

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Portrayal of Gender and Power Relations in Two Amharic Films: *Rabboni* and *Endateketelegn*

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Abstract

*This research is an attempt to critically analyze how gender and power relations are portrayed in Amharic films: **Rabboni** (Master) and **Endateketelegn** (Do not follow me). The films were selected based on their content involving gender perspective, the directors' gender, and the presence of a strong protagonist woman character. The two films were critically analyzed using feminist film theory, the social construction of gender, and gender and power relations. The findings of the analysis indicate that female characters are portrayed dominantly as beautiful, strong, self-confident, and independent. On the contrary, the men are portrayed as handsome, psychologically weak, powerless, and indecisive. The sources of women's power in the films are the ways they grew up, the materials they own, and the knowledge they acquire in the story world. The females in the films are made to exercise the full freedom of being female which is unlikely for films produced in a highly patriarchal society. In conclusion, these Amharic films are attempting to serve as change-makers in gender power relations in Ethiopian society through their portrayal of women that challenge and reverse taken for granted stereotypical roles and characteristics assigned to women.*

Keywords: Gender, Amharic Films, Gender power, Gender portrayal, Patriarchy, Feminist Film theory.

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1. Introduction

In patriarchal culture, the positions of men and women in society are determined. Women are not only treated but also portrayed as inferior, weak, submissive, and emotional while men are considered superior, strong, protective and decisive. Such treatments and portrayals are entrenched in a patriarchal system: a system that promotes the belief that men are superior to women. Male and female have physical and biological differences, but these differences should not lead women to be inferior to men. Feminists argue that such differences should be celebrated, but the difference should not favor one over the other. They try to show the differences between men and women in terms of the nuance of sex and gender (Tyson, 2006).

According to Holmes (2009), sex and gender have different meanings. He says that, "Sex refers to whether a person is considered female or male, based on the kind of body they have. Gender describes the ideas and practices that constitute femininity and masculinity." (p.2). From Holmes's idea, we can understand that sex is associated with physical and biological features whereas gender is a socially constructed identity. Gender is described as social expectations, rules, and norms attached to femininity and masculinity (Tyson 2006; Holmes, 2009). It has a significant effect on every person's life. Explaining this, Miller (2016) says, "Gender is [...] one of the most salient and influential aspects of a person's identity. Gender influences a person's appearance, interest, activities, friendships, interpersonal styles, romantic relationships, and career decisions (p. 1)."

Gender is also the source of power. As Koester (2015) indicates, "Gender is one of the most persistent causes, consequences, and manifestations of power relation" (p.1). The patriarchal view presents men as powerful, independent, and breadwinners, and women as subordinate, weak, and homemakers. Such thoughts and practices are supported by different institutions. Media, in our case cinema, is one among these institutions through which gender representations and gender power relations are widely represented. Cinema reflects and shapes people's world views and social reality such as gender. The media is one of the most predominant and influential cultural materials that is intertwined into our daily lives and occupies our consciousness with different messages related to how we see men and women (Wood, 2004). Cinema, one of the powerful media in the present world, does not only reflect but also creates, and challenges the existing social practice of gender. Similarly, gender issues are appearing in Amharic films as they are prevalent in cinema elsewhere.

One of the issues which are strongly criticized in the Amharic films is the way females are represented (Gebeyehu and Landsaria, 2019; Bitania, 2016; Tigist, 2006). Ethiopia is a patriarchal society that places women next to men (Haregewaine & Emebet, 2003). Hence, cinema that is produced in the country may reinforce or challenge the existing system. Therefore, the present study addresses whether an alternative world (feminist) view other than patriarchy is presented in contemporary Ethiopian cinema.

2. Review of Literature

Although cinema productions are increasing in Ethiopia, "research in [cinema] is at its infancy." (Jedlowski 2015, p. 182). Especially, how gender is represented in the cinema of Ethiopia has not been researched adequately. One may reasonably wonder why scholarship on Ethiopian cinema remains to be scanty. Thomas (2015) mentions some of the reasons as follows,

The Ethiopian experience is overlooked within the vastly expanding scholarship dedicated to African film and media studies as the Ethiopian context proves less accessible to outsiders for linguistic, cultural, and historic reasons, while European and American scholars have historically focused on Anglophone and Francophone contexts (p. 18).

On the other hand, Aboneh (2016) argues that scholars in the area ignored Ethiopian cinema because they believed that African cinema is merely a legacy of colonialism, or they may deliberately omit it (p. 724). Bitania (2016) also adds to this point that, unlike other African films, Ethiopian cinema has not been able to get international exposure due to its languages, mainly Amharic and some Tigrinya and Afan Oromo languages (p.170). Hence, critical literature is scarce on Ethiopian cinema. The knowledge gap on the cinema of the country as well as its absence in the cinema studies of Africa and of the world itself reassures one to research Ethiopian cinema. Consequently, this study attempts to fill the knowledge gap by taking one particular case, i.e., gender and power relationships in Ethiopian cinema.

While the gap is still apparent, we find some endeavors in the area of Ethiopian cinema. Among them, Thomas (2015) analyzed some movies from different genres and themes. Aboneh (2016) researched the socio-economic and political impact of the imperial era on the development of Ethiopian cinema. Bitania's (2016) article focuses on "Revolutionary Ethiopia through the lens of the contemporary film industry". She analysed some films using Mulvey's male gaze theory and concluded that Amharic films are highly subjected to showing patriarchal views of women as subordinate, dependent, victim, and so on (2016, pp. 189-190). Thomas and Aboneh hardly touched upon the issue of gender. However, Eyerusalem (2018) tried to show women's participation in the cinema of Ethiopia, and presents women scriptwriters, actors, directors, films characters etc. Drawing on the findings and perspectives of the above studies, the present research aspires to add knowledge to this field by investigating Ethiopian cinema from the vantage point of feminism.

