



**UNCELEBRATED HEROES AND HEROINES IN MAAZA MENGISTE'S *THE
SHADOW KING, BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE* AND IRENE SABATINI'S *AN ACT OF
DEFIANCE***

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LITERARY STUDIES IN
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the uncelebrated heroes and heroines all over the world.

I also dedicate this work to my father, Mr P.S. Mkumba and my late mother, Mrs D.F Mkumba, who have greatly, marvelously, unceasingly and tiresomely supported me in my academic journey from nursery, primary, secondary up to tertiary level of education.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this is entirely my own original work except where otherwise acknowledged. No part of this work has been submitted elsewhere.

Chrispin Mkumba

Full Legal Name

Signature

Date

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis represents the student's own work and effort and has been submitted with our approval.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Dr Emmanuel Ngwira

Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the theme of uncelebrated heroes and heroines in Maaza Mengiste's novels *The Shadow King*, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Irene Sabatini's novel *An Act of Defiance*. The central argument is that Mengiste and Sabatini excavate and portray the overlooked heroic contributions of some uncelebrated male and female characters to honour their legacy and illuminate their significant yet under-recognised roles in the building of their nations in the aforementioned novels. The study establishes that the heroism of some male and female characters is depicted through their participation in fighting against political oppression and injustice. The heroism of the female characters is further revealed in their fight against sexual oppression. The heroic attributes that the male and female characters display are also examined in this study. This thesis also explores different factors that lead to the uncelebrated life of the heroes and heroines in the primary texts. This study hinges on Postcolonial, Marxism and Feminism theories. It draws from the ideas of a postcolonial theorist, Frantz Fanon, it relies on his concept of violence and his outlook of what happens in a post independent nation. His views are relevant in different ways, for instance, examining how male and female characters employ violence as a liberating force from political oppression in the novels under study. Drawing from Louis Althusser's concepts of Ideological and Repressive state apparatuses, the study examines the hostile atmosphere that the heroes and heroines emerge from. The study also draws from the ideas of Judith Butler and Patricia McFadden. Butler's concept of mournable bodies is relevant in exploring whether the characters depicted in the primary texts are worthy of public recognition and mourning. Her other concept of gender performance is pertinent in understanding the heroism of female characters in their fight against political and sexual oppression. McFadden's views on sexuality and politics are pertinent in exploring different means that the heroines employ to fight against political and sexual oppression in the primary texts. Throughout the study, it has been established that the heroism of the male and female characters is reflected through their violent and non-violent heroic actions in fighting against political and sexual oppression.

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CHAPTER ONE

UNCELEBRATED HEROES AND HEROINES: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

There is a mutual relationship between history and literature. Literary authors draw from events that happened in the past and incorporate them in their novels in a fictitious manner. Examples of such authors include Maaza Mengiste and Irene Sabatini. History also benefits from literature because it is through fiction that history which may be dying is given a new life as it is retold in a fictitious manner. The quality of emotional appeal in a fictional work distinguishes it from a historical writing. Karen O'Brien concurs that "despite the increasingly affective nature of historical writing, eighteenth-century commentators generally remained committed to the notion that, even when a historical work invited reader identification with a character, the emotional experience was qualitatively different from that of reading fiction" (408). This cements the idea that fiction appeals to the emotions of the reader. The focus of this thesis is to study literature specifically how fiction plays a role in bringing to light the heroic deeds of uncelebrated heroes and heroines in the novels under study.

A number of people who are famous are celebrated as heroes and heroines in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. In Ethiopia, the Queen of Sheba is celebrated as a heroine who led the Ethiopian nation with wisdom. In her paper, "Forging a nation: The Ethiopian Millennium Celebration and the Multiethnic State", Izabela Anna Orłowska observes that "the story of the Queen of Sheba, her journey to Israel and her encounter with King Solomon provided the backbone of popular conceptions of Ethiopian ancient history" (303). She further elucidates that the "story of the Queen's journey was very much part of the mainstream culture, repeatedly reproduced both by established artists and commercially as tourist attractions" (Orłowska 303). Emperor Menelik II is celebrated as a hero in Ethiopia for his contribution to fighting against Italian forces. Orłowska affirms "that the victory at Adwa has national heroes associated with it, notably Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913)" (309). It is worth noting that "the military victory of the Ethiopian army over Italian forces has since 1896 provided a potent symbol of black power not only for Ethiopia, but for the rest of Africa and for communities of African origin throughout the world" (Orłowska 309). Ethiopia's triumph over the Italian forces is interpreted as a "victory of an African army over European colonial ambition" (Orłowska 309). Similarly, in Zimbabwe, there are some people who

are recognised as heroes and heroines. Joshua Nkomo is regarded as a hero for his contribution to the liberation struggle against the British colonial rule (Masiya and Maringira 6). Although some people are recognised as heroes like Joshua Nkomo and heroines like Queen of Sheba, a prominent question that this thesis grapples with is: does fiction depict characters who engage in heroic deeds that help in the building of their nations yet they are never recognised nor celebrated in their countries? Another follow up question could be: what are the factors that lead to the uncelebrated life of such heroes and heroines in the primary texts? These are the questions that will form the core argument of this study.

This thesis contends that in Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Irene Sabatini's, *An Act of Defiance*, both authors excavate and portray the heroic deeds of some unfamiliar and uncelebrated male and female characters as a way of honouring them and also bringing to light their significant contribution to the building of their nations. This thesis also posits that both Mengiste and Sabatini present a counter narrative discourse pertaining to the idea of heroism. That is, they depict a new dimension of understanding heroism in the primary texts contrary to the one that is propagated by regimes of power. Basically, the main objective of this study is to establish that in the primary texts Mengiste and Sabatini portray the heroic deeds of the uncelebrated heroes and heroines as a way of appreciating them and making known their unfamiliar heroic deeds. The study further asserts that the heroism of some male and female characters in the aforementioned novels is depicted through their participation in fighting against political oppression and injustice. In this thesis, I further argue that the heroism of the female characters is also revealed through their fight against sexual oppression. This study also examines the heroic attributes of the female and male characters in the novels under study. Finally, the thesis examines factors that lead to the uncelebrated life of heroes and heroines in the primary texts.

Oftentimes, the voices of ordinary people are muted and their stories are not known in a society. On the other hand, the voices and stories of powerful people in a society, for instance, political leaders, are easily heard and known to the public. I have selected Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Irene Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* because both authors narrate the silenced and ignored stories of people on the periphery. Through the process of narration, they challenge the existing notions of national political discourse and history of their countries. The significant contributions of ordinary people to the building of their nations is

revealed through the process of narration in the novels under study. The primary texts are set in Africa and employ historical allusion as a narrative technique. I observe that both authors depict the history of their respective home countries namely, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, as a way of enlightening their fellow Zimbabweans and Ethiopians and the rest of the people in the world about the historical events that happened in their countries. The primary texts depict the idea of heroism and the theme of uncelebrated heroes and heroines as they portray some characters that engage in heroic deeds through their fight against injustice, political and sexual oppression; but are never recognised nor awarded despite their notable actions in their countries. Sabatini employs allusion to depict the suffering of people in a post independent Zimbabwe. Her novel, *An Act of Defiance*, specifically alludes to the oppression of people under the reign of Robert Mugabe. The novel depicts characters who fight against sexual and political oppression.

I have chosen Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and *The Shadow King* for various reasons. Firstly, Mengiste's *The Shadow King* is historically a prequel to her other novel, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. This helps the researcher to have wider knowledge concerning the literary representation of events that happen in both colonial and postcolonial Ethiopia as portrayed in the primary texts. It aids the researcher to appreciate the similarities and differences pertaining to the heroic deeds of uncelebrated heroes and heroines during the colonial and postcolonial periods. It also helps the researcher to detect the similarities and differences regarding the factors that lead to the uncelebrated life of the heroes and heroines in both colonial and postcolonial eras. Additionally, in both novels, Mengiste employs historical allusion as a narrative technique to highlight events that happened in Ethiopia. Mengiste's *The Shadow King* is set in the colonial era and it alludes to the events that happened during the second-Italo Ethiopian war. It portrays the Ethiopian characters who fight against colonial oppression by waging war against the Italian invaders. In Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, characters that are central to the study are Hirut, Aster, Seifu, Kidane and Minim.

On the other hand, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* depicts Ethiopian characters who fight against political oppression perpetuated by the Derg regime during the postcolonial era. It alludes to the events that happened in Ethiopia during the reign of both Emperor Haile Selassie and Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. Both of these leaders ruled Ethiopia with an iron fist. Melakou Tegegn asserts that Emperor Haile Selassie massacred "peasants and pastoralists who rebelled against the feudal land-

holding system and discrimination of rural populations in Ogaden, Sidamo, Tigray, Eritrea and Bale, who at various times resorted to armed rebellions against his policy of ethnic domination in the 1960s” (249). He highlights that “the genocide committed by the military regime of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam in the 1970s that became known in Ethiopia as the Red Terror took place between 1974 and 1979” (Tegegn 250). Tegegn observes that “the mass killings actually began at the end of 1974 when the Provisional Military Administrative Council executed 60 officials of the imperial government and 5 activists of the armed forces movement (250). Such atrocities are alluded to in Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze*. In the preceding novel, Dawit, Solomon, Anbessa, Sara and Ilita are characters that are pertinent to the study.

There are different viewpoints with regard to the meaning of the notion “hero” or “heroine”. Literary critics Meyer Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham describe the hero or heroine as “a figure of great or national cosmic importance (98). This entails that a person who takes an action that benefits the whole nation can be regarded as a hero or heroine. But this definition of a hero or heroine is lacking because a person who takes an action that can benefit few individuals or even one person can also be regarded as a hero or heroine depending on the sacrifice and impact of one’s action. Ari Kohen understands a hero or heroine as “an individual or a network of people that take action on behalf of others, or in defense of integrity or a moral cause” (45). This implies that a person or group of people who sacrifice their lives and take an action that may help an individual or the whole nation may be regarded as a hero or heroine. The idea of defending integrity or a moral cause suggests that a hero or heroine is a person who takes an action to defend and uphold what is regarded as morally right in a society amidst pressure and intimidation. According to Jacqueline Haessly, another description of a hero or heroine is of a person “called to watch over; protect; show strength and courage in battle; be admired for courage, nobility or exploits; and any person admired for qualities of achievements and regarded as an ideal or model” (3). This reveals that a person who achieves something like being victorious in battle and also displays certain attributes like courage in battle can be regarded as a hero or heroine. This study adopts Kohen’s and Haessly’s understanding of a hero or heroine. This is because in this study, a person or group of people who risk their lives to take an action that may benefit an individual as well as the whole nation can be regarded as heroes and heroines.

Heroes are grouped in various categories. In their paper, “Heroism: A Conceptual Analysis and Differentiation Between Heroic Action and Altruism”, Franco et al highlight different types of heroes and heroines. The first category of heroes and heroines are martyrs which refers to “religious or political figures who knowingly (sometimes deliberately) put their lives in jeopardy in the service of a cause or to gain attention to injustice” (Franco et al 102). Warriors is the second category of heroes and heroines. It refers to people who emerge in the midst of violence and are “typically military leaders who lead a nation or group of people during a time of difficulty such as war or disaster and they serve to unify a nation, provide a shared vision, and may embody qualities that are seen as shared vision and necessary for the group’s survival” (Franco et al 102). They further elaborate that bureaucracy heroes and heroines “typically involves employees standing firm on principle despite intense pressures to conform or blindly obey higher authorities” (Franco et al 102). It also involves “employees in large organisations in controversial arguments within or between agencies” (Franco et al 102). They also highlight that religious heroic figures include “dedicated, life-long service religious service embodying highest principles or breaking new religious/spiritual ground. They often serve as a teacher or public exemplar of service” (Franco et al 102). According to Franco et al, civil heroes and heroines are “civilians who attempt to save others from physical harm or death while knowingly putting their own lives at risk” (102). Another category of heroes and heroines are political-religious figures which refers to “religious leaders who have turned to politics to affect wider change or politicians who have a deep spiritual system that informs political practice” (Franco et al 102). Another type of heroes and heroines are superheroes and super heroines. A superhero or super heroine is a “fictional character who is endowed with powers that are beyond the laws of nature and uses such power to do miraculous things” (Cook and Frey 5). This study specifically draws from the definitions of a warrior, bureaucracy, martyr and superhero or super heroine in order to understand the type of heroic characters that are portrayed in the novels under study.

In this study, the term “warrior heroes or heroines” refers to characters who lead their fellow citizens to fight against political oppression as well as the ones who are led by military leaders in fighting against political oppression. It also includes those characters who plan and enact non-violent military tactics in fighting against political oppression. In this thesis, the notion “bureaucratic heroes or heroines” is used to refer to characters who use their professional skills, platform and knowledge to fight against injustice, political and sexual oppression. Additionally,

the concept “super hero or super heroine” is used to refer to a character who invokes the supernatural powers to fight against political and sexual oppression. Finally, the term “martyrs” refers to characters who die in the process of fighting against political oppression. This study leans on the understanding of the meaning of these different definitions of the categories of heroes and heroines in order to decipher the type of heroic characters that are depicted in the primary texts.

