triangle 2. 2016. Tewodros Teshome. Ethiopia: Sebastopol Entertainment. [*ሶስት ማዕዘን 2*]

Sotto la Croce del Sud/Under the Southern Cross. 1938. Guido Brignone. Italy: Mediterranea Film.

Stagecoach. 1939. John Ford. USA: Walter Wanger Productions.

Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope. 1977. George Lucas. USA: Lucasfilm, Twentieth Century Fox.

Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back. 1980. Irvin Kirshner. USA: Lucasfilm.

Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi. 1982. Richard Marquand. USA: Lucasfilm.

Tadañochu/The Hunted. 2005. Ermias Tadesse and Abebe T. Ethiopia. [*ታዳኟቹ*]

Tagachu/The Hostage. 2005. Shewanesh Mola. Ethiopia: TY Shalom. [*ታጋቹ*]

Taschershiñalesh/You've Made Me Finish It. 2013. Bizuayew Eshetu and Habtamu Mamo. Ethiopia: Solar Film Production. [*ታሰጨርሺኛለሽ*]

Taza/Taza (Eave). 2017. Kidist Yilma. Ethiopia: Eskis Film Production, 123 Film Production. [*ታዛ*]

Tiggil Dil, Dil Tiggil/Struggle Victory, Victory Struggle. 1978. Michel Papatakis. Ethiopia: Ethiopian Film Centre. [*ትግል ድል ፣ ድል ትግል*]

Three Steps North. 1951. W. Lee Wilder. Italy/USA: W. Lee Wilder Productions, Continentalcine

Tilaï. 1990. Idrissa Ouedraogo. Switzerland/UK/France/Burkina Faso/Germany: BBC, COF, Evangelish Reformiarte Kirche, Filmcooperative, French Ministry of Cooperation and Development, La Fondation Gan pour le Cinéma, Les Films des l'Avenir, Ministère de la Culture de la Republique Française, Rhea Films, Stanley Thomas Johnson Stiftung, Waca Films.

Tilefeñ/Abduct Me. 2015. Mulualem Getachew. Ethiopia: Charda Film Production and Bethlehem Film Production. [*ጥለፈኝ*]

Tinbit/Prophecy. 2005. Esayas Gizaw. Ethiopia: Esayas Gizaw Film Production. [*ትንቢት*]

Tizitah/Remembrance. 2010. Habtamu Mebratu. Ethiopia: Heden Film Production. [*ትዝታህ*]

Tizm/(Au)tism. 2016. Sophonyas Taddese. Ethiopia: Bekal Film Production. [*ትዝም*]

Traffikwa/The Traffic Policewoman. 2013. Eyerusaleam Kassahun. Ethiopia: Arki Sira Production. [*ትራፊኳ*]

Tsamako. 2001. Zekarias Haile-Mariam. Ethiopia: Mega Advertising. [*ፃማኮ*]

Tsetset/Remorse. 1990/1991. Tesfaye Sinke. Ethiopia: International Film Production Company NRMIS. [*ፀፀት*]

Tsinu Kal/The Binding Word. 2014. Daniel Beyene. Ethiopia: Tom Film Production. [*ፅኑ ቃል*]

Tulsi: Mathrudevobhava. 2008. Ajay Kumar. India: Padmavati Enterprises.

Una stagione all'inferno/*A Season in Hell*. 1971. Nelo Risi. Italy: Difnei Cinematografica; France: Ancinex.

Utopia. 2015. Behailu Wassie. Ethiopia: Maki Film Production. [*ዩቶጲያ*]

Waqt. 1965. Yash Chopra. India: Yash Raj Films.

Werk Bewerk/Gold by Gold. 2012. Roman Ayele. Ethiopia: Serawit Multimedia Production [*ወርቅ በወርቅ*]

Weyteru/The Waiter. 2011. Habtamu Mamo. Ethiopia: Dunda Film Production. [*ዌይተሩ*]

Wisané/Decision. 2008. Tom Thomas. Ethiopia: Fusion Addis. [*ውሳኔ*]

Yabedech: Ye'arada Lij 3/She is Crazy: Cocky Child 3. 2017. Bruk Tamru. Ethiopia: Shadow Film Production. [*ያበደች፡ የአራዳ ልጅ 3*]

Ya Ken/That Day. 2013. Teshale Werku. Ethiopia: Master Sound, Mahlet Production. [*ያ ቀን*]

Yaltasebew/Unthinkable. 2013. Hermon Hailay. Ethiopia: M. B. Z Film Production. [*ያልታሰበው*]

Yanchiw Léba/Yours Thievingly. 2011. Belay Getaneh. Ethiopia: Green Mountain Film Production and Sofi Film Production. [*ያንቺው ሌባ*]

Yanegeskeñ/The One Who Enthroned Me. 2015. Mohammed Dawud. Ethiopia: Spots Film Production [*ያነገሰኸኝ*]

Ye'Arada Lij/Cocky Child. 2015. Bruk Tamru. Ethiopia: Shadow Film Production. [*የ'አራዳ ልጅ*]