3. Theoretical Framework

Feminist Film Theory

Feminist film theory came into being in the second wave of feminism early in the 1970s (Hayward, 2000). The theory deals with analyzing the representations of women in films. In the theory, cinema is taken as a "cultural practice that represents the myths about women and femininity as well as men and masculinity" (Smelik, 2007, p. 491). And the central elements of feminist film theory and criticism are related to representations and spectatorship (Smelik, 2016, p. 1). In feminist film theory, cinema not only reflects social relations but also actively constructs meanings of sexual difference. Smelik explains, "Feminist film theory claims that cinema is more than just a reflection of social relations: film actively constructs meanings of sexual difference and sexuality" (2016, p. 1).

The dominant ideology that is presented in cinema concerning gender is patriarchy. The narrative of cinema contains the desire and fears of patriarchy. In cinema, women are on the display and men are the bearers of the look (Mulvey, 1999). The British well-known feminist film theoretician Laura Mulvey (1999) wrote an article entitled 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' and coined the term (male gaze) (1999, p. 837). In the theory she explains that the role of women in films is often as objects; this is because of the common patriarchal social structure and lack of diversity in directors. Her theory (Male Gaze) is

highly influenced by Sigmund Freud's and Jacques Lacan's theories of psychoanalysis. According to Mulvey, "Psychoanalytic theory is thus appropriated here as a political weapon to demonstrate the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form" (1999, p. 833). Because most men are the maker of films, they unconsciously reflect what they want to see in the cinema they produce. In the cinema, pleasure is created through the look that ordered the world into active/ male and passive/female. The one who looks for pleasure is the man and the one to be looked at as an object of desire is the woman. In the ideology of patriarchy, men hold power in all important institutions, and women are deprived of such power (Wilson, 2000, 1494).

Feminist film theory is directed toward criticizing and analyzing dominant patriarchal cinema (McCormick, 1991). Cinemas are produced by men, for men, and about men; and women have no more important role than being looked at as an object for the pleasure of men. To challenge such practice counter cinema is needed i.e. cinema that is produced about women and for their pleasure; they call it women's cinema or counter cinema (Johnston, 1999). The alternative presented by feminist film theory is depicting women in different roles and characterization changes. As to them, women should be portrayed as human beings and heroines who can be articulated beyond being mothers, lovers, and child caregivers. They should have to have an active role in the films than being an object of desire used by their male partners (Smith, 1999). To have such a result, real conscious corrections that represent the positive image of women in the film industry are necessary.

The Social Construction of Gender

Through different phases, the feminist movement shifted its emphasis from women's representations and women's writings to gender theory, which is how the two genders interact. Gender theory shifted its focus on the analysis of females to the two genders' interactions (Klarer (1999, p. 95). The social constructivist theory of gender takes gender as a socially constructed phenomenon. Tyson (2006) explains gender categories as socially constructed,

[...] women are not born feminine, and men are not born masculine. Rather, these gender categories are constructed by society, which is why this view of gender is an example of what has come to be called social constructionism (p. 86).

This theory sees gender as socially as well as culturally constructed roles, responsibilities, privileges, and expectations of women and men. Every society sets standards and values for women and men to follow or to do. Furthermore, gender is the fundamental element of men's and women's identities. According to Macnamara (2006), gender identity study considers the following:

If it is true that gender is fundamental to the identities of women as more than half a century of feminist theory has argued, it is fair to conclude that gender is also an important element in the identities of men and boys both individually and collectively (p. 7).

Therefore, in this research, both men and women are the subjects of the study. Traditionally what it means to be a masculine man and a feminine woman have certain characteristics. Men are expected to show masculine qualities such as being assertive, aggressive, physically strong, tough, rational, and goal-orientated, whereas women are expected to exhibit feminine traits such as soft, weak, sensitive, delicate, nurturing, patient, collab-

orative, passive, beautiful, graceful, caring, gentle, and empathetic. In this article, the above traits are seen as social constructive characteristics of feminine and masculine which are used to critically analyze gender constructions in the selected films.

Gender and Power

Power exists everywhere. Kalbfleisch and Cody (1995) explain power in men and women's relationships saying, "[t]here is power when women and men live together, work together, talk together, or are simply in each other's company (p. Xiii)". Therefore, gender can be taken as one of the sources of power which traditionally allows men to have control over women. The system that lets men dominate women is called patriarchy. Hierro and Marquez (1994) explain gender as, "...a system of social hierarchy. It is an inequality of power imposed on sex and constitutes the sexualization of power (p.175)". Power in the gender context means domination and it also refers to masculine superiority over feminine (Hierro and Marquez, 1994).

Gender and power are related. The male gender has the power to control the other gender and the female gender is expected to be submissive. Hartsock (1990) affirms this when he says, "power is associated firmly with the male and masculinity" (p. 157). But we may find women who have power over men and other women. This is because the source of power differs. Foucault explains the source of power and its existence as follows: "Power is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere (1978, p.93.)". Gender influences the power relationship in society. Koester (2015) explains how gender affects power relation as,

Gender shapes power relations at all levels of society. In fact, the set of roles, behaviors, and attitudes that societies define as appropriate for men and women ('gender') may well be the most persistent cause, consequence, and mechanism of power relations from the intimate sphere of the household to the highest levels of political decision-making (p. 2).