The study goes beyond understanding the meaning of heroism which is advanced by ruling regimes of power. Oftentimes, people who are regarded as heroes and heroines are the ones who are associated with the ruling regime. People who revolt against the oppressive rule of a ruling regime are oftentimes labelled as villains by the ruling regime. This thesis seeks to establish how the fictional texts under study act as counter narrative discourse of heroism as advanced by ruling regimes. The study probes further to understand what kind of character can be regarded as warrior, martyr, bureaucratic or superhero. For instance, the study seeks to establish if warrior characters who engage in noble cause of fighting against political oppression but also engage in despicable acts along the way can still be regarded as heroes and heroines. Heroes and heroines are often associated with great achievements. The study delves deeper to understand if characters who have embarked to achieve something but end up failing to accomplish their goals can still be regarded as heroes and heroines.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Different scholars have analysed different issues pertaining to the novels under study. Some of the issues that they have raised include the portrayal of violence and history in the primary texts. Both Brandon Breen and Emma Frances Bond observe Mengiste’s effort to correct a misrepresented history of Ethiopia in her novel, *The Shadow King*. In her paper, “Narrating the Italo-Ethiopian War Gabriella Ghermandi’s *Regina di fiori e di perle* and Maaza Mengiste’s *The Shadow King*”, Breen posits that both novels “center on the agency of women soldiers during the colonial war and attempt to revise international views of a history that is often ignored or seen through a male and European gaze” (129). She highlights that Mengiste’s *The Shadow King* is reminiscent of the second Italo-Ethiopian War and the subsequent guerilla warfare that erupted throughout Ethiopia (Breen 129). She argues that Mengiste’s novel “attempts to bring to light the so-called forgotten Black women of the war and to highlight the historical link between Italy and Ethiopia that has not received the attention it deserves on a national level in either country” (129). These ideas are vital

to the study because they help in bringing out a historical perspective of the achievements of Ethiopian women during the second war between Ethiopia and Italy.

Similarly, Bond's paper, "Reversing the Gaze: Image and Text in the Public Debate Over Italian Colonialism", is related to Breen's paper in the sense that both of them advance the idea of understanding Ethiopian colonial history and bridging the gap where they think Ethiopian history is distorted. She argues that Mengiste's "action of laying claim to a shared history within the public domain establishes a wider, more inclusive notion of collective memory and thereby also works toward establishing a shared ethos" (6). She asserts that "this is achieved by envisioning literature as a form of visual culture in which the "afterimages" of colonialism function as residues or traces of history that force the reader-spectator to 'remember' a shared legacy" (6). These views are helpful in understanding the history of Ethiopia which is fictionalised in the primary texts.

Commenting on the text, Bond further observes that Mengiste's *The Shadow King* criticises the perceived ignorance of Italians about their colonial past and rejects the idea of regarding Italians as good colonialists (8). She posits that "Mengiste tries to reimagine the hidden histories behind these photos [pictures of Ethiopian girls taken by Italian colonial soldiers], both of the women featured and the men who took them" (Bond 9). She is of the view that Mengiste "occupies a critical cultural position that allows her to "unsettle the authority" of the original photographer's gaze and affirm her own right to gaze back" (Bond 9). This information is pertinent in understanding how Mengiste brings to light the stories of the hidden heroic deeds of both female and male characters in her novel, *The Shadow King*.

Furthermore, Annie Gagiano's paper, "Eastern African Women Writers' 'National Epics': A New Force in Creative Fiction?" is essential to the study. She also argues that different authors including Mengiste attempt to correct a misrepresented history of their nations and also assign crucial roles to female characters. She analyses different novels in her paper namely Nadifa Mohamed's *The Orchard of Lost Souls*, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Dust*, Jennifer Nansubwi's, *Kintu*, Namwali Serpell, *The Old Drift* and Maaza Mengiste's, *The Shadow King*. Gagiano observes that the "texts eschew traditional portrayal of single, male leaders in national epics and allow us to grasp diverse, communal contributions to the growth of nationhood, while often giving central roles to women" (35). I concur with Gagiano's view that women are given central roles in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*. This is because some female characters play crucial roles through their active participation

in fighting against colonial oppression. Gagliano comments that Mengiste's novel is characterised by diversity of characters and setting. For instance, she observes that Mengiste's novel, *The Shadow King* is first set in an aristocratic home where Kidane and Aster are depicted as household master and mistress respectively. Hirut is depicted as a household servant. Later on, the setting of the novel shifts into a war zone where we encounter Ethiopian soldiers engaging in a direct combat against Italian invaders (Gagliano 37). She further elaborates that Mengiste admits of her own belated discovery concerning female participation in war including the knowledge of her great grandmother who took part in fighting against the Italian invaders (Gagliano 42). This data helps in understanding the contribution of women to fighting against colonial oppression in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*.

Nick Tembo's article, "Challenging Androcentric Conceptions of Nationalism: Reimagining Female Agency in Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*", examines the roles of women in the liberation struggle. He argues that female characters namely Selam, Sara and Lily, "enact their visibility through their participation in ongoing counter revolutionary activities" (3). He contends that Selam contributed in the liberation struggle by inspiring and nurturing his son to become courageous and rise up against the malpractices of the Derg regime (Tembo 5). Sarah becomes pivotal in the novel as she courageously helps Dawit "to retrieve the bodies of the so called 'traitors' [people who revolted against the regime] who are left to rot in the streets, returning them to their families for secret burials and thus restoring their dignity" (qtd. in Matzke 94). Tembo observes that Lily's suggestion to revolt against the Derg system from within is a form of resistance even though not much is said whether she succeeded with her plan or not (9). These ideas are pertinent in examining different ways that female characters employ in fighting against political oppression in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*.

In her paper, "Narrating the Italo-Ethiopian War Gabriella Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle* and Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King*", Brandon Breen observes that violence plays a crucial role on the lives of the characters depicted in the novels. She contends that "violence always marks a significant moment in the lives of the characters, whether perpetrated by Italian soldiers, ascari, or Ethiopian patriots, allowing them to make essential decisions about who they are as people and their relationship to their respective homelands" (131). She provides an example of a violent scene at a time when Yacob recalls the violent murder scene of his younger sister and her Italian partner

(Breen 132). She argues that although the violence and desecration of dead bodies can strike the reader, but it also has a transformative power because it is revealed that the death of his sister triggers Yacob to make a decision to quit his rebel life and submit to Italian rule in an effort to care for his infant niece (Breen 132).

According to Breen, the violent scene of the death of Tariku in *The Shadow King*, represents a combination of both enchanted and disenchanted violence (132). She observes that when Tariku dies, Tariku's parents instead of becoming more afraid and demotivated to fight against the Italians; they draw strength from Tariku's death to still fight the more against the Italians (Breen 133). She argues that Tariku's death also shows "the uselessness of violent death and how war counteracts religion, leaving dead bodies in unmarked graves, their sacrifice almost futile" (Breen 132). She further posits that the fact that "Tariku's parents are motivated to fight, but they also grieve the loss of their son, shows that enchanted and disenchanted forms of violence can coexist" (Breen 132). Breen's ideas are pertinent in understanding the fact that the heroines and heroines emerge in the midst of a hostile atmosphere in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*.

Gemma Burgess' article, "A Hidden History: Women's Activism in Ethiopia" also elaborates on both the ideas of violence and Ethiopian history. She observes that in 1974, people protested against the ruling regime in Addis Ababa (99). As a result, power was seized by a 'Co-coordinating Committee' of the Provisional Military Government of Ethiopia (PMAC), also known as the Derg (Burgess 99). Later on, Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam became Chairman of PMAC and Head of State (Burgess 99). She argues that "Mengistu's call in 1977 for a 'Red Terror' to combat what he referred to as the counter-revolutionaries was followed by some of the regime's most repugnant acts of violence" (Burgess 100). According to Burgess, it is "conservatively estimated that 100 000 educated Ethiopians were killed while several hundreds of thousands more were forced to flee the country" (100). During the autocratic rule of the Derg, there was unlawful killing of people, torture, imprisonment, illegal searches and arbitrary arrest (Burgess 100). People became disappointed with the oppressive rule of the Derg and ousted it from political power. Burgess further asserts that Ethiopian women have been involved in both different forms of peaceful activism and active military organisation (100). These views are useful in comprehending the dictatorship rule that heroes and heroines fight against in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*.

In the same vein, Alfredo Gonzalez-Ruibal's et al "A Social Archeology of Colonial War in Ethiopia" shade more light on the ideas of brutality and history in Ethiopia. They assert that the "Ethiopian victory at Adwa (1896) was a thorn in Italy's imperial pride. The 1935-1936 war was short but very costly in human lives, especially on the Ethiopian side. Ethiopia suffered almost 300, 000 battlefield deaths over thirty times more than Italy" (Ruibal et al 43). They argue that the use of guns, airplanes, tanks and poison gas by the Italian army made the Italian soldiers to have an upper hand over the Ethiopians (Ruibal et al 43). They observe that Ethiopia is regarded as a nation that managed to emerge victorious over a colonial power during the scramble for Africa (Ruibal et al 42). Ethiopia was the only uncolonised country that was surrounded by Italian colonies namely, Eritrea and Somalia. Italy attacked Ethiopia in its endeavor to fulfil the expansionist policies of the fascist state (Ruibal et al 42). In the course of the Italo-Ethiopian war, the Italian invaders used mustard gas which is considered as one of the most dangerous gases used during the First World War (Ruibal et al 54). It is noted that mustard gas "chemicals attack the skin provoking blisters and hemorrhages and, as they enter the organism, they cause internal bleeding and peel off the mucous membrane of the bronchial tubes. It may take several extremely painful days to die" (Ruibal et al 55). This data helps in comprehending the political violence that the female and male characters encounter in the primary texts.

Angela Veale's "From child soldier to ex-fighter Female fighters, demobilization and reintegration in Ethiopia." comments on Ethiopian history and also women's participation in political protests. Veale observes that there is lack of visibility regarding the knowledge of female fighters in both academic and public platforms (7). This is "due to the fact that cultural conceptions of female as nurturing and life-giving are the antithesis of concepts synonymous with conflict, such as aggression, violence and destruction" (Veale 7). She highlights that during war some women perform non-combat tasks for instance, preparing food, cleaning and being porters (Veale 8). She also observes that women participate as fighters. Veale asserts that the "contribution of women as fighters in the liberation struggle against Mengistu's Derg regime is almost legendary. It is widely regarded that fighter women were strong, if not stronger, than the men, and played a critical role in the success of the movement" (17). These ideas are helpful in appreciating women's contribution to the building of Ethiopia in the primary texts.

In brief, the literature reviewed on Mengiste's two novels reveal that different scholars have analysed diverse issues like violence, women's participation in war and history. Breen analyses the ideas of violence and comments on Ethiopian history specifically the participation of Ethiopians during the second Italo-Ethiopian war in *The Shadow King*. In the same vein, Gagliano and Bond highlight on Mengiste's effort to correct a misrepresented history of Ethiopia. In this study, the views of Breen, Gagliano and Bond on Ethiopians participation during the second Italo-Ethiopian war are vital in examining how Mengiste fictionalises Ethiopian political history in *The Shadow King*. Their ideas are also helpful in understanding how Mengiste brings to light the stories of the hidden heroic deeds of both female and male characters in *The Shadow King*. Breen's understanding of violence is relevant in examining the hostile atmosphere that the heroes and heroines find themselves in as they take part in fighting against political oppression. It is also pertinent in exploring how heroes and heroines employ violence as a liberating tool from political oppression in *The Shadow King*. Ruibal et al comment on violence and suffering of Ethiopians during the Italo- Ethiopian war. This information is significant in providing a historical background of the effects of war between Italy and Ethiopia. It also helps in examining how Mengiste fictionalises history in her novel, *The Shadow King*.

Tembo analyses roles of women in fighting against political oppression perpetuated by the Derg regime in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. Tembo's ideas are pertinent to this study as they help in providing insight to the roles of female characters in fighting against political oppression in the preceding novel. Burgess comments on Ethiopian political history as she shades more light on the suffering of Ethiopians during the reign of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. This data is significant in providing a historical background of the violence that Ethiopian fictitious characters encounter in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. Both Burgess and Veale highlight that Ethiopian women participated in fighting against political oppression perpetuated by the Derg regime. This information is pertinent in examining how Mengiste fictionalises the history of Ethiopian women's contribution in fighting against political oppression in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*.

However, this thesis analyses the roles of women in fighting against political oppression from a heroic perspective. Additionally, this thesis does not only focus on examining heroic deeds of heroines but also moves further to discuss the heroic deeds carried out by unsung heroes in the primary texts. This study goes further to examine factors that lead to the uncelebrated life of the

heroes and heroines in the novels under study. The study also enquires how Mengistes uses fiction as a medium of celebrating the uncelebrated heroes and heroines in the primary novels.

Sabatini's novel, *An Act of Defiance* has not received much scholarly attention. As a result, this study relies on other critical articles that I found to be relevant and helpful in analysing the idea of uncelebrated heroes and heroines in the aforementioned novel. Some scholars elucidate on the author's ability to incorporate history in a literary text. They also highlight on the attributes that heroes and heroines display in the course of undertaking heroic actions. Some critics also comment on the hostile political atmosphere in Zimbabwe.

Firstly, Susan Andrade's article, "Rewriting History, Motherhood, and Rebellion: Naming an African Women's Literary Tradition", is pertinent to this study. She posits that there is a need to read the "literary production of African women as their self-inscription into history" (Andrade 97). This idea is significant to this study in understanding how Mengiste and Sabatini write fiction as a way of voicing out the grievances of women and also presenting a correct representation and history of both Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. Andrade highlights that sometimes women express their grievances by staging a strike against their oppressors. She reveals that the "women's war was the violent culmination of traditional manifestations of Igbo women's power", called "making war on" or "sitting on" a man" (95). She points out that "such power usually took the form of raucous and destructive behavior by women and was directed at men who were perceived to threaten their personal or economic security" (96). The idea of women staging strikes against their oppressors is relevant in exploring different ways that heroines employ in fighting against political and sexual oppression in the primary texts.