Yeberedow Zemen/The Ice Age. 2002. Helen Tadessa. Ethiopia: Tilahun Gugsa Advertising and Sharp Videography. [*የበረዶው ዘመን*]

Yefiker ABCD/Love's ABCD. 2012. Dawit Negash. Ethiopia: Cool Film Production. [*የፍቅር ABCD*]

Yefiker Kal/Love's Word. 2014. Ermias Tadesse and Joseph Ebongo. Ethiopia: 123 Studio and Joseph Ebongo Film Production. [*የፍቅር ቃል*]

Yefiker Neger/Love's Thing. 2006. Tsion Kiros. Ethiopia: Kasopiya Film Production. [*የፍቅር ነገር*]

Yefiker Wagaw/The Price of Love. 2015. Hermon Hailay. Ethiopia: HM Film Production. [*የፍቅር ዋጋው*]

Yegeter Lij/The Country Girl. 2016. Wondewosen Yihub. Ethiopia: Ewnet Film Production and Ney Entertainment. [*የገጠር ልጅ*]

Yeger Ita/The Foot's Lot. 2010. Tesfaye Gebremariyam. Ethiopia: Mimu Film Production. [*የዕግር ዕጣ*]

Yejenber Tila/The Sun's Shadow. 1994. Abreham Tsegaye. Ethiopia: Sima Video and Electronics and East Africa Film Production. [*የጀንበር ጥላ*]

Yekenfer Wedaj/Lovers. N/A. Bemnabu Kebede. Ethiopia [*የከንፈር ወዳጅ*]

Yekitnesh/The Ordinary. Early 1990s (exact date unknown). Wibshit Werk-Alemahu. Ethiopia. [*የክትነሽ*]

Yelib Kelebet/The Heart's Ring. 1996. Abreham Tsegaye. Ethiopia: Ambassel Music Video and Electronics. [*የልብ ቀለበት*]

Yelij Habtam/Rich Kid. 2016. Abdisa Mitku. Ethiopia: Charda Film Production, ABD Film Production. [*የልጅ ሃብታም*]

Yemanat?/Who's is She? 2012. Abdurezak Shemsu. Ethiopia: Bilen Film Production. [*የማናት?*]

Yematbela Wef/The Bird That Cannot Be Eaten. 2013. Michael Leulseged. Ethiopia: Teddy Film. [*የማትበላ ወፍ*]

Yemoriyam Midir/The Land of Moriah. 2008. Yonas Berhane Mewa. Ethiopia: Ethio Film Production [*የሞሪያም ምድር*]

Yemot Fiker/Love of Death. 1996/1997. Birhanu Shibiru. Ethiopia. [*የሞት ፍቅር*]

Yenegen Alweldim/I Will Not Be Born Tomorrow. 2016. Abreham Gezahegn. Ethiopia: Formod Multimedia Production. [*የነገን አልወልድም*]

Yenekezech Hiywet/Her Worn-Out Life. 1998. Demere Tsigie. Ethiopia [*የነቀዘች ህይወት*]

Yenetsa Tiwild/The Free Generation. 2002. Abreham Tsegaye. Ethiopia: Haile and Alem International. [*የነፃ ትውልድ*]

Yeras Ashkir/Personal Servant. 2013. Zekariyas Kassa. Ethiopia: Awassa Family Film Production. [*የራስ አሽከር*]

Ye'shoh Atir/Thorny Fence. 2004. Tekste Girma. Ethiopia [*የ'ሾህ አጥር*]

Yesiol Mushiroch/Hell's Bride and Groom. 2012. Girma Bekele Kemsi. Ethiopia: Blue Sky Film Production. [*የሲኦል ሙሽሮች*]

Yetikur Fert/The Black Jewel. 2015. Asefa Mekonen. Ethiopia: Zewge Art Promotion. [*የጥቁር ፈርጥ*]

Yetsehay Mewicha Lijoch/Sons of Sunrise. 2016. Sewmahon Yismaw. Ethiopia: Sabisa Films. [*የፀሃይ መውጫ ልጆች*]

Yewendoch Gudday/Men's Affair. 2007. Henok Ayele. Ethiopia: Arki Sira Production. [*የወንዶች ጉዳይ*]

Yewendoch Gudday 2/Men's Affair 2. 2009. Admasu Kebede. Ethiopia: Arki Sira Production. [*የወንዶች ጉዳይ 2*]

Yigbagn/Appeal. 2012. Henok Ayele. Ethiopia: Nolawi Film Production, Afromantic Films Production. [*ይግባኝ*]

Yimechish: Ye'arada Lij 2/May You Be Comfortable: Cocky Child 2. 2016. Bruk Tamru. Ethiopia: Shadow Film Production. [*ይመችሽ: የአራዳ ልጅ 2*]

Yipewez/Shuffle It. 2013. Yafet Zewde. Ethiopia: Roha Film Production, Tez Film Production. [*ይፐወዝ*]