The two concepts, gender and power are related, and what it means to be a 'woman' is to be powerless which is characterized as quiet, obedient, and accommodating and to be a 'real man' opposes the former; that is, powerful, outspoken, controlling and imposing men's will on women (Koester, 2015). In addition, as to Mulvey (1999), 'gender power controls cinema' and cinema is produced for men viewers and is deeply intended to promote the patriarchal ideology and discourse.

4. Methodology

This study is qualitative. It employs content and textual analysis. The selected films are taken as texts. Extracted scenes that are suitable for showing gender relationships and/or power relations were taken from the films and are examined following the plotline of each film to understand how gender is portrayed. The relationships between men and women characters, their power relations, and the different positions they hold in the story have been considered to understand gender and power representations.

A purposive sampling technique, with text selection criteria of the film content that calls gender perspective, the film directors' gender, and the presence of a strong protagonist woman character was used. The selected films are Rabboni (Master) (2014, dir. Kidist Yilma), a female director, and Endateketelegn (Do not follow me) (2015, dir. Dagmawi Yirga), a male director. The directors were chosen because they were considered as the maker of

the films and sometimes directors and scriptwriters are the same (Hayward, 2000).

The selected scenes were transcribed into written texts after watching them repeatedly and translated into English. Since the researchers have limited cinematographic background, the analysis was limited to dialogue, narrative, and performances. Therefore, to show gender differences, narratives, dialogues, performances (actions, facial and body expressions of characters) and screenshots were considered as data for the analysis. The study was conducted comparatively on how male and masculinity and female and femininity were presented. It is worth noting that gender power in this study is considered as controlling and dominating the narrative through different means.

5. Results and Discussion

The films under analysis are *Rabboni* (Master) and *Endateketlegn* (Do not follow me). They are categorized under the romance film genre. In *Rabboni*, we find Adey, the leading female character, and Luel, the leading male character. And in *Endateketlegne* (Do not follow me), we have Hanna, a female character, and Biruk, a male character. Since gender portrayal includes physical, psychological, power, pleasure, masculinity, femininity, and patriarchy as well as an alternative world view, the topics are organized under these themes. The next subtopics will present results and discussions using selected theories and themes as a lens to understand the portrayal of gender in the films.

5.1. Physical Appearance versus Psychological Traits

Smith (1999) states, “The role of a woman in a film almost revolves around her physical attraction and the mating games she plays with the male characters (p. 14)”. The main character, Adey, in *Rabboni* is portrayed as a young and beautiful countryside girl. She is independent, confident, and humorous. Her looks and behavior conjure up the themes of rusticity and pristine country life: She does not wear any makeup to beautify herself. Her dresses are not stylish and her hair is not done like a young beautiful girl. Her hair is braided or carelessly ponytailed so that she can do chores easily (image 2). In almost all the scenes, she looks happy and energetic. Here, Adey is not portrayed as an object for the pleasure of men. She is portrayed as a woman who has a story to tell. She tells a story to Leul every time they are together. Here are some images that can show how she looks in the film.



Image 1 (Time 13:36)



Image 2(26:49)



Image 3(35:12)

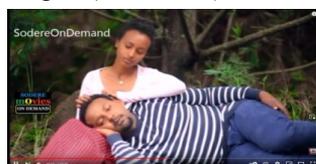


Image 4(58:05)



Image 5 (1:00:34)



Image 6(1:44:38)

As noted above, Adey looks natural; she does not wear eye shadows, lipsticks, or anything to make her more attractive. But patriarchal thinking towards women is to the contrary. Women are expected to be attractive. This behavior bestowed on women by such a society is related to the social perception of women as objects that are created to satisfy the desire of men (Mulvey 1999, p. 837). Adey's inner quality and philosophy move the story forward. She keeps her looks the same till the end of the story (Image 6). Her philosophies like keeping the environment from chemical pollution in the name of development and buying people's hearts with love rather than caring for material riches attract Leul's attention (Kidist 2014, 26:46; 41:34). In the beginning, Leul wants the land passionately but later Adey becomes his priority. At last, Leul said with affection to Adey, 'Nature attracts me' which includes Adey, too (Kidist 2014, 01:33:58).

Leul is a young businessman. He is careful about his physical appearance; he is neat and energetic. He is tall, young, handsome, and physically strong. In most scenes, although he is handsome and forceful, he looks unhappy and serious because of problems relating to his business and his married life. However, he starts to smile after he strikes up a good relationship with Adey (Image 3).



Image 7 (2:30)



Image 8(1:44:41)



Image 9(1:04:16)



Image 10(1:07:50)



Image 11(1:35:28)



Image 12(1:51:05)

Leul is also an aggressive person who wants to make things succumb to his will (masculine) (Kidist, 01:00:16). Leul is attractive and Adey falls in love with him without knowing he is married (Kidist, 01:23:57). Though he is determined to expand his business, psychologically, he is frustrated and unhappy (image 9). Here is the quote:

Leul: I thought I am successful in my life. But I understand that I am nothing.

Aman: Leul, a child is a gift of God.