In her paper, "Sheroes and Villains: Conceptualizing Colonial and Contemporary Violence Against Women in Africa", Amina Mama postulates that "in many countries, violent abuse has been taken up as the most salient and immediate manifestation of women's oppression by men, and in Africa, widespread violence against women is now probably the most direct and unequivocal manifestation of women's oppressed status" (46). She observes that "in most societies, rape and domestic violence have on occasion provoked public outrage, but it has been left to women's organisations and movements to take more concerted action" (Mama 46). Mama postulates that even though women participated in fighting against colonial oppression in countries like Zimbabwe; women still suffer under postcolonial regimes and they protest the betrayal of

women's interests by the nation states (54). These ideas are vital in exploring different forms of suffering that female characters go through in fictitious postcolonial Zimbabwe and Ethiopia in Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* and Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* respectively. These views are also helpful in exploring different ways that female characters employ in fighting against sexual oppression in the primary texts.

Another invaluable source for the study is Ina Cloete and Nelson Mlambo's paper, "A Literary Exploration of Trauma and Resilience in Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*". Cloete and Mlambo "demonstrate how trauma theory and resilience theory can be used to analyse literary texts, fictional and non-fictional as a way to explain the realities of everyday lives in Africa" (1). They present some characters who display resilience spirit in the midst of economic hard conditions. For instance, Emily and sister Shave continue to save lives at the hospital irrespective of the poor conditions at the hospital like no access to water and electricity (Cloete and Mlambo 5). The character of being resilient in times of trouble is pertinent in examining the heroic attributes of female and male characters who engage in heroic deeds in the primary texts.

Bazimaki Gabriel's article, "Verisimilitude in fiction: Exploring the Didactic Theory of Literature in Light of Heroism Reflected in Ngugi WaThiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*" is essential to the study. He "carries out a literary analysis of Ngugi's novel *A Grain of Wheat* using the didactic theory of literature" (2). He also elucidates some lessons that can be drawn from the life of the heroes. He highlights that heroes and heroines are associated with attributes such as "triumph, courage, glory, victory, death and rebirth, sacrifice, selfless act, strong love for others and self-denial, success, fight for one's right and the right of the oppressed, acceptance to die for others to survive" (12). These heroic attributes are essential in examining the heroic attributes of female and male characters who engage in heroic deeds in the novels under study.

Overall, I observe that many scholars that comment on Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, *The Shadow King* and Irene Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* focus on exploring issues of violence, political oppression and history. Even though some scholars have commented on people's participation in the liberation struggle, many of them focus on analysing women's participation in the liberation struggle. However, this thesis focuses on building and analysing the contribution of both female and male characters who engage in heroic deeds in their fight against political and sexual oppression. This study further examines the heroism of the uncelebrated

female and male characters in the novel by examining their heroic deeds as well as their heroic attributes. This thesis delves deeper to examine factors that lead to the uncelebrated life of heroes and heroines in the novels under study. This thesis further enquires how Mengiste and Sabatini use fiction as a medium of celebrating the uncelebrated heroes and heroines in the primary novels.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Postcolonial, Feminism and Marxist theories. The term post colonialism does not simply mean a period after colonialism but it encompasses a period before colonialism, during colonialism and post independent era. Bill Ashcroft et al concur that the “simpler sense of the ‘post’ as meaning ‘after’ colonialism has been contested by a more elaborate understanding of the working of post-colonial cultures which stresses the articulations between and across the politically defined historical periods, of pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence culture” (187). Postcolonial theory can be understood as a “disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (Gandhi 3). Postcolonial theory is a critical theoretical approach that deals with various issues that affect people who were once colonised. The theory is based on different concepts such as colonialism, history, disillusionment, nationalism, oppression, just to mention a few. It revisits the political and economic factors that motivated the colonisers to colonise different countries. It also exposes the oppression that the colonised went through in the hands of their oppressor, the colonisers. Post-colonial theory also explores ways that the colonised can employ to become free from colonial oppression. It is worth noting that Mengiste’s *The Shadow King* is set during the colonial era. During this colonial era, the Italians who are the colonisers, oppress the Ethiopians in order to expand their political and economic domination by conquering Ethiopia. In Ethiopian history, Minale Adugna observes that Italy unleashed its second invasion of Ethiopia on 3 October 1935 (21). The war took place from 1935-1941. At that time, the Italian army was led by General Emilio De Bono (Adugna 21). Adugna highlights that “at the root of the Fascist invasion lay the Italian’s need to erase the ‘shameful scar’ of their defeat at the battle of Adwa fought on 1 March 1896” (21). She also argues that the Italians “were determined to restore the glory of the old Roman empire, besides the motive behind contemporary European imperialist expansion over much of the world” (21). She points out that the “Italians were already in control of Eritrea and Somaliland. Ethiopia remained to be a third country to be conquered to realise the dream of their empire of

Italian East Africa” (Adugna 21). However, the Ethiopians put on a gallant fight in their effort to fight against Italian colonial domination over Ethiopia.

Sabatini’s *An Act of Defiance* and Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* are set during the post-colonial era. Both Sabatini’s *An Act of Defiance* and Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* reflect the disillusionment of people due to the failure of political leaders to fulfil their promises to the citizens of Zimbabwe and Ethiopia respectively. Zimbabweans who were under British colonial rule became independent on 11 April 1980. Robert Mugabe assumed political power and became a dictator (Masiya and Maringira 5). As already pointed out, Sabatini’s *An Act of Defiance* depicts a fictitious representation of the suffering of people under the reign of Robert Mugabe. On the other hand, Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* portrays a fictitious representation of the suffering of people under the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I and Colonel Mengistu’s Derg regime.

There are a number of postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhaba, Edward Said and Antonio Gramsci, just to mention a few. One of the postcolonial theorist whose ideas I find relevant to this study is Frantz Fanon. This thesis relies on Fanon’s views pertaining to the notions of disillusionment, nationalism, colonialism and violence. His ideas are reflected in his book entitled *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon postulates that “at the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force” (94). This cements Fanon’s idea that the colonised people should engage in violence in order to become free from both physical and psychological colonial oppression. This is because of his view that violence is the only language which the colonisers understand. He opines that the natives can become physically free from colonial oppression by revolting against colonial leadership and replacing it with a new governance led by the natives themselves. On the other hand, he is of the view that the natives can become mentally free from colonial bondage by rejecting and refusing the stereotypical definitions of the native which are coined by the coloniser in order to create an inferiority complex in the natives’ mindset.

Fanon advances the idea that the coloniser oppress the masses physically, psychologically and economically by means of violence. He also observes that the coloniser use brutal force in order to force the natives to become submissive under colonial rule (Fanon 40). Hussein Bulhan concurs with Fanon’s understanding of violence. He understands violence as “any relation, process, or condition by which an individual or a group violates the physical, social, and/or psychological integrity of another person or group” (135). This kind of violence is experienced by the colonised

during the process of colonisation. The usage of war weapons like guns, bayonets and cannons by the coloniser substantiates the fact that the coloniser indeed use violence in order to force the people to be under colonial rule. In a post-colonial state, the African rulers mimic the colonisers' tactic of employing violence in order to exercise political domination over the masses. For instance, the masses who stage a strike as a way of expressing their disgust with bad governance end up being beaten and arrested by the police.

Fanon further elucidates on the failures of the post-colonial state. He highlights that the elite Africans possess political and economic power in a post independent era. He clarifies that the ruling elite become alienated from the masses as they enrich themselves with wealth while the masses are languishing in poverty. Fanon argues that "national consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been" (148). He holds the idea that people become disillusioned due to the failure of the political leaders to fulfil nationalistic promises. For instance, instead of sharing the government resources equally among the citizens, the political leaders become corrupt and steal the government resources. The political leaders fail to implement developmental programs that can lift the masses out of poverty. The freedom of expression is also infringed upon in a post independent nation.

Different scholars have presented different opinions regarding Fanon's notion of violence. Jodie Bradshaw argues that it is difficult for the anti-colonial violence to achieve its intended purpose of liberating the colonised from the shackles of colonialism (1). She also faults Fanon's idea of using violence in fighting against political oppression as gender biased. This is because she observes that Fanon puts the male gender as being in forefront in fighting against colonial oppression but sidelines the female gender from directly taking part in the liberation struggle. Neil Roberts postulates that Fanon's violence is intrinsic in nature as it places positive value on a violent act regardless of the result at a specific moment of implementation of the action (146). The idea of intrinsic violence is pertinent in understanding the value of violent actions that the heroes and heroines take in the primary texts. I do not agree with Bradshaw's idea that anti-colonial violence cannot achieve its intended purpose. I argue that the idea of creating a new self, a new nation that is politically and psychologically free from colonial oppression can be attained through violence.

I also disagree with Bradshaw's observance that Fanon's notion of violence is gender biased. Actually, Fanon's idea of anti-colonial violence advocates that both genders should take part and unite in fighting against political oppression.

The views of Frantz Fanon are pertinent to this study. His philosophy of the natives' usage of violence as a weapon of gaining freedom from physical and psychological colonial oppression is relevant in examining the importance of violence that the oppressed heroes and heroines engage in for the purpose of gaining political and psychological liberation in the primary texts. Fanon's idea of how political leaders exert violence on the masses in both colonial and postcolonial era is pertinent in understanding the kind of hostile atmosphere that the uncelebrated heroes and heroines find themselves in. The heroes and heroines that are depicted in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Irene Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* emerge in the midst of violence. It should be noted that even though the Ethiopian nation was never colonised, it experienced the pain of oppression during the time when the Italians invaded it in their endeavor to colonise it. The ideas of what Frantz Fanon postulates of how the coloniser colonised countries by means of physical and psychological violence as well as his ideas on how people in the colonised countries can employ violence to break free from political oppression augurs well with what happened in Ethiopia as depicted in Mengiste's *The Shadow King* and *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. In Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, the Italian invaders employ violence in order to force the Ethiopian masses to submit under Italian colonial rule while in Mengiste's *Beneath Lion's Gaze* the Derg regime use violence in order to force the Ethiopian masses to submit under the oppressive Derg regime. Fanon's view of the natives' usage of violence to break free from political oppression is relevant in examining how the uncelebrated heroes and heroines employ violence as a weapon of resisting and liberating themselves from colonial and political oppression in both Mengiste's *The Shadow King* and *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* respectively. His views of how the masses express their disillusionment with the ruling regimes and that the government forbids them from expressing such ideas is useful in exploring how the uncelebrated heroes and heroines employ different means in their fight against political oppression in the primary texts.

The study also hinges on the ideas of feminists like Judith Butler and Patricia McFadden. In her book, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler, highlights on the idea of mournable and unmournable bodies. She "considers a dimension of political life that has to do

with our exposure to violence and our complicity in it, with our vulnerability to loss and the task of mourning that follows and with finding a basis for community in these conditions” (19). She ponders on the idea of who counts as being human in the society, whose life is regarded as worthy and what make’s one’s life to be regarded as grievable or not (Butler 20). She posits that it “seems important to consider that the prohibition on certain forms of public grieving itself constitutes the public sphere on the basis of such a prohibition” (Butler 37). She argues that such “prohibitions not only show up a nationalism based on its military aims and practices, but they also suppress any dissent that would expose the concrete, human effects of its violence” (Butler 38). Butler’s idea of grievable and ungrievable bodies is pertinent to this study in examining whether the life of the characters depicted in the novels under study is worthy of celebration and also exploring if the death of some characters is worthy of public recognition and mourning. The study also relies on Butler’s understanding of gender performance. In her paper, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory”, Butler argues that “gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time- an identity instituted through a stylized repetition” (519). She is of the view that gender is based on performance. This information is pertinent in examining how heroines attempt to deconstruct gender social roles in a patriarchal society.

The study also hinges on the feminist ideas of Patricia McFadden. Her views on sexuality and political affairs in African nations are pertinent to this study. Some of her views are reflected in her papers entitled “African Feminist Perspectives of Post-Coloniality” and “Women and National Liberation Movements”. McFadden advocates that women should fight against rape. She also encourages women to take pride in their femininity. She also comments on political issues that affect people living in colonial and post-colonial era. Her ideas are vital to this study in exploring how heroines fight against sexual oppression. They are essential in understanding the postcolonial state and different tactics that the heroes and heroines employ in fighting against political oppression in the primary texts.

Marxism was developed by Karl Max. It states that the proletariat or the working class is exploited by the ruling class (also called the bourgeoisie), who own the means of production. It aims at sensitising the proletariat to revolt against the exploitative ways of the bourgeoisie and in the end creating a classless society (McLellan 7). Marxism contains different strands and concepts. For the

purposes of this research, this thesis focuses on concepts such as Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), bourgeoisie and proletariat. I briefly explain what these terms mean and how relevant they are to my study below.

According to Karl Max, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are two classes of people that are found in a capitalist society. The bourgeoisie comprises of people who own the means of production and earn profit through their businesses. On the other hand, the proletariat constitutes of people who belong to the working class. These are the people who work for the bourgeoisie and end up receiving wages (Marx 6). This information is relevant to this study. In reading Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* and Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, the political leaders who enrich themselves with public resources in postcolonial states can be read as the bourgeoisie. The masses who revolt against political oppression perpetuated by political leaders in postcolonial states can be read as the proletariat.