Leul: You are right. But without that, I have no peace of mind. I feel like I am defeated.
(Kidist 2014, 1:04:26-1:04:55)

From the quote, we can understand that Leul feels uncertain about things and lacks something in addition to not having a child in his life. Soon after he understands that his struggling does not bring him peace and happiness, he started to question himself. However, Adey's friendship shows him the way to love a person and to understand and know the meaning of life. The lesson he takes from Adey makes him happy (Kidist 2014, 1:41:25). Then the deep hole in his life including the quarrel with his wife is settled. Here,

Adey's psychological strength causes Leul to listen to her and be certain about his love for his wife (Image 6). A woman in a patriarchal society is expected to be psychologically weak; however, Adey is depicted as psychologically strong even though she knows she will soon die of leukemia. Until her death, she cares for others and she was happy.

On the other hand, Hanna, the main character in Endateketelegn (Do not follow me), is physically portrayed as a woman who wanted to look like a male at the beginning of the story (Image 1-3). She wears jeans, shirts, shorts and a cap. She tells us that she learns to be male by denying her femininity because the family wants a boy. She grew up freely. She is physically strong to beat Biruk and other male characters (Images 3& 7). She fights with men for no reason. For this reason, Biruk defines her as a man saying, "You can call her male" (Dagmawi 2015, 4:13). Hanna shows the traits she learns from the environment. In the course of the story, Hanna starts to change her looks and her appearance when she gets into a relationship with Biruk (Image 4-6):



Image 1 (17:02)



Image 2 (13:02)



Image 3 (24:43)



Image 4 (48:14)



Image 5 (52:49)



Image 6 (1:11:33)

She is emotionally strong. She even challenges her father because he is not a good example to teach her culture and celebrate her identity. Since the family wished to have a son but could not have one, Hanna decides to act as if she is a boy. She spends her time with village boys. Her actions are learned from the physical compound she is living in. However, after she met Biruk, his patience and love for her changes her attitude towards womanhood. She starts to change her way of doing things; her dressing also changes. She has a degree in Economics but never worked with her degree because of the lower payment. Biruk advises her that she should start work so that she can become a professional and earn good salary. After taking some time on studying Biruk's business, Hanna decides to start work and rescue Biruk's project proposal from theft. She looks attractive physically and strong psychologically. Her physical appearance is appreciated and looked upon by her boss who would ask her out for a date. He comments to her, "You look beautiful today" (Dagmawi 2015, 1:09:00). No obstacle hinders Hanna to have what she desires to have. Here is what her employer witnesses about her capability:

Ato Daniel: As you know our proposal has been implemented because of the professional woman who was hired recently.

Work Colleague: We will arrange a program to celebrate the achievement of the proposal.
(Dagmawi 2015 1:16:44)

On the other hand, Biruk is a handsome, gentle, and physically strong person. In addition

to his physical looks, he has a soft demeanor (he panics when she sneezes, (image 8)) that attracts Hanna. Though he has a muscular appearance, Biruk does not believe in fighting physically to get what he wants. He prefers discussion to agree on common matters (Dagmawi 2015,50:35). This trait of Biruk benefits him for getting Hanna's friendship and losing his project proposal as well. The following images show his looks when he is in a relationship with Hanna



Image 7(2:40)



Image 8(20:14)



Image 9 (28:38)



Image 10(35:30)



Image 11(1:23:03)



Image 12(1:25:04)

Biruk's soft character is classified as feminine behavior because he never uses physical force to regain what he already lost. Hana hits him (image 7). He never hits her back. He is a non-smoker and drinks soft drinks while Hanna smokes and takes hard drinks. Furthermore, when somebody takes his belongings, he has no way to challenge and gain his property back. The next extract affirms this personality.

Friend: You are a coward. Would you simply give him what you have strived for for many years?

Biruk: What can I do? I have gone to him many times. I argued with him, but what difference did I make?

Friend: I will not leave the case even if you do! I will bring him here!

Biruk: Sit down! (Dagmawi, 2015, 50:24- 50:50)

The above quotation explains that Biruk is a hard worker and at the same time weak (coward) to handle serious matters. He wrote a proposal to support the needy people, but a person in one organization snatched the project from him and Biruk could not defend his ownership of the project. Biruk gives up on the project; he even prevents his friend from intervening in the situation. However, Hanna plans and endeavors to fight for Biruk so that he regains his ownership of the proposal (Dagmawi, 2015, 1:23:03). Hana experiences changes, including her own outlook on femininity and masculinity. But Biruk easily gives up on his project and is frustrated.

5.3. Power versus pleasure

Gender power controls cinema; it presents women in the display and men to look at (Mulvey, 1999). The gaze, as well as the power, is in the eyes and hands of men. Power is the ability to get or do whatever one wants to do. To have power, it is necessary to have money, material, or a position that can influence people to be governed for that power. Adey and Leul in Rabboni have different roles in moving the story forward. Adey is a university student but not enrolled at the time of the story. She is also the granddaughter of the

landowner, Yotor, from whom she inherited the land. Adey has land and Leul has money. Each uses their power to control what they want to have in the story. Leul looks down upon Adey as if she has no power. He says the following to describe their power difference: *Leul: Why are we writing a proposal for her?*

Aman: She wants to know if the land is going to be of better use than it is right now. She wants to talk to the owner, too.

Leul: (After long laughter) that reminded me of a story. A mouse and an elephant were crossing over a bridge and the bridge shook. And then the mouse said to the elephant, "we shook the bridge." She is like a mouse. Well, I will talk to her tomorrow. (Kidist, 2014, 09:35-10:15).