The terms Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus were developed by French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. The latter is a form of power that operates by means of violence. It involves the use of coercion and power by the ruling class to force the subordinate class, the masses, to like their ideologies. Examples of RSAs include the courts or judiciary, the police and the armed forces just to mention a few. The basic function of the RSAs is to intervene timely in politics in favour of the interests of the government in power, by repressing the subordinate social classes as required either by violent or non-violent coercive means. The ruling class are able to control the RSAs because they also control the powers of the state (Althusser 151). Ideological state apparatus, on the other hand, is understood as soft power as they belong to the private domain of the society. They comprise of social institutions such as the family, education system, churches and media houses just to mention a few (Althusser 136-137). Althusser points out that the basic function of ISAs is to propagate social control, while presenting themselves as socially neutral and objective (137). He argues that the social norms are in fact ideologically determined in the sense that they serve the interest of those who possess social power (Althusser 138). Both Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses propagate social conformity, influencing people's behavior and thought patterns (Gurevitch et al 31). This information is important to my study in examining how political leaders in the ruling postcolonial regimes use state agencies like

the police, and the judiciary to coerce the masses to be subordinate to their leadership through violent and non-violent means in the primary texts.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In terms of methodology, the study employs a desk research approach. The researcher engages with primary texts extensively in order to advance the stated argument. Secondary sources are also used to assist in advancing the thesis under discussion. Structurally, the paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic of the thesis. It presents a background of the study. Summary of the novels, thesis argument and objectives of the study, literature review, and theoretical framework and clarification of some concepts are presented in this chapter.

In the second chapter, I argue that in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*, both authors depict female characters as heroines that fight against political and sexual oppression as a way of honouring them and also presenting a new dimension of understanding heroism. I further argue that Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* portrays heroines that fight against injustice. Different tactics that heroines employ in fighting against injustice, sexual and political oppression are explored in this chapter. The chapter also examines the heroic deeds and attributes that the heroines exhibit in the course of fighting against political and sexual oppression in the primary texts.

The third chapter focuses on exploring how Mengiste and Sabatini illuminates the heroism of unknown and uncelebrated male characters as a means of honouring them and bringing into view their significant impact in defending the integrity of their nations in the primary texts. The chapter further examines the heroic deeds and attributes that the heroes display in the course of fighting against political oppression and injustice in the novels under study. I assert that the heroism of the male characters is depicted through their participation in resisting and fighting against political oppression and injustice.

In the fourth chapter, factors that lead to the uncelebrated life of the heroes and heroines are examined. I assert that there are different factors that make the heroes and heroines to be uncelebrated in their nations. These factors include the heroes' and heroines' action of carrying out heroic deeds in the underground, lack of proper recognition and documentation of the heroic deeds of the heroes and heroines as well as the heroines' act of carrying out heroic deeds in a

patriarchal society which does not appreciate and value their heroic deeds. Finally, chapter five presents the concluding remarks of the topic under discussion. In the following chapter, I delve into analysis of the heroic deeds and attributes of heroines that are portrayed through their fight against injustice, political and sexual oppression in Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Irene Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*.

CHAPTER 2

PORTRAYAL OF HEROINES IN MAAZA MENGISTE'S *THE SHADOW KING*, *BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE* AND IRENE SABATINI'S *AN ACT OF DEFIANCE*.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses women's contribution in Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Irene Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*. In this chapter, I argue that Maaza Mengiste and Irene Sabatini depict female characters as heroines that fight against political and sexual oppression as a way of honouring them and also bringing to light women's contribution to the fictitious Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. This argument is revealed through the authors' portrayal of female characters that subvert the dominant political ideologies that are advanced by the ruling regimes. The main argument of this chapter is also revealed by examining the heroic deeds and attributes that the female characters exhibit in the course of fighting against political and sexual oppression in the novels under study.

This chapter is anchored on the ideas of Frantz Fanon and feminists like Patricia McFadden and Judith Butler. This chapter also relies on the Marxist views of Louis Althusser. In relation to postcolonial theory, the chapter specifically draws from Fanon's ideas on the concept of violence as well as his views of the state of a post independent nation as reflected in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon's ideas of how violence is used by both the coloniser and the ruling regime in order to exercise political domination over the people is essential to the study. His ideas are significant in exploring how the coloniser, in this case, the Italian invaders, employ violence in order to impose colonial rule in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*. His views are also vital in examining how the ruling regimes employ violence in order to remain in power and also to force people to be submissive to them in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* respectively. Fanon's assertion of how the natives can employ violence to break free from colonial and political oppression is relevant to the study. It is pertinent in examining different ways of how the heroines employ violence as a weapon of fighting against colonial and political oppression in both Mengiste's *The Shadow King* and *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. This chapter also draws from Judith Butler's concept of mournable and unmournable bodies. This idea is vital in understanding whether the characters who die in the process of fighting against political oppression are worthy of being regarded as heroines and being mourned in the primary novels. Patricia McFadden's ideas

on sexuality and politics are significant in exploring how women fight against sexual and political oppression in the primary texts. Althusser's concepts of Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus are incorporated in this chapter. These concepts help in elucidating different ways that the ruling regimes employ in order to exert political domination over the masses in the primary texts.

In Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, the Italian soldiers employ violence in order to force the Ethiopians to submit under Italian colonial rule. The use of violence is depicted through their use of guns and mustard gas in order to exercise political domination over Ethiopia. This resonates with Fanon's argument that "the foreigner [Italian soldiers] coming from another country imposed his rule by means of guns and machines" (39). Indeed, many African countries including Ethiopia suffered from colonial oppression during the process of colonisation. The use of mustard gas is dangerous and causes much harm on one's body because the "chemicals attack the skin provoking the severe blisters and hemorrhages and, as they enter the organism, they cause internal bleeding and peel off the mucous membrane of the bronchial tubes. It may take several extremely painful days to die" (Ruibal et al 55). In their paper, "The Use of Chemical Weapons in the Italo-Ethiopian War", Lina Grip and John Hart contend that the "use of mustard air bombs played an important role in shifting the momentum of fighting in favour of the Italian forces and in demoralising the Ethiopian forces" (3). They further opine that "its use resulted in many long lasting, painful injuries and in a significant number of deaths" (Grip and Hart 3). The use of violence by the Italian invaders in order to force Ethiopians to submit under Italian colonial rule corresponds with Emma Bond's assertion. In her paper, "Reversing the Gaze: Image and Text in the Public Debate Over Italian Colonialism", Bond rightly observes that Mengiste's *The Shadow King* is "highly critical of a perceived ignorance within Italy about its colonial past, and voice a rejection of the idea of Italians as 'good' colonialists" (8).

Similarly, in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, the Derg regime enacts violence on its citizens by shooting them and mutilating their bodies, among others. For instance, a young boy is shot by the police during protests. Hailu says that "the hole in the boy's back was a punctured, burned blast of muscle and flesh" (Mengiste, *Beneath* 6). This depicts the brutality of the Derg regime. Female characters like Sara, Ilita and the unnamed Colonel's daughter play crucial heroic roles in resisting and

fighting against political oppression perpetuated by the Derg regime. Their heroic roles are explored in this chapter.

In Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*, the ruling regime through the youth militia employ violence on the heroines in order to deter them from fighting against political and sexual oppression. Sabatini portrays female characters that engage in heroic deeds through their fight against sexual and political oppression in the fictitious Zimbabwe. These characters are namely Trinity, Gabrielle and Danika. Their heroic actions are examined in this chapter.

2.2 WAR IS NEVER ONLY A MAN'S AFFAIR: EXHUMING THE HEROISM OF WOMEN IN ETHIOPIA

In *The Shadow King*, the Ethiopian women characters engage in the fight against political oppression in Ethiopia through their participation in the war between Italy and Ethiopia. They are portrayed as warrior heroines who employ both violent and non-violent means in their endeavor to resist and fight against political oppression. As already alluded to, warrior heroines are “typically military leaders who lead a nation or group of people during a time of difficulty such as war or disaster and they serve to unify a nation, provide a shared vision, and may embody qualities that are seen as shared vision and necessary for the group's survival” (Franco et al 102). In this thesis, the term warrior heroine refers to characters who lead their fellow citizens to fight against political oppression as well as the ones who are led by military leaders in fighting against political oppression. It also includes those characters who strategise and enact non-violent military tactics in fighting against political oppression. With regards to use of violence, Mengiste portrays the Ethiopian women characters as warrior heroines who use guns to kill Italian soldiers in their effort to resist and fight against Italian colonial domination. This is reflective of Fanon's idea that violence “frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect” (94). Fanon is of the view that people should engage in violence in order to overcome colonisation because violence is the only language which the colonisers understand. Newson- Horst notes that the novel shows how “[t]he women want to do more than bear children and be comforts to soldiers; they desire to fight side- by side- with the men. In other words, they want to be more than what the world expects of them” (2). The use of violence by the Ethiopian heroines sends a clear message to the Italian invaders that their colonial domination over Ethiopia is utterly rejected by the Ethiopians.

The participation of the female characters like Hirut and Aster in fighting against Italian invaders in fictitious Ethiopia depicts them as warrior heroines. They are portrayed as warrior heroines in the sense that they play significant roles in the fight against political oppression in the novel. Mengiste writes that Hirut resides “in that small box of a room” (17) while Aster resides in another apartment where she “lives with her husband, Kidane” (Mengiste 17). Aster is a wife of Kidane, who later becomes an Ethiopian commander, while Hirut serves as their house maid. Mengiste employs this domestic space in Ethiopia to narrate the events that happened during the second war between Ethiopia and Italy. Upon hearing the news of the coming of Italian invaders, both Hirut and Aster participate in fighting against the Italian invaders.

In her paper, “Eastern African Women Writers’ ‘National Epics’: A New Force in Creative Fiction?”, Annie Gagiano rightly asserts that Mengiste’s *The Shadow King* “moves out from an aristocratic home whose house servants, represented by an elderly and younger woman, along with the lord and master, together shift into the life of guerilla soldiers facing the full might of the Italian army during a long and brutal fight (the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-37) to rid Ethiopia of its Italian invaders” (37). Both Aster and Hirut leave the comfort of their homes and join the battle to fight against Italian invaders. Angela Veale argues that “females enter fighting forces in many different ways, including active recruitment, volunteering, abduction or gang pressing” (7). Hirut and Aster are one among many ordinary Ethiopian women who volunteer to take part in active combat against the Italian soldiers in their effort to resist and fight against political oppression.

Through a situational irony we learn that Aster confronts an Italian soldier: “Carlo turns to his men stark eyed and shocked at him. Tell them about this. Tell them what I did. Then he [Carlo Fucelli] turns to find himself facing Aster, her rifle aimed perfectly not for his heart, but for the flesh of his stomach. She [Aster] pulls the trigger. The bullet is a fist in his gut.” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 352). The situational irony is depicted in the sense that while Colonel Fucelli is busy praising himself of his military prowess in fighting against Ethiopian soldiers and telling his fellow Italian soldiers to convey a message about his military achievements to other people, little does he know that he is at the mercy of Aster who is ready to shoot him. Despite his military expertise, Carlo Fucelli fails to defend himself from the fearless Aster. Fanon is of the view that natives should employ violence as a weapon of liberating themselves from colonial oppression. He posits that “at long last the native, gun in hand, stands face to face with the only forces which contend for his

life- the forces of colonialism” (58). In agreement with Fanon’s assertion, Aster, the native Ethiopian character, with the aid of her gun uses physical violence to shoot Italian soldiers like Colonel Carlo Fucelli, who represent the powers of colonialism, in her bid to defend the fictitious Ethiopia from being colonised.

Aster’s action of shooting Fucelli can also be read as a form of instrumental violence. Instrumental violence is carried out with the aim of achieving a certain purpose. With regards to instrumental violence, Roberts concurs that “when viewing the world through the lens of means and ends, one analyses the value of an act depending on the efficiency through which an act is carried out” (146). Aster’s action of engaging in direct combat against the Italian invaders depicts the instrumental value of resisting and fighting against physical and psychological Italian colonial domination over the fictitious Ethiopia. Fanon recalls that the colonisers, in this case, the Italian invaders, come to Africa with the intention of oppressing and exploiting Africans. He argues that the white colonial masters “come to take over his [the African native who gets colonised] land and force him by dint of flogging to till the land for them. If he shows fight [resist], the soldier fires and he’s a dead man” (Fanon 22). The precursory reveals that through the process of colonisation, the colonised are exploited economically, dehumanised and politically oppressed as they are being robbed of their land and killed by the coloniser during colonisation. Aster’s participation in fighting against Italian colonial oppression symbolises the Ethiopians’ rejection to be politically, socially and economically dominated and exploited by the Italian colonisers. Psychologically, Aster’s resistance against the Italian invaders symbolises the Ethiopians’ refusal to bow down to the colonial ideas that they are inferior and that there is a need for Ethiopians to be governed by the Italians in Mengiste’s fictitious novel.

Additionally, Aster exhibits the heroic attributes of patriotism and courage in her endeavor to resist and fight against political oppression. Her patriotism is revealed as she risks losing her own life as she fights against the Italian invaders in an active combat in order to protect and defend the freedom and integrity of the Ethiopian nation. Her courage is displayed through her ability to charge against the Italian soldiers fearlessly in the battlefield. It should be noted that Colonel Carlo Fucelli is portrayed as a military leader of the Italian army who is endowed with exceptional military skills. However, his military skills fail in the face of the military skilled warrior heroine, Aster, who shoots him in the stomach.