The above quote proves that in the eyes of Leul, Adey is little and powerless. However, in the next scene, Adey explains herself as the owner of the land, which is equal to Leul's company ownership by saying "Are you the owner of the company... And I (Adey) am also the owner of the land (Kidist, 2014, 13:02-13:03)". Hence, both characters have power. They acquire it from the material they have. Though they seem to have equal power, Adey has more power. She forces him to write a convincing proposal that explains the purpose of why he needed the land (Kidist, 2014, 14:11). Adey has the power to decide on the land. This was confirmed by her grandfather. He said the owner of the land is Adey and the decision is up to her (Kidist, 2014, 08:34).

Leul only cares about having a successful business and does not give any time to his family. He faces two challenges: his wife asks for a divorce, and Adey wants him to convince her for what purpose he wants the land. Leul believes at the beginning that money can buy everything but later he understands that sometimes money could cause a person to lose his/her happiness and peace. Adey describes herself as a happy person though she would die soon because of leukemia (Kidist, 2014, 1:50:03). In the former scene, Leul tells Aman that Leul is not happy and at the end of the film, he is happy because of what he learned from Adey (Kidist, 2014, 1:40:25).

Regarding power which is the ability to impose something on someone to do things willingly or forcefully, we find Adey as a powerful person. This is because the knowledge she has of nature makes her more powerful than Leul. She teaches him how the land is important for the local people and the environment through different examples. Adey's sources of power are the indigenous knowledge she has about the land as well as her education up to the university level. On the other hand, Leul neglects her at first but begins to be impressed by her over time. He starts respecting her when he understands her knowledge of nature and philosophies of life which are better than his. She believes in forgiveness, love and rationality. At last, he gives up his quest for the land but learns a lot from Adey about his family life. He was frustrated for not having what he has dreamed of. However, he becomes happy with what Adey taught him. Adey gives him practical teaching. She always forgives him when he does something wrong (Kidist, 2014, 1:14:54). He becomes passionate to learn from her. He learns to love with a full heart and with sacrifices and becomes happier than he was before. She advises him to be committed to his marriage by saying, "give yourself to your wife" (Kidist, 2014, 1:31:55). Her teachings change him for good and make him happy. In the end, he gives up his goal of buying land and expanding his company. Let's see evidence from the film scene:

Leul: (Looking at Aman who sits beside him) Adey asked me to bring her a hairpin. I couldn't give her that time. But the land she adores is accompanying her birthday with the blossoming flowers. Will she be happy when she comes

back tomorrow? What can I possibly give her? She has got what nature can offer. I don't have anything other than what she gave me. I don't have the factory I have longed to have. Did you think it would be like this sixty days ago? But I am happy. I can't wait till dawn, I missed her. (Kidist, 2014, 1:40:03-1:41:44)

The strong portrayal of the character, Adey, shows a woman can be practical and leads the story to a positive end. She also believes in God who makes her and He has the right to take her life according to His will (Kidist, 2014, 01:50). She does not care, fear or is not frustrated because she will die soon. She would rather present her life as a model for Leul and her younger brother to look up to. She loves Leul and she cares about him and his family's well-being. Adey has the power to transfer what she believes in to Leul with patience and forgiveness. She leads Leul to think critically and live with love. His broken marriage starts to revive and the medicine his wife starts taking helps her to become pregnant (Kidist, 2014, 1:50:13). Adey was able to change Leul's understanding of life and his relationship with his wife. The story presents Adey's life and the change it brings to Leul's personality (Kidist, 2014, 1:50:19). As far as the researchers' knowledge is concerned, such depictions of characters are not common in Ethiopian cinema. However, this film successfully presents a strong role model character that is independent and can change the common representations of women.

Meanwhile, in the film *Endateketelegn* (Do not follow me), Hanna has the potential to influence others around her. She has masculine characteristics at first. She uses her power to control her sisters as males try to control women. She has the physical strength to beat men. She is also aggressive (masculine) and never tolerates when she thinks that someone is messing with her. In the film, we see her beating men who want to talk to her. She uses her physical strength to demonstrate her confidence. Let us see the following extract:

Biruk's Friend: Hey you, I just remained silent when you beat me last time because I see you are a woman.

Hanna: What if I were a man?

Biruk's Friend: I would beat you hard!

Hanna: And now what do you want?

Biruk's Friend: (mistreating her) I don't want anything (she head-butts him on the forehead, throws him on the ground, and kicks him where he fell until her friends came and stopped her) (Dagmawi, 2015: 24:30-24:40)

In addition to her physical capability, she has also the knowledge to effectively implement projects. The proposal Biruk wrote is implemented by Hanna. Hence, the knowledge Hanna has is a source of her power, too. The employer who hired Hanna lets her do whatever she wants to do on the proposal to get it finalized. When she uses her talent and starts to look feminine, her behavior turns from aggressive to friendly (stops beating a man who tries to mess around her) (Dagmawi, 2015, 1:19:13).

On the other hand, Biruk has a weak and soft character which are feminine traits. He does not use physical power to beat back a person who beats him. He is a very intelligent economist who plans a project and runs his own business. However, he does not have the confidence to get what he deserves from the project he plans. Here, Hanna uses her power of knowledge to save Biruk's project proposal, which has been snatched by another person. He was close to losing it but with the help of Hanna, he gains back what he had lost (Dagmawi, 2015, 1:23:00).

Hanna starts looking feminine in the way she dresses and uses makeup to please Biruk because he comments positively every time they meet. He helps her to look feminine and

use her knowledge which is the source of her power. And Biruk becomes happy after he knows what Hanna did was for his sake (Dagmawi, 2015, 1:23:30). The physical appearance of a woman matters a lot to attract a male partner and to make him happy which is what feminists reject. However, Hanna uses her physical attractiveness to divert the attention of her employer through the male gaze (Dagmawi, 2015, 1:09:00), and she has knowledge that makes her more powerful.