In her fight against political oppression, Aster's warrior heroism is also depicted as she plays the role of an army commander to her fellow Ethiopian women. Aster's warrior heroism is revealed both through her physical engagement in fighting against the Italian invaders as well as through her ability to train and lead her fellow Ethiopian women to take part in fighting against political oppression in fictitious Ethiopia by fighting against the Italian invaders. She devotes herself to training her fellow Ethiopian women in military tactics. In her own words, Aster says "We'll give them [the Italians] back their killings. I'll teach every woman how to make gunpowder. I'll teach all of you how to shoot a gun. You have to know how to run toward them unafraid" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 106). Aster's action of training her fellow women in military tactics like shooting a gun and facing the enemy with courage is reminiscent of the heroic actions of many ordinary courageous and patriotic Ethiopian women who volunteer to play significant roles in fighting against political domination in Ethiopia. Mengiste attempts to unearth the heroic deeds of female heroines who are not celebrated as a means of honouring them and uncovering their heroic deeds to the public.

These Ethiopian women who are trained by Aster can be read as warrior heroines as they take part in the war by making gunpowder and shooting against the Italian soldiers. The unity that exists among these Ethiopian women in employing violence to fight against Italian colonial domination resonates with Fanon's assertion that the "practice of violence binds them together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain [...] The armed struggle mobilises the people, that is to say, it throws them in one way and one direction" (93). Indeed, the Ethiopian women band together and use guns to violently get rid of the common enemy, the Italian invaders. Aster is also described as a woman who "put her own women in the front and left no Italian alive on that hill in Debark" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 358). The foregoing denotes that Aster and her fellow Ethiopian women are great warrior heroines who massacred all the Italians in the course of the war at Debark hill. These Ethiopian women portray the heroic attributes of courage, sacrifice and patriotism as they confidently risk their lives in fighting against the Italian soldiers for the public good of Ethiopia. This concurs with Gabriel's observation that heroines exhibit heroic attributes such as "courage, selfless act and acceptance to die for others to survive", among others (12). These Ethiopian women are ready to die so that both the current and the coming generation of Ethiopians should be spared from the bondage of Italian colonial oppression.

I assert that Mengiste's depiction of Aster's and the Ethiopian women's action of taking part in war is a way of deconstructing the socially constructed view of regarding Ethiopian women as "poor, oppressed, ravaged by natural calamities, famished, illiterate and starving, with multiple skeletal children and in urgent need of emergency aid" (Maula 11). At the same time, Mengiste attempts to honour them by cracking wide open the women's contribution in fighting against political oppression in Ethiopian history. The heroic deeds carried out by Aster, Hirut and the Ethiopian women in Mengiste's *The Shadow King* represents the contribution of ordinary Ethiopian women who took part in the second Italo-Ethiopian war. McFadden laments that even though "African women were in the forefront of the enslavement resistance five to six hundred years ago, yet they are invisible in the written history of that period (4). This same trend of unrecognising women's contribution to their countries is also revealed during the colonial era. In *The Shadow King*, regardless of the women's input in defending Ethiopia from being colonised by the Italians; they are never known nor celebrated as heroines. In her paper, "Narrating the Italo-Ethiopian War in Gabriella Ghermandi's *Regina de fiori e di perle* and Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King*", Brandon Breen avers that Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, "attempts to revise international views of a history that is often ignored or seen through a male and European gaze"(129). The highlighting of women's contribution is a milestone in correcting the misrepresented history of a nation. This helps in presenting a picture of the reality of the heroines' contribution and their significance during the second Italo-Ethiopian war.

It is through Mengiste's act of writing her novel, *The Shadow King*, which presents the better picture of a historical allusion to women's contribution and significance in fighting against political oppression during the second Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Susan Andrade bemoans the fact that in the past, novels written by women were considered apolitical- "which means concerned only with domestic issues and certainly not part of the national narrative" (5). Nevertheless, with the passage of time, people begin to read political issues in novels written by women. Mengiste is one of the female novelists who features political issues in her novel, *The Shadow King*. She brings out the political issue of women's contribution in fighting against Italian colonial domination by depicting Ethiopian female characters who play significant roles in resisting colonial domination in the aforementioned novel. Some of these female characters are Aster, Hirut and Fifi whose heroic deeds are explored in this chapter. Their heroic deeds help in highlighting women's contribution to fighting against Italian colonial domination.

Aster is portrayed as a character who invokes the supernatural powers to aid her in fighting against political oppression. Aster is depicted as a mythical figure, “a madwoman on a wild horse blazing through the hills, she is stopping at every church and shouting into the heavens and calling wrathful angels down to earth, a spirit screaming vengeance from the tops of barren trees. She is unnamed ghost thrown down by the Almighty to curse our foreign enemies” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 65). This depicts that Aster is portrayed as not just a heroine, but as a superheroine who is able to invoke the supernatural powers, in this case, the angelic legions, to help her in fighting against political oppression by unleashing wrath on the Italian invaders. Her assumed supernatural ability is supported by the hyperbolic image of fire as Aster is depicted riding on a horse and shining like fire in the hills. She is also depicted as a ghost who is able to destroy the Italian soldiers. She is capable of frustrating the Italian invaders’ plan of colonising the fictitious Ethiopia. With the passage of time, the Ethiopian women characters begin to recognise that “it is Aster, wife of Kidane, racing through our hills with that horse the color of gunpowder. It is she who is rupturing our nights with those shouts, dressed in black. She is calling to us, ordering us to get ready to fight” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 65). Through this action, Aster is able to inspire and encourage the women to take part in the war. As pointed out above, the Ethiopian women hearken to her call to take part in the war and it is these women whom Aster equips with military tactics. Aster’s heroism is further portrayed through her heroic attributes of bravery and resilience as she is able to travel alone without fear in the hills and at night.

Both Hirut and Aster are further portrayed as warrior heroines who guard the Shadow King, Minim. Hirut is fully dressed as a bodyguard of the acting emperor, Minim. Hirut is “dressed as a Kebur Zebegna, a member of the Emperor’s elite army. Her uniform, handed to her by Aster with unusual gentleness, has been perfectly sized to fit her. A rifle is on her back, cleaned and polished. An ammunition belt is cinched at her waist” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 220). Such words paint an image that Hirut is well dressed and fully armored with a gun and bullets which she uses to kill the Italian soldiers in her duty of protecting the emperor. Aster is also fully dressed and armored as she is “dressed in a uniform with a pistol around her waist” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 217). Both Hirut and Aster use their guns to shoot Italian soldiers in order to protect Minim and defend the fictitious Ethiopian nation from being colonised by the Italians. Both Hirut and Aster exhibit heroic attributes of patriotism, acceptance to die for others to survive, and courage as they risk their lives to guard the acting Emperor who is also targeted by the Italian soldiers (Gabriel

12). More importantly, it supports the argument regarding Mengiste's attempts to highlight the role of women as national soldiers, taking part even in military action. It is obvious that the guards of the emperor would not stand out as heroes to the same extent as the emperor himself. Kidane tells his fellow Ethiopians to "pay attention to his guards, these women [Hirut and Aster] who are also warriors, soldiers, daughters of our Empress Taitu who once led forty thousand against these *ferenjoch* [Italian soldiers] the first time they invaded forty years ago" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 221). There is an allusion to warrior heroic deeds of Empress Taitu who is praised and honoured in Ethiopia for leading an "army of about 5000 infantry and 600 men [and fighting against Italian soldiers] at the battle of Adwa [and emerging victorious during the first Italian invasion of Ethiopia]" (Adugna 13). I read Mengiste's reference of Aster and Hirut as the daughters of Empress Taitu as her way of underscoring the fact that ordinary Ethiopian women who engage in warrior heroic deeds during the second-Italo Ethiopian war have to be recognised and celebrated just like Empress Taitu is honoured in Ethiopia.

Hirut's heroism is further portrayed through her endowment with supernatural strength to fight against political oppression. As she charges against the Italian invaders, "she feels the spirits of the dead seep into her bones and steady her like steel" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 353). This hyperbole depicts Hirut as a superhero as she is endowed with supernatural powers of her ancestors which enters her body and strengthens her to continue fighting against political oppression by eliminating the Italian invaders. Breen asserts that Hirut is "endowed with mythical qualities associated with her soldierliness" (134) through her ability to interact with the dead. Hirut's warrior heroism is further depicted through her use of a *wujigra* (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 31), a gun she is given by her father, to kill the Italian invaders as an act of her resistance and determination in fighting against Italian colonial domination. Hirut is portrayed "as a wondrous soldier in the great Ethiopian army, daughter of Getey and Fasil, born in a blessed year of harvest, racing toward the enemy unafraid" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 353). Hirut is given the surname Getey which alludes to the real name of Mengiste's grandmother who took part in the Italo Ethiopian war but her story is not widely known. Gagiano confirms that "Mengiste describes her own belated discovery of female participation in war against a vastly better resourced and larger army by her great grandmother" (42). This can be read as Mengiste's way of honouring and uncovering the unappreciated common Ethiopian women who contributed to the building of their nation.

It is worth noting that in their fight against political oppression, the heroines also unite with the Ethiopian men in fighting against political oppression by means of violence in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*. Patricia Hill Collins argues that Black feminism is a "process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualise a humanist vision of community" (39). African feminism advocates for the unity of both African men and women to fight against colonial domination. This is because the black women realise that their fellow black men are also victims of colonial oppression and there is a need for both men and women to unite in fighting against colonial oppression. McFadden highlights that the idea of nationalism unites African men and women. She argues that "basically, nationalist ideology is an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist ideology that mobilises oppressed, dispossessed populations, and does not have any tolerance at all for gender issues. There is no space in nationalism for gender differences" (4). Indeed, both the Ethiopian women and male characters are portrayed as warrior heroines and heroes as they use violence, for instance, the use of guns in fighting against colonial oppression in their country. The unity that exists between the heroes and heroines in fighting against political oppression also resonates with Fanon's idea that the fight against the same enemy (colonialism) creates a feeling of solidarity because "the mobilisation of the masses, when it arises out of the war of liberation, introduces into each man's consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny and of collective history" (93). In tandem with Fanon's contention, Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, depicts the fictitious Ethiopian men and women characters that are united through violence and driven to fight against political oppression by the fact that they have the same identity, that is to say, they all identify as Ethiopians, and are fighting the same enemy, in this case, the Italian invaders, who want to colonise them. This brings out the theme of solidarity as Ethiopian men and women unite in fighting against political oppression.

It should be noted that the female characters do not only employ violence in fighting against political oppression but they also employ non-violent means. Their heroism is also displayed through other activities that are not associated with violence but contribute positively to fighting against the Italian invaders. We learn that "Close at their heels are the women with stretchers and blankets, wool scarves and food supplies. They are the ones who will carry the wounded, bury the dead and feed Kidane's army" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 92). Such an expression is an allusion to the non-violent heroic tasks that are performed by ordinary Ethiopian women during the second Italo- Ethiopian war. Instances of such tasks include carrying the wounded soldiers on the

stretchers and feeding the Ethiopian army. I read this as Mengiste's way of conferring prestige upon the uncelebrated Ethiopian heroines by uncovering their heroic deeds in the novel. Angela Veale befittingly observes that in Ethiopia "females within fighting forces also perform tasks that are gender stereotypical for women in their society such as preparing food, cooking, cleaning, and being porters"(6). In the same vein, Minale Adugna in her paper, "Women and Warfare in Ethiopia", contends that "women camp-followers were reported to have mainly been engaged in the transportation and preparation of food and drinks [...] and in the event of food scarcity they used to gather fruits and roots of some plants [to feed the Ethiopian army]" (24). Veale's and Adugna's observations cement the fact that there are many ordinary Ethiopian women who contributed to fighting against political oppression during the second Italo-Ethiopian war. Infelicitously, some of these heroines are not celebrated for their input to the building of Ethiopia.

Hirut is a fictitious Ethiopian female character whose heroism is depicted through her work of taking care of the wounded soldiers in a war zone. It is revealed that Hirut "has been working without break to tend to the wounded [...] and has spent sleepless nights cleaning and wrapping bandages and mixing powders" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 115). This accentuates the fact that Hirut is a patriotic and selfless woman who works tirelessly and is highly dedicated to making sure that the soldiers recover quickly so that they can return to the battlefield and continue fighting against the Italian soldiers. It is also revealed that Hirut becomes exhausted in the course of taking care of the wounded soldiers which has "stripped her clean of emotion, pushed her deep into a pit of debilitating fatigue" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 205). Nevertheless, she continues to take care of the wounded soldiers even in her tired state. Hirut's action of taking care of the wounded can be read as an allusion that is in accordance with Adugna's assertion that Ethiopian women "used to assist members of the Red Cross in carrying the wounded as well as giving first aid or full nursing service using traditional medicine which they prepared from roots, barks, fruits and leaves of various trees" (24). In so doing, Hirut helps the fictitious Ethiopian army to be physically fit so that they can be able to resist Italian colonial domination over Ethiopia.

Additionally, Fifi is depicted as a cunning warrior heroine who plays the role of a spy in her effort to resist and fight against political oppression in Ethiopia in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*. She is described as a "young woman who fled to Asmara to remake herself into a *shermuta*, a *wishima*, a whore: Fifi, the stunningly beautiful madam loved by some of the smartest, bravest Italian

officers Italy has ever known” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 193). Mengiste’s portrayal of Fifi as an Ethiopian woman who is loved and cherished by Italian soldiers alludes to the love affair that Italian men have with Ethiopian women. Adugna assent that “the Italians had great affection for the Ethiopian women and they used to marry or keep concubines” (32). Through the omniscient narrator we learn that “beyond the face and the curves and the supple muscles [of Fifi], there is also this: that sharp intellect that masks much more than it reveals” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 203). I observe that such description of Fifi denotes that her cunning warrior heroism is depicted in the way she uses her beauty, intelligence and wisdom to attract Italian soldiers to sleep with her so that she can get important information about Italian military tactics from them and pass it on to the Ethiopian soldiers. McFadden contends that women’s action of reclaiming their sexual energy and power enables them to discover reservoirs of personal and political courage that can equip them to envisage and fight against oppressive systems and circumstances (2). I observe that Fifi uses the power of her sexuality as an agency of change, creativity and resistance against Italian colonial domination over Ethiopia. Her actions prove that women have the capacity to use their sexual power to change things and fight against agents of oppressive systems, in this case, the Italian invaders. Gagliano coincides that Fifi “who becomes Fucelli’s lover picks up and remits Italian war intelligence to the Ethiopians” (43). This helps the Ethiopian soldiers to be alert of impending danger and also to launch strategic military attacks against the Italian army.

Fifi’s action of engaging in sexual relations with the Italian soldiers can also be read as her way of expressing her sexual freedom. We learn that people do not imagine that Fifi is a “woman who provides special services only for the richest Italian men at an astonishing price” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 177). McFadden posits that in “all patriarchal societies, women and girls are taught, consistently and often violently, that their bodies are dirty, nasty, smelly, disgusting, corrupting, imperfect, ugly and volatile harbingers of disease and immorality” (5). This negatively affects how women imagine their bodies and also extends to the sexual restrictions to which they are expected to adhere to in a patriarchal society. Fifi is not blinded by patriarchal perceptions regarding her body, rather, she cherishes her body and enjoys sexual pleasure and freedom as she sleeps with different Italian men.

Moreover, Fifi’s wit is portrayed in the way she uses the nickname Ferres when sending important information to the fictitious Ethiopian soldiers so that the Italian soldiers should not detect her as

a spy if they come across such information. Kidane receives important military information from Fifi “written in the same careful, neat script as before. Rossi. 3 columns. 1500 strong. Pushing through Debark to Bahir Dar. will be attacked, reinforcements needed” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 111). It is revealed that “Fifi’s Italian is perfect, educated, with hardly a trace of an African accent. She speaks it with astonishing fluency” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 193). Fifi learns and speaks Italian language fluently so that she should be able to easily converse with the Italian soldiers and relay the Italian military strategies to the Ethiopian army. Through her actions, Fifi displays the heroic attributes of patriotism and courage in her effort to resist and fight against political oppression. Her patriotism and courage are revealed in the way she fearlessly put her life in danger by interacting with the Italian soldiers who would have easily killed her upon knowing that she is a spy. Mengiste blows the lid of Fifi’s heroic deeds as a way of appreciating the works of the uncelebrated heroine and that of the rest of the common uncelebrated Ethiopian women who also acted as spies during the war.

Hirut is portrayed as a heroine who only does not fight against political oppression but also fights against sexual oppression. Kidane who embodies the patriarchal ideals regards Hirut as a sexual object. Kidane beats and rapes Hirut on different occasions in the war camp. We learn that Kidane pushes Hirut backward until she is flat on the ground and settles on top her [and rapes her] (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 206). He also “kicks her and curses while he pulls up his trousers” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 208). I read Kidane’s acts of raping Hirut as his way of expressing his masculine superiority over the woman, Hirut, who is considered as weak in a patriarchal society. Commenting on the issue of rape, Pumla understands rape as “an act of non- consensual sexual violence, directed against a woman or someone constructed as feminine. It is an expression of masculine power and female vulnerability” (144). Hirut fights against sexual oppression by necessitating the death of Kidane. Her fight against sexual oppression is her way of fighting against male domination and physical, emotional and psychological oppression of women by men. Gagliano posits that “Hirut finally freed herself from Kidane by using a small knife appropriated from Fucelli’s battlefield corpse to end her then grievously wounded abuser and leader’s life” (43). Apart from using the small knife to kill Kidane, Hirut also necessitates the death of Kidane by suffocating him. This is revealed as Ettore wants to tell Hirut who is holding the injured Kidane that “he cannot breathe like that. He wants to say, sit up, Hirut and give him air. But Hirut is rocking and murmuring, her grip tightening on the man as Kidane groans and breathes his last”

(Mengiste, *Shadow King* 356). Hirut's action of killing Kidane is her way of deconstructing male superiority over women. This kind of male superiority that Hirut deconstructs is the one that is expressed through men's action of raping women.

I observe that Hirut's action of necessitating the death of Kidane is her way of expressing her anger against sexual violence that she suffers in a patriarchal society. Hirut's action of killing Kidane, a rapist, is her way of expressing disgust, condemning and fighting against the atrocious act of rape which men use to assert their male dominance over women. Hirut is one of the rare women who summons up courage and fights against the sexual oppressor. Hirut's vengeance on Kidane sends a clear message that the act of raping women should not be tolerated in a society.

It has been evidenced that the heroism of the female characters is depicted through their contribution in fighting against political oppression. Heroines like Aster uses violence in fighting against the Italian invaders. This is expressed by engaging in a direct combat and using guns in fighting against the Italian invaders. The heroines also carry out non-violent heroic deeds. For example, taking care of the wounded soldiers and providing food to the Ethiopian army. This helps in strengthening the Ethiopian army to continue the battle against the Italian invaders. The heroism of the female characters is also depicted through their fight against sexual oppression. For instance, Hirut fights against sexual oppression by killing Kidane, a man who rapes her. I read Mengiste's excavation of the heroic deeds of the uncelebrated heroines as a way of honouring them and exposing their notable deeds to the public.

2.3 DARING WOMEN: EXCAVATING UNCOMMON HEROISM OF WOMEN IN ZIMBABWE

Irene Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* features female characters that fight against injustice, political and sexual oppression in a fictitious post-independent Zimbabwe. The novel features female characters like Trinity, Gabrielle Busisiwa Langa, Danika and Isobel. Gabrielle is portrayed as a lawyer and she takes up the task of seeking justice for Danika who gets raped in the aforesaid novel. Trinity is portrayed as a journalist and Isobel is depicted as a workmate of Gabrielle. Both Trinity and Isobel are friends of Gabrielle. I perceive that Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* depicts female characters namely, Gabrielle, Trinity and Isobel as bureaucratic heroines who fight against political and sexual oppression. This is because they employ their professional knowledge and platform in carrying out heroic deeds in the country. As already alluded to, bureaucratic heroines

“involves employees in large organisations in controversial arguments within or between agencies and [employees] standing firm on a principle despite intense pressure to conform or blindly obey higher authorities” (Franco et al 102). In this thesis, the term bureaucratic heroine is used to refer to characters who use their professional skills, platform and knowledge to fight against injustice, political and sexual oppression.

Through her law profession, Gabrielle plays the heroic role of fighting against political and sexual oppression. She fights against political and sexual oppression as she attempts to seek judicial justice for Danika, a young school girl who is raped by the Party man. I read Danika’s rape case as a representation of political and sexual oppression. This is because Danika is sexually assaulted by a man, a political figure, who is protected by the government so that he cannot be punished for his crime. Gabrielle is portrayed as a bureaucratic heroine in the sense that she is determined to proceed with Danika’s rape case despite being warned by her father that Danika’s rape case is “too big and too political” (Sabatini 25) and the court’s constant adjournments of Danika’s case. As already mentioned, the man who rapes Danika is a political figure who holds a high position in the ruling party. As such the state uses the court, specifically the judge, to mentally frustrate Gabrielle to drop the rape case so that their political member, the rapist, goes scot free.

Nevertheless, Gabrielle portrays bureaucratic heroic attributes of courage, determination and fighting for the rights of the oppressed as she stands on the principle of seeking judicial justice for Danika irrespective of the fact that the offender is a powerful political figure. She puts her life in danger as she pursues Danika’s case. Commenting on the issues affecting women in the African countries, McFadden asserts that:

Unquestionably, heterosexual rape and sexual assault by males within families, in public spaces, and in situations of war and conflict have played a major part in the crushing, deadly wave that HIV has become across the continent, and feminists must continue to challenge and bring to justice those who commit acts of misogyny with impunity against females of any age or social status (41).

Gabrielle summons up courage and acts as an agent of social change as she fights against sexual and political oppression that Danika incurs in the hands of the party man. Gabrielle is aware that Danika’s sexual rights have been violated by the rapist. She attempts to accord some agency to the young girl so that she can get justice at the court where both Danika and Gabrielle hope that the

rapist will be punished for his offence. I assert that Gabrielle fights against political and sexual oppression as a way of fighting against male domination and oppression of women in the society. Gqola observes that in African patriarchal society women live in fear due to sexual oppression they incur at the hands of men. She poses that rape “is an exercise in power that communicates that the man creating fear has power over the woman who is the target of his attention” (Gqola 79). In a patriarchal society, women are not treated with dignity as they are regarded as sexual objects that men use to satisfy their lust. Gabrielle’s act of seeking justice for Danika can also be read as her way of fighting against this sexual objectification of women by men.

There are different attributes that are associated with heroines. In his article, “Verisimilitude in fiction: Exploring the didactic theory of literature in light of heroism reflected in Ngugi WaThiong’o’s *“A Grain of Wheat”*” Bazimaki Gabriel affirms that courage and the ability to fight for the rights of the oppressed are some of the heroic attributes. (12). We learn that Gabrielle “wanted to make absolutely sure she had collected as much pertinent information as possible, that there was nothing vital she had missed that would jeopardize the hearing [of Danika’s] case” (Sabatini 21). This data cements the fact that Gabrielle is determined to gather important information that may help her win the case in her fight against political and sexual oppression.

Gabrielle’s bureaucratic heroism is further portrayed through her determination to uphold the integrity of the law as she wants to make sure that the accused is punished despite his political position in the society. Consequently, political figures and ordinary men in society would be afraid to indulge in political and sexual oppression for fear of being punished by the law thereby winning the battle against political oppression and sexual oppression of women in the society. Usually heroism is associated with people who engage in warfare like soldiers. Sabatini brings out the uncommon type of heroism as she portrays a bureaucratic heroine, Gabrielle, who uses her law profession to fight against political and sexual oppression in the fictitious post independent Zimbabwe.

Additionally, Gabrielle’s and Isobel’s bureaucratic heroism is further revealed as they fight for the rights of the exploited workers at their workplace. Both of them help in fighting for the just payment of money to the exploited workers. Isobel portrays the heroic attributes of fighting for the rights of the oppressed and shows concern and love for others. This is revealed through her response upon hearing the tax that is deducted from the workers. She responds in an angry tone,

“That’s bullshit, you can’t just arbitrarily take thirty percent from someone’s salary. We should have guidelines as an organization, on fair practices” (Sabatini 237). Karl Max argues that in a capitalist society the proletariat are given wages by the bourgeoisie in exchange for their labour (6). From a Marxist perspective, the workers whose tax is deducted unfairly at the organisation can be read as the proletariats who are being exploited at their workplace. As a result, such characters continue to languish in poverty as they are economically oppressed. Isobel’s response reveals that she is empathetic towards the exploited workers and she is concerned with the exploitation of the workers through heavy taxation. No wonder she suggests that the organisation should learn to treat workers fairly and pay them justly for their work. Concurrently, Gabrielle uses her professional knowledge of law to fight for the just payment of the exploited workers. In her response to the news of the heavy tax deduction of the exploited workers, she says, “As a lawyer, I must warn you that you could be liable for severe damages should a case be brought before the court” (Sabatini 238). Both Gabrielle and Isobel display the heroic attributes of courage and fighting for the rights of the oppressed. The heroic attribute of fighting for the right of the oppressed yields fruit as the exploited workers’ payment is amended and exploitation of the workers through heavy taxation is stopped due to Isobel’s and Gabrielle’s aforementioned intervention. They are courageous in the sense that they confidently voice out their opinions to Mrs Dickson, a woman whom everyone fears to contradict her views even if her opinions are wrong.

Gabrielle’s heroism is further depicted as she fights against political oppression through her active participation in sensitising the masses about their freedom to vote for any candidate of their choice during the referendum. Consequently, government loses the election during the referendum and begins to hunt for people whom they think contributed to the downfall of the ruling regime. In her conversation with Ben, who later becomes her lover, Gabrielle says “we were just educating people about the referendum” (Sabatini 108). I argue that Gabrielle’s action of sensitising the masses is her way of indirectly fighting against political oppression. This is because people are empowered by the knowledge that during elections they have a right to vote for a candidate of their choice and have the liberty to not vote for the ruling regime which paves way for systematic removal of an oppressive government. She is also patriotic as she educates the masses about their freedom to vote into power a candidate of their choice. This could eventually lead to the freedom and peace

of many people if they could succeed in voting out of power the ruling oppressive government and replacing it with a good one during elections.