The alternative view presented here implies that a knowledgeable woman can be powerful. And power does not depend on being male or female rather it can be found in the material, confidence, and knowledge one has.

5.4. Femininity versus Masculinity

In traditional patriarchal culture, femininity is attached to women, and masculinity is attached to men. This outlook takes masculinity as a stronger trait and femininity as quite the opposite. Femininity is characterized as weak, soft, beautiful, irrational, powerless, and homey while masculinity is characterized as strong, powerful, rational, decision-maker, and so on (Tyson, 2006). When we see the traits of Adey and Leul in the film *Rabboni* (Master) in light of femininity and masculinity, we find the characters having mixed behaviors.

Adey helps the family by doing household chores. She cooks, fetches water, and harvests crops from the land. She also offers food to guests who come to visit them. The role she has in the story is what a traditional woman is expected to have. The exception here is that she has authority over the land and the power to decide what she wants to do on the land, which demonstrates masculinity in addition to having the traditional role. Although Leul does not want to discuss the issue with Adey because he does not take her seriously, she is the owner of the land and the person to deal with the land issue.

Leul: My name is Leul.

Adey: Adey, My grandfather calls me Gela and my grandmother calls me Emuye, my uncle... anyways I have a lot of names in the house. Adey is my official name. You can call me Adey. Are you the owner of the company?

Leul: Yes!

Adey: And I am the owner of the land. Come into the house and we will talk there.

(Kidist, 2014, 13:01-13:03)

After she knew Leul, she starts caring about his emotions. When he feels disappointed, she shows empathy for him i.e. feminine character. She feels that Leul does not know about the use of land as a local medicine planting area. Therefore, she wants to teach him how the land is useful for the people. She already made a decision but the way she presents what she decided was with lots of care. She compares two things: money on one hand and love for others on the other. Females and males are different in handling material as well as relationships. Adey as a female cares about relationship, and Leul cares about the material. She tells him that a person can be called rich if he can buy a thing that money could not buy which is the love of others.

Because Leul concentrated on business matters, he forgets to give time to his family. That causes the problem in his marriage. He is aggressive and emotional with Adey, who is trying to help him to understand what life is about. He is focused only on his business and never gives time for friendship and family. Hence, he fails to be successful in his marriage and business. In the meantime, he gives up hope and cries about losing Adey's friendship

(femininity), his marriage, and the land he desires to have. That causes him to act improperly and makes Adey cry (Kidist Yilma, 2014, 1:00:34). He talks to Adey with anger, which is a masculine character. Finally, she reveals her decision not to sell the land because she believes that the land is serving the community as a planting area of traditional medicine. Her decision is out of good reason not of emotion. She convinces him how important the land is for the local people than it is for the company he plans to build. Adey has rationality as well as a decision-making ability, which is not what the traditional patriarchal woman is expected to have (Kidist 2014, 1:33:03).

Adey rescues Leul's marriage and brings back joy, hope and love to his life. She loves him first. When she learns that he is married but has disputes with his wife, she advises him to fix his marriage with love and patience. Therefore, Adey plays a significant role in making Leul's life straight, which is not the characteristic of traditional feminine characters who are more often than not portrayed as seductive, spoiler or fatale. She is more powerful than Leul because she is more knowledgeable. Leul speaks about Adey's influence, "I become a different person every time I visit you " (Kidist, 2014, 1:31:59).

The influence of society in determining the gender of a child is presented in the film *Endateketelegn* (Do not follow me). Society values and respects males more than females. Hanna as the main character wishes to be like a man to benefit from these values of the society. She learns and practices what she knows about masculinity. She smokes cigarettes and spends time with men. She does all these things because the society she lives in holds boys in higher regard than girls. Her childhood dream was even to be a man. Here is the evidence.

Hanna: Hi, I am Hanna. Our family is full of females when I was a child. And my father and mother always regret about not having a son. I also see that all things are done by males and why should I not be a man? Even when one person in our village asked me what I would like to be in the future, I said proudly that I want to be a man. I remember till now how he laughed at me. Who the heck are you men to do everything as to your will? You drive a truck, play football, and so on. I will not listen to you anymore. To your surprise, I am a man (Dagmawi, 2014, 00:10- 01:05).

On the other hand, Biruk shows her what a feminine character is. He is humble and patient to get Hanna into the relationship. At first, she beats him as a warning for following her. He explains that being beaten by a woman is "a shame to the sons of Adam" (Dagmawi, 2015,04:00). She called him a coward which is not a masculine character. He accepts it and never wants to react violently. Rather, he wisely handles her to understand his love. The behaviors she shows (independent, active, insensitive, brave, and assertive) are masculine. And the traits he shows (dependent, passive, receptive, and emotional) are traditional feminine characteristics. Gradually, she falls in love with Biruk. Looking feminine, acting as a female, and doing things that are expected of women become things practiced by Hanna to please Biruk. She confirms this by saying, "I become a woman for your sake" (Dagmawi 2015, 1:25:00). She starts a job to help him and to make him happy. She changes all of her thoughts about masculinity and understands what femininity is. And at the end of the story, she celebrates her femininity and declares that femininity is an identity that incorporates masculinity in it (Dagmawi, 2015,1:21:23).