In the same vein, Trinity is depicted as a bureaucratic heroine as she uses her journalism profession to fight against political oppression in a fictitious post independent Zimbabwe. Trinity is working for the *Herald*, a government newspaper agency. She fights against political oppression by criticising and writing stories that expose the malpractices of the regime. I read Trinity's action of writing stories that expose the malpractices of the regime as her way of overturning the tables with regards to the operation of political dominant discourse of power. Louis Althusser posits that the "Ideological state apparatuses functions massively and predominantly by ideology" (145). He further elucidates that the state uses the Ideological state apparatuses like the media in order to propagate social control by advancing ideas and social norms that influence the masses to submit to the ordinances of the government (Althusser 136). In Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*, the *Herald* newspaper is an example of the Ideological state apparatus that the postcolonial ruling regime uses to advance its political ideologies so that the masses should be subordinate to its leadership. At *Herald*, the journalists are expected to present a good image of the ruling regime to the public by writing stories that praise the achievements of the leadership of the ruling regime. Nevertheless, Trinity subverts this system in the sense that even though she works for the *Herald*, a government newspaper agency, she refuses to write stories that advance the propagandistic agenda of the ruling regime. Rather, she writes stories that exposes the evils of the regime which can in turn influence the masses to rebel against the ruling regime.

Godfrey who has a love relationship with Trinity, tells Gabrielle "But you read Trinity's pieces, Gabrielle. She is getting into all those hard to reach places, interviewing war vets, the so called new landowners; her descriptions of what's going in those farms once they have been "liberated" are something else. I don't think her editor really reads those pieces properly" (Sabatini 188). This reveals that Trinity is clever and uses cryptic language in writing news that criticise and expose the malpractices of the ruling regime without being easily detected. She also depicts heroic attributes of courage, sacrifice and patriotism as she risks her life and job in fighting against political oppression for the benefit of all people in the fictitious post independent Zimbabwe. It is also revealed that "Trinity has the voices of the [political] victims in her tape recorder, their words in her notebooks" (Sabatini 289). This can be read as an allusion to people who were tortured

during the reign of Mugabe in Zimbabwe. In her attempt to fight for justice of the oppressed political victims in the fictitious Zimbabwe, she intends to publish and make the stories of the political victims known all over the world. She does this in order to seek judicial justice for the political victims from international courts and organisations.

Trinity loses her job in the course of fighting against political oppression. Trinity reveals to Gabrielle that she has “been suspended by the paper until further investigation” (Sabatini 292). Althusser is of the view that the Ideological state apparatuses such as school, church and the media employ “methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, censorship in order to ‘discipline’ not only their shepherds, but also their flocks” (16). In accordance with Althusser’s idea, Trinity’s suspension from work can be read as a form of punishment that the ruling regime uses in order to discipline her and also deter other people from writing stories that expose the evils of the ruling regime. Trinity’s right of freedom of expression is infringed upon by the regime’s act of suspending her from work.

We also learn that Trinity tells Gabrielle that the Party Youths “slapped me for a bit, they accused me of giving the opposition a platform” (Sabatini 291). The precursory reveals that Trinity is beaten by the Party Youths in the *Herald* office for failing to produce a party card and she is deemed a subversive person. The beating of Trinity by the Youth Militia and dismissal from her work concurs with Fanon’s idea that the “party plays understudy to the administration and the police, and controls the masses not in order to make sure that they really participate in the business of governing the nation, but in order to remind them constantly that the government expects from them obedience” (181). This reveals that the ruling regime employs coercion in order to silence people who criticise and agitate for change of leadership due to bad governance of the postcolonial regime. Many people become disillusioned with the leadership of African postcolonial regimes as the masses feel betrayed because of the political oppression they experience in post independent nations. It is the ruling regime that uses the government agents to oppress the masses. In Sabatini’s *An Act of Defiance*, the ruling postcolonial regime censors the published media content and uses the party youths in order to silence and coerce people like Trinity to desist from criticising the government and fighting against political oppression in their country. I read Sabatini’s depiction of Trinity’s contribution to fighting against political oppression as a technique of honouring and bringing into view the heroic deeds of Trinity, a bureaucratic heroine, to the public. In her paper,

“A Hero for the Twenty First Century”, Jacqueline Haessly poses that persistence in times of struggle is one of the heroic attributes (3). Trinity displays the heroic attribute of persistence in times of struggle in the sense that even though Trinity goes to exile, she is still contemplating on finding ways of seeking justice for the political victims and finding other strategies of fighting against political oppression in her country.

Additionally, Danika is portrayed as a super heroine in Sabatini’s *An Act of Defiance* as she fights against sexual oppression. A super heroine is a “fictional character who is endowed with superpowers that are beyond the laws of nature and uses such power to do astonishing things” (Cook and Frey 5). In this thesis, the term super heroine refers to a character who invokes the supernatural powers to fight against political and sexual oppression. Danika is portrayed as a superheroine in the sense that she is depicted as a character who uses magical powers to seek justice and fight against sexual oppression. It is evident that Danika’s use of magical powers is working as Danika tells Gabrielle that she afflicted the Party man with madness. This is revealed in a conversation between Gabrielle and Danika:

I will find them, I will have my revenge, one by one. Already the first one, the one we came to you about, do you remember that one? Gabrielle remembers. The fifteen year old schoolgirl, Danika Dube, who came to the office with her father and found her. Danika Dube with those big brown eyes, looking at her to see if she was going to be judged. Yes, that one, has become a madman. A madman (Sabatini 296).

From the above quotation, the man who is referred to as the first one whom Danika complained to Gabrielle about refers to the Party man who rapes Danika in the novel. We further learn that the Party man eventually becomes mad as he is afflicted with madness due to the magical powers invoked by Danika. I argue that Danika’s use of magical powers to cause the man who rapes her to become mad is her way of fighting against sexual and political oppression. This is because she is denied judicial justice and suffers because the man who rapes her is a political figure who is jealously guarded by the government agencies like the court and the political youth militia. On the other hand, Danika’s use of magical powers can be read as a sign of powerlessness in the sense that she fails to get judicial justice at the court. Nevertheless, her use of magical powers to cause harm on the rapist can also be read as her way of expressing anger and enacting vengeance against the person who molests her. After successfully dealing with the Party man, Danika is motivated

and continues to employ magical powers in order to afflict harm on the Youth Militia men. Danika calls upon the spirits and believes that they will come and cause harm on the Youth Militia men who sexually, physically and emotionally abused her in the past (Sabatini 297). I assert that Danika's usage of magical powers does not only serve the purpose of fighting against sexual and political oppression, but also serves as a vehicle of enacting vengeance upon the people who mistreated her, in this case, the Party man and Youth Militia men. Sabatini brings into view the heroic deeds of the uncelebrated heroine, Danika, as a way of honouring her and bringing to our attention her supernatural tactic of fighting against political and sexual oppression.

It is quite significant to note that Danika uses magical powers to fight against political and sexual oppression as her last option. She uses these magical powers after being frustrated by the court and also after being captured and tortured by the Youth Militia. Through flashback, Danika recounts the malpractices of the youth militia. She recalls that "They have taken me from the classroom. They have beaten the teacher when he tried to protest. They say that I am causing problems for a big man and they will teach me how to repent" (Sabatini 125). Fanon postulates that in a post independent nation, "the party, a true instrument of power in the hands of the bourgeoisie, reinforces the machine, and ensures that the people are hemmed in and immobilized. The party helps the government to hold people down" (171). In line with Fanon's argument, I read the Youth Militia's action of capturing and torturing Danika as well as beating her teacher as the government's usage of its political party wing, the Youth Militia, in order to silence the truth of the bad conduct of the party officials through intimidation thereby hindering the masses from accessing justice. This act of injustice of hindering the masses from accessing justice through intimidation makes the people to be hopeless and continue to suffer in the fictitious post independent Zimbabwe. However, despite all of this, Danika emerges as a heroine as she portrays the heroic attributes of resilience and persistence in times of struggle and proceeds to fight for her justice through the use of magic.

Overall, Sabatini brings forward different heroic deeds of the uncelebrated heroines in her novel, *An Act of Defiance*. It has been revealed that the heroism of these heroines is portrayed through their fight against injustice, political and sexual oppression. This can be read as Sabatini's means of honouring and bringing into light the contribution of uncelebrated heroines in their effort to create a better society for all in fighting against injustice, political and sexual oppression in the

fictitious Zimbabwe. Trinity and Gabrielle are portrayed as bureaucratic heroines who fight against injustice, political and sexual oppression through their profession. For instance, Gabrielle employs her law profession to fight against exploitation of the workers as well as to fight against sexual and political oppression. Through her journalism profession, Trinity also fights against political oppression by writing news that expose and criticise the malpractices of the regime. Danika is depicted as a superheroine who employs magical powers to fight against political and sexual oppression.

2.4 OUT OF THE SHADOW: DEPICTION OF BRAVE HEROINES IN MENGISTE'S *BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE*

Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* portrays heroines that resist and fight against political oppression in the fictitious post-colonial Ethiopia. I observe that these heroines fight against the autocratic rule of the Derg regime with the aim of toppling it and replacing it with a better one. Mengiste's portrayal of the heroic deeds of these uncelebrated female characters can be read as her technique of appreciating and bringing forward the contribution of the fictitious Ethiopian heroines in the building of their nation. Some of the heroines that are portrayed in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* are namely, Sara, Ilita, the unnamed Colonel's daughter, Selam and Lily. These female characters employ different means and display heroic attributes in their fight against political oppression which is perpetuated by the Derg regime.

In *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, Sara's heroism is portrayed through her actions of fighting against political oppression in the fictitious Ethiopia. In the novel we are told that people suspected to be rebels against the Derg regime are often killed, and their bodies left in the streets in disgrace. Sara joins the underground movement and begins to take part in the risky political assignment of collecting dead bodies and identifying their relatives so that they may be given a befitting burial. She collaborates with Dawit in collecting the dead bodies. We learn that "Dawit lifted the corpses, Sara helped drag them into the car, and then both of them drove past homes into the hills, then to a dense patch of trees and shrub" (Mengiste, *Beneath* 227). Sara's action of collecting the dead bodies can be read as her way of resisting and fighting against political oppression since the Derg regime forbids people from doing so. Z'etoile Imma appropriately concurs that collecting the dead bodies "was a form of resisting repression that didn't entail picking up a gun and shooting someone" (qtd. in Tembo 6).

It is worth noting that it is considered a norm that the dead person should be properly mourned and buried by one's relations. It should be noted that Sara's collection of dead bodies and presenting them to their relatives provides a platform for the relatives of the dead to conduct a proper funeral ceremony. It also energises the relations of the dead person not to give up the fight against political oppression which is perpetuated by the Derg regime. Anne Gagliano, in her paper, "Contemporary Female African Authors Imagining the Postcolonial Nation: Two Examples", affirms that Sara's return of the dead bodies to their relatives is "considered essential by the deeply pious Ethiopian people, and in effect restoration of the bodies to their family serves as some kind of heartening to them not to yield to the Derg's callous brutalities" (185). Sara also displays her heroic attributes of courage and patriotism as she "retrieves the bodies of the so called 'traitors' [people who revolt against the Derg regime] who are left to rot in the streets, returning them to their families for secret burials and thus restoring their dignity" (Matkze 94). Heroines who fight against political oppression like Sara have hope that a time is coming when they will triumph over the Derg's dehumanising autocratic rule and that they will be treated with honour as citizens of the fictitious Ethiopia by the new leadership that may replace the Derg regime. Through the narrator, we grasp that Sara "wrapped an arm around his [the soldier's] neck" (Mengiste, *Beneath* 281). The foregoing reveals that Sara in her fight against political oppression also engages in a physical battle against a soldier of the Derg regime thereby displaying the heroic attribute of courage. I observe that Mengiste depicts the heroic deeds of the uncelebrated heroine, Sara, as a way of appreciating and bringing to light the contribution of ordinary Ethiopian women in the fight against political oppression in Ethiopia.

Judith Butler asserts that some bodies are considered mournable while other bodies are considered unmournable. She postulates that "the question that preoccupies in the light of recent global violence is, who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally what makes for a grievable life?" (Butler 20). In Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, Sara's action of collecting the dead bodies of people who rebel against the Derg regime substantiates the fact these people are worth of both being regarded as human, being mourned and given a decent burial. This is because these people can be regarded as martyrs who die in the process of fighting for a noble cause of liberating the masses from economic and political oppression under the reign of the Derg regime. This action of sacrificing one's life for the betterment of all people is a contributing factor that makes the lives of these martyrs grievable and worthy of recognition. Martyrs are the ones who

“knowingly put their lives in jeopardy in the service of a cause” (Franco et al 102). In this study, the martyrs refers to characters who die in the process of fighting against political oppression. The mere fact that these martyrs have their relations whom they have built emotional and social ties with is another factor that make their lives grievable. Butler observes that “despite our differences in location and history, my guess is that it is possible to appeal to a “we” for all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody” (20). Butler’s observation speaks volumes of the pain and emotional turmoil that different characters who lose the lives of their beloved ones in the hands of the Derg regime go through. One of the places where people express their grief towards their deceased relations is at a funeral ceremony. It is absurd and disheartening to learn that the Derg regime forbids people from conducting a proper funeral ceremony for their deceased relations. It should be emphasised that it is in the eyes of the oppressed masses that the people who get killed in their fight against political oppression are mirrored as martyrs.

On the other hand, the Derg regime regard the people who get killed by the Derg soldiers as rebels who do not deserve to be properly mourned. It is obvious that the Derg regime cannot celebrate the people who rebel against its autocratic rule. Mengiste portrays female characters who get tortured and even killed in their fight against political oppression. A woman who passes pamphlets in order to stir up the masses to rebel against the oppressive ways of the Derg gets murdered by the Derg regime’s soldiers. Through an imagery, we learn that:

A girl knotted in tight ropes was dumped in Yekatit 12 Martyrs Square. Her skirt was lashed to her legs with rope that dug into her wrists and her ankles. And brought her limbs to an unnatural point. Students gathered around her, their fear carefully draped. Dawit pushed through them and forced himself to take a better look. He could count her ribs through her bloodied shirt. [...] He remembered her [name], Ililta (Mengiste, *Beneath* 172).