Hanna pays a lot of sacrifices to make Biruk happy. She deliberately studies Biruk's colleague who stole his project and finds a way to be hired in the organization that the colleague run. As she planned, she finds Biruk's project and becomes the new project assistant. She uses her academic knowledge to fulfill the project's expectations from the concerned body. Moreover, the head of the organization also wants to abuse her sexually,

which she manages carefully. Meanwhile, Biruk finds out where she works and never lets her explain herself, which is very emotional. Biruk misunderstands her actions and breaks up with her (Dagmawi, 2015, 1:11:17-1:11:51).

Hanna with the help of Biruk gets the chance to understand her identity. She has the potential to change any difficult situation for good. She brought changes in her life, Biruk's life, and the life of others. She uses her knowledge and wisdom to gain back what Biruk had already lost. She does all this alone. She shows femininity that incorporates masculinity. Her final speech reflects this fact. She expresses femininity as a secret that can have both qualities of masculinity and femininity together.

In the film, Biruk is successful in showing Hanna the way to use her potential properly. Then he just gives up his work and his relationship with Hanna. He is not happy till he finds out that Hanna did what she did to gain his project back for his sake. Till the end, he could not give Hanna a chance to explain herself. He was too emotional and sensitive, which is not expected from a traditional masculine character. Both female and male characters show us mixed behavior of femininity and masculinity in their words and deeds. Such portrayal of characters is against patriarchy which limits the place of women at home and for feminists who want to see women in better places to share their life experiences. In addition, the films present the feminine trait as an important human behavior not as sign of inferiority.

5.4. Patriarchy versus Alternative System

In the story of the film *Rabboni (Master)*, even though we see both genders more in a traditional role, they equally participate in leading the plot. Adey as a female plays a part in showing an alternative view. The decision Adey makes on the land is respected by her family. Therefore, one alternative the film presents is a woman can have the right to make decisions in the family. Adey knows what her decision will be but wants to teach the buyer how important the land is for the local people. Later when she gets along with Leul, she starts to care about him. Consequently, she lets Leul see that the land is more important for the people than the company he builds. The two things to be compared are local medicine production and car paint production. The next extract shows the logical comparison and the decision Adey makes on the land.

Adey: What is on this land is all right. This land is not for sale. I am sorry that I couldn't do what you want me to do. (Adey grabs the soil from the ground) The waste that comes out of this (showing the soil on her hands) is not dangerous like the waste from any company. The more we push nature and the more we are developed, the tougher the problem would be. And that makes us lose what we care about.

Leul: (Looking at Adey's eyes) Nature attracts me. (Kidist, 2014, 01:33:02-01:33:53)

Adey challenges the patriarchal views about women. She is the owner of and decision-maker on the land. Her grandfather says the following, "Well, in fact, I am not the owner of this land; I have given it as an inheritance to my granddaughter. You can talk to her. It is her decision" (Kidist, 2014, 08:26-08:35). Traditionally, a woman's role is to deal with household issues like cleaning, cooking, washing, etc. However, Adey, in this film, subverts patriarchal practice by controlling the narrative in her way of handling things.

In patriarchy, crying is a feminine trait that is seen as a sign of weakness in Ethiopian culture. But in the film *Rabboni*, we see both female and male characters cry. Adey cries a lot when Leul does not care about her friendship. Leul at the same time cries without knowing the reason for his grief. So both characters show traditional feminine traits. Furthermore, patriarchy is a trend seen in Ethiopian Amharic films. However, in *Rabboni*, Adey, against patriarchal stereotypes, performs very well both in private and public spheres. She does household chores (private) as well as deals with Leul on the issue of the land (public). Adey becomes dominant, strong, and influential because her grandfather teaches her, and she is also a university student. The film portrays the female character as more powerful than men. In general, the film shows us gender is socially constructed, and educating women makes them more powerful. Let's see an extract from a scene:

Leul: What grade are you in?

Adey: I am a third-year Sanitation student at the university.

Leul: That is why you trouble me so much.

Adey: No, It's not that. I swear. Shall I make you laugh? You seem a little bit angry

(Kidist, 2014, 33:38-33:50)

From the quote, we see Leul questioning Adey's education. She challenges him well, and he believes that the reason is her education. The name *Rabboni* reminds us of Jesus Christ who is crucified for the world (in Christianity). We know this word is taken from the bible, and it is a Jewish title given to a spiritual instructor. And Adey is given such a name for the behavior she shares with people near her as Christ did. Her life is an example of Leul's future. She is dominant in every scene. She teaches moral, philosophical, and religious values to the person she cares for. She is the savior of Leul's marriage. The next scene shows us how dominant she is:

Leul: (starts reading Adey's letter on Adey's grave) ... Leul, ask the Lord your happiness with a trusting heart and He will give it to you. But you must ask honestly; you will have children with your wife that is what I hope and wish (while the letter is read by Adey's voice, Rebika (Leul's wife) is seen taking local medicine). He who is entrusted gives faith. ...

Ribka: (She is seen pregnant and close to Adey's grave) Thank you! (Walks to Leul) Did you hate me after you met her?

Leul: It's after I met her that I learned what love is (He hugs and kisses Ribka on her forehead) (Kidist, 2014, 1:50:07-1:51:29).

In the above scene, Adey's philosophy and teaching help to change Leul and his married life. Adey's faith, hope, and wish for Leul were fulfilled. Therefore, this film allows us to see the world in a different way beyond patriarchal perspectives. Both characters are independent, but they need each other to pass on the required message. Each character strives to achieve what they planned in life. Although Adey passes away, at last, she was happy with Leul's transformation (Kidist 2014, 1:50:08). The female character is portrayed as having both feminine and masculine traits that give another image to a woman in the film.

Though the film *Endateketelegn* (Do not follow me) is made in the patriarchal context, we see a female lead that has the potential to control her body and things outside her. Because society favors males over females, Hanna decides to show masculine character in a female body. Then when she finds her lover, she becomes very happy and makes Biruk happy, too. She is the one who can decide what to do with her life. She did not experience love before Biruk, and the relationship she has with Biruk is good for her to know herself better. Biruk doesn't show masculinity rather he tries to manage things wisely which is

traditional/patriarchal and considered a feminine character.

Therefore, Hanna accepts her femininity by looking beautiful, serving a meal to the family, being humble, and doing great things in the end. Her femininity attracts the other guy who stole Biruk's project, and her subject matter knowledge helps to improve the project's success (Dagmawi 2015, 1:05:30). The project ended successfully with Hanna's strength and she is elected as president of the women's association. This gives her the potential to reveal the truth that the project owner is Biruk. Finally, she wins and regains her love. The alternative view presented here is that a woman has the potential to make things right. She is wise and never uses physical power to fight but her knowledge and her personality allow her to solve problems. Let's see Hanna's speech about femininity:

Hanna: (Loud clap is heard from the auditorium, Hanna starts speaking using a microphone). Thank you! [...] Femininity is the subtle art of masculinity, not masculinity itself. No man can be a man if he does not walk in a woman's path. [...] When I did not have a clue about it, I went my way for many years to practice masculinity. [...] I liked my femininity when I realized that many male leaders, male generals, male athletes, male politicians, many elites, and scholars had passed on my path. [...] And thank you so much for making me speak today about the heroism of our esteemed sisters, who elected me President of the Women's Advocacy group. I truly thank the owner of this project and the first opener of my path of change, my love, all in all, my dearest Biruk Getenet (Dagmawi, 2015, 01:20:43-01:23:05).

In patriarchy, femininity is inferiority, but Hanna reverses it and explains it as an identity of which one can be proud, and it also has a masculine quality in it. She practices masculinity but loves femininity which allows her to exercise to be successful and happy in the end. Hana also explains femininity as an ability that every man should pass through it to know what it is and to be successful. She also mentions different qualities of femininity which are worth to be celebrated. She is educated and knows how to do things in her specialized area, which shows a great achievement in addition to respecting being female. Here, she approves that masculinity and femininity are not attached to being male and female rather it is a learned behavior that one can acquire from the environment.

In general, the two films showed us an alternative view other than patriarchy. Adey and Hanna have strong, active, decision-making, and problem-solving qualities which are considered masculine traits. They are beautiful and empathic as feminine. Mixing such qualities show an alternative view to patriarchy which limits women's traits to a few images. Such representation can change the repetitive stereotypical portrayal of women as weak, powerless, and problem makers.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The objectives of this article were to critically analyze the portrayal of gender and power in Ethiopian Amharic cinema and to investigate whether there is an alternative world view presented in the country's cinema. To meet the objectives, two films were selected purposefully and analysed using feminist film theory (male gaze), the social construction of gender theory, and gender and power relationships. As a result, in the films, female characters are portrayed as strong, decision-makers, problem solvers and powerful. And male characters are depicted as weak in decision making, lacking in confidence, frustrated, and in need of rescuers.

In the film directed by a woman, physical appearance does not have any place than inner

quality. But in the film directed by a man, the female character's physical beauty is improved in the course of the narration to please the male character and to distract another man's attention so that the female can carry out what she intended to do. Psychological strength is also the quality of women characters in both films. Women in the two films endure challenging situations with patience and wisdom. Men become emotional and aggressive when challenging situations happen and in the end, they get frustrated and feel hopeless. However, male characters get their happiness or what they desire with the help of female characters.

In the two films, women have more power than men. The sources of their power are the material they have (like land), their self-confidence and knowledge. With their power, they help their male counterparts. Adey helps Leul to find happiness, and Hanna helps Biruk to regain the project he wrote. Women characters in each story are portrayed as rational beings, rescuers, problem solvers, independent and decision-makers. These traits are not usual characteristics of traditional patriarchal women. Men in the selected films are seen sometimes as emotional, weak, and indecisive. Accordingly, the films present a reversal of some taken-for-granted stereotypical attributes depiction of gender and power in Amharic films.

The pleasure of the women in each film is the pleasure of their men partners. In the films, pleasure is not acquired through looking at women as erotic objects for sexual desire. Rather, women in the films strive to please men characters in different ways. Each woman character does the following: Adey by showing the true meaning of life and Hanna by taking risk of regaining the project proposal ownership. Both care about their male partners and are happy at the end. The male characters do not give much attention to women's happiness. Leul tries to fulfill his material needs by ignoring his relational issue with his wife and Biruk is too emotional to listen to Hanna about why she did things her way. Both characters regain what they lose with the help of their women partners.

In the two films, we see the patriarchal system questioned and an alternative world view in which women and men are portrayed in unusual ways presented. The women characters have more power than their men counterparts. The women characters can decide on different issues other than household duties. The traits they show give women another image other than being mothers, daughters and sisters, which are the only places the patriarchal system allows them. Another alternative is that both women and men characters share masculine and feminine traits which could be taken as mixed behavior.

Generally, the two films represent the alternative view of patriarchy by portraying women and men in mixed behaviors than strictly feminine and masculine characteristics. Hence, the films appear to affirm that being strong, successful, knowledgeable and decision-making abilities do not depend on a person's gender, rather on different factors like the way children grew up and their educational background. Consequently, these facts assert that gender is constructed by society through different institutions like family and education.

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