The above information portrays an image of the brutal suffering that Ilita encounters in the hands of the Derg soldiers. The image that Ilita’s body is tied with tight ropes, dumped in a public space and that people are able to count her ribs through her bloodied shirt speaks volumes of the political brutality that the heroines who resists the oppressive rule of the Derg regime encounter in the fictitious Ethiopia. One of the soldiers warns the public who are gazing at Ililta’s body that “she’s a lesson to all of you. And there will be others unless all of these anarchists stop their bourgeois assaults” (Mengiste, *Beneath* 172). Fanon poses that the “army and the police constitute the pillars

of the regime” (172). True to Fanon’s idea, the soldiers, a pillar of the Derg regime, use violence as we witness them torturing and murdering people who rebel against the Derg regime like Ilita. They do this in order to scare away people from rebelling against the regime as well as to force the masses to be subordinate under the Derg regime even though they are suffering.

The use of violence by the Derg regime can also be read as a form of mythical violence. Mythical violence is understood as “an instrumental view of violence that champions the idea of lawmaking in a means-ends continuum. It is bloody, upholds administrative legal violence and sets boundaries of a legal debate” (Qtd in Roberts 14). Nonetheless, the use of mythical violence by the Derg regime in order to gain political control over the masses can be read as an act of injustice to the fictitious citizens of Ethiopia. Normally, the ruling government is supposed to provide protection and implement good economic and social policies for the betterment of its citizens. In Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze*, the Derg’s leadership fails to implement good governance policies that can help to lift the masses out of economic and social hardship. As a result, people become disillusioned and begin to revolt and express their dissatisfaction with the failed and autocratic leadership of the Derg. I observe that the Derg regime makes an error in judgment in the way it responds to the demands of the masses. This is because instead of listening to the outcry of the masses and making necessary changes like implementing good governance policies that can lift the people out of poverty; the Derg regime begins to attack and unjustly murder innocent people who revolt against its autocratic and corrupt rule. Instead of unleashing violence on the masses, the Derg regime would have used other forms of resolving conflict like contact and dialogue. This would have helped in preserving people’s lives and finding amicable working solutions that can help to meet the people’s demands.

Even though the Derg regime regard the people who rebel against its leadership as rebels and not worthy to be mourned, I perceive that the female characters who die in the process of fighting against political oppression deserve to be regarded as martyrs and being properly mourned. This is because they sacrifice their lives with the intrinsic purpose of fighting against political oppression for the common good of the masses. Butler argues that there is a need to critically evaluate “how the norm governing who will be a grievable human is circumscribed and produced in these acts of permissible and celebrated public grieving, how they sometimes operate in tandem with prohibition on the public grieving of other’s lives and how this deferential allocation of grief

serves the derailing aims of military violence” (37). In *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, it is revealed that Mengiste manages to present different opinions of the masses and the Derg regime regarding the idea of a person that is worthy to be regarded as a martyr and being properly mourned. As already pointed out, the common oppressed people deem the people who die in the course of fighting against political oppression as martyrs and worthy of being mourned and even recognised in public. It is not surprising that Sara joins the underground movement of collecting the dead bodies of people who are killed by the Derg regime in order to mourn them properly and give them a decent burial. On the other hand, the Derg regime regard such people as rebels and not worthy of being mourned. In fact, the Derg regime forbids the masses from mourning the people who are killed by the Derg soldiers. I read Mengiste's representation of the common oppressed people's opinion of regarding the people who get killed by the Derg regime in the process of fighting against political oppression as martyred heroines and mournable as her way of presenting a counter narrative discourse pertaining to the idea of heroism. That is, she depicts a new dimension of understanding heroism in the primary text contrary to the one that is propagated by regimes of power. This is a good way of questioning the strategy that the ruling regimes put in place in considering a person that should be recognised and mourned in public.

Just like Ililta, the unnamed Colonel's daughter is portrayed as a heroine as she takes part in fighting against political oppression by passing out pamphlets that spell out strategic plans that the masses can use to rebel against the Derg regime. She gets brutalised in the hands of one of the Derg soldiers namely, Girma who is referred to as a “monster and a butcher” (Mengiste, *Beneath* 240). I observe that Mengiste depicts Girma as an allegorical historical figure, “Girma Kebede from Arat Kilo area in Addis Ababa where the Birhanina Selam Printing was located. Girma Kebede killed people like flies. He was the one who summarily executed the eight months pregnant Daro Negash” (Tegnen 225). In the novel, he is depicted as a cruel, merciless and violent soldier which underscores the fact that the heroines emerged in the midst of a hostile atmosphere as the Derg regime exercised autocratic rule in Ethiopia.

The unnamed Colonel's daughter gets badly wounded in the hands of Girma and his fellow soldiers in their effort to stop her from taking part in fighting against political oppression in the country. Hailu describes the shocking scene of the appearance of the Colonel's daughter. He notes that “clumps of hair had been pulled out of her head. Blood had soaked through her trousers and bright,

flowered blouse. Her swollen feet hung off one like a butcher's oversized trophy. Seeping out of the opening of the plastic bag was the smell of excrement and burnt flesh, shit and cruelty, a new obscenity" (Mengiste, *Beneath* 117). This portrays the physical wrath that the colonel's daughter incurs in the process of fighting against political oppression. Her body is badly wounded and has begun to produce pungent smell due to the smell of excrement and burnt flesh that comes out of her body. This depicts the brutality of the Derg regime. The wrath that the unnamed Colonel's daughter suffers in the hands of the soldiers alludes to many uncelebrated ordinary Ethiopian women who resisted and fought against political oppression during the reign of the Derg regime. I read Mengiste's portrayal of the heroism of the unnamed Colonel's daughter as her way of honouring and bringing forward the contribution of the uncelebrated Ethiopian women who took part in fighting against political oppression. The unnamed Colonel's daughter can be read as a heroine as she displays the heroic attributes of courage and patriotism in joining the cause of fighting against political oppression in order to liberate the masses from political oppression. Her patriotism and courage are depicted as she confidently risks her life in fighting against political oppression for the public good of Ethiopia.

It is worth noting that the domestic space provides a good platform in nurturing heroes in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. Selam, Hailu's wife, plays a crucial role of nurturing the heroic attributes of courage, resilience and inculcating a fighting spirit in her child, Dawit. Ngumbi avers that Selam is depicted as the "parental and familial figure that inspires and nurtures a revolutionary spirit in Dawit (180). Tembo postulates that "it is Selam who leads Dawit to believe that he comes from a family of great fighters" (6). Through the omniscient narrator, it is revealed that Selam "would understand in a way no one else in his family could, she would remind him [Dawit] that in his veins ran the blood of her father, one of Gondra's fiercest fighters, and she would tell him that hope can never come from doing nothing" (Mengiste, *Beneath* 30). The fruit of Selam's effort in nurturing heroic attributes in her child is depicted as Dawit engages in warrior heroic deeds through his fight against oppression perpetuated by the Derg regime. For instance, Mengiste presents a violent murder scene where Dawit "twisted the soldier's neck, surprised by its pliancy, its snap muffled by his own startled gasp. The soldier slumped to the ground" (230). This depicts Dawit as a warrior hero as he is endowed with superhuman strength and bravery in the way he murders a soldier with his bare hands.

Furthermore, Lily, Dawit's former girlfriend, is portrayed as a bureaucratic cunning heroine in the way she intends to fight against political oppression within the Derg system itself. Lily is a teacher by profession and her job description entails teaching women to know about their rights. In her conversation with Dawit, she tells Dawit that "teaching women about their rights is a good thing. And since *Kebele* meetings are mandatory, we might as well use it to our advantage. We can get them over one day, or at least get close enough for a clear shot"[...] "may be the way to fight is from inside. As long as we keep fighting" (Mengiste, *Beneath* 127). The foregoing reveals that Lily's heroism is depicted in her cunning idea of taking advantage of her teaching profession to sensitise the Ethiopian women of the Derg's propaganda and feed them with new knowledge as a way of stirring them up to rebel against the Derg regime. Her suggestions represent a covert form of agency. This kind of agency fits under the notion of self-definition which is described as the moment when one "becomes aware of the way that one's self and one's self conception, are socially constructed" (Abrams 825). Kathryn Abrams further poses that "developing this awareness does not permit [one] to transcend [...] socially conditioned visions of self, but it allows [one] greater room in which to affirm, reinterpret, resist, or partially replace them" (825). Abrams' views are applicable in Lily's life in the sense that even though Lily is conscious that it is quite difficult for her to find different means of fighting the Derg regime, yet she still has confidence and believes that women like her can be able to systematically fight against the oppressive rule of the Derg regime within the Derg system itself.

From a Marxist point of view, Lily's suggestions can be read as her way of subverting the dominant discourse of political power whereby the ruling regime uses the Ideological state apparatuses to impart ideas to the masses that make them to conform to the ordinances of the ruling regime. In Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, instead of using the women's platform to advance the propagandistic agenda of the Derg regime, Lily is courageous enough in using this women's platform to attack the Derg regime by imparting knowledge to the Ethiopian women of the evils of the Derg regime in order to stir them up to rebel against the Derg oppressive rule. Lily also reveals to Dawit that she takes part in distributing the pamphlets and also attends meetings that aim at sensitising the masses to rebel against the Derg regime (Mengiste, *Beneath* 128). However, it should be pointed out that Lily's heroic action of sensitising her fellow women to revolt against the Derg regime is not fully developed. This is because in the novel, it is not clearly stated whether she succeeds or not in winning the Ethiopian women to fight against the Derg regime.

2.5 CONCLUSION

To wind up the discussion, this chapter has discussed the heroism of female characters in the primary texts. In *The Shadow King*, the heroism of the female characters is revealed through their participation in fighting against colonial oppression. The heroines employ both violent and non-violent means in fighting against Italian colonial domination over Ethiopia. The participation of women in war suggests that these women are patriotic and brave as they risk lives in order to defend the integrity of Ethiopia. Hirut and Aster are some of the prominent female characters in the novel. In both Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* and Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, the heroism of the heroines is revealed through their participation in fighting against political oppression in postcolonial Zimbabwe and Ethiopia respectively. In Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*, both Trinity and Gabrielle are portrayed as bureaucratic heroines. Gabrielle uses her law profession to fight against political and sexual oppression. Trinity uses her journalism profession to fight political oppression by writing stories that expose the evils of the regime. Danika employs magic power to fight against political and sexual oppression. The female characters are disillusioned with the political and sexual oppression they experience in their country. In *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, Sara is depicted as a warrior heroine as she collects dead bodies that are thrown in the streets by the Derg regime. This is one of her ways of resisting and fighting against the autocratic rule of the Derg regime. Ililta, the unnamed Colonel's daughter and Lily fight against political oppression by passing out pamphlets that disseminate information that the masses can use to depose the Derg regime. The heroines depicted in the primary texts display the heroic attributes of courage and patriotism as they confidently risks their lives in fighting against political oppression for the public good of their nations. I read Mengiste's and Sabatini's exposition of the heroic deeds of the uncelebrated heroines as their technique of honouring women's contribution in Ethiopia by correcting a misrepresented history of Ethiopia. The subsequent chapter examines the heroic deeds of male characters in the primary texts.

CHAPTER 3

PORTRAYAL OF HEROES IN MAAZA MENGISTE'S *THE SHADOW KING*, *BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE* AND IRENE SABATINI'S *AN ACT OF DEFIANCE*.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Even though a lot of men who engage in notable deeds that benefit the society and the country at large are oftentimes celebrated, Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Irene Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*, portray male characters that engage in heroic deeds but are not celebrated. I observe that Sabatini and Mengiste bring to our attention such kind of uncelebrated heroes by fictionalising history in the novels under study. I detect that the male characters that are depicted in the primary texts belong to various categories of heroes. Mengiste's *The Shadow King* and *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* portray warrior heroes and martyrs. Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*, portrays bureaucratic heroes and martyrs. In this chapter, I argue that both Mengiste and Sabatini bring to spotlight the heroism of unknown and uncelebrated male characters as a means of honouring them and bringing into view their significant contribution to the building of their nations. The chapter further examines the heroic deeds and attributes that the heroes depict in the course of fighting against political oppression and injustice in the novels under study. I assert that the heroism of the male characters is depicted through their participation in resisting and fighting against political oppression and injustice. I perceive that the heroes employ both violent and non-violent means in fighting against political oppression in both Mengiste's *The Shadow King* and *Beneath the Lions Gaze*. On the other hand, the heroes employ non-violent strategies in their act of fighting against political oppression and injustice in Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*. It should be noted that both Mengiste's *The Shadow King* and *Beneath the Lions Gaze* feature a character by the name of Dawit. Even though Mengiste's *The Shadow King* is a prequel to *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, these characters are not necessarily the same and are analysed as different characters in this study.

The chapter employs postcolonial, Marxism and feminism theories. In postcolonial theory, Frantz Fanon's views on the concept of violence as well as his ideas regarding the failures of postcolonial nations are employed. His idea of how the colonised can use violence as a liberating force from colonial oppression is relevant in exploring different violent tactics that the male characters use in order to resist and fight against colonial and political oppression in both Mengiste's *The Shadow*

King and *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* respectively. It is also relevant in analysing the heroic deeds and attributes that the male characters engage and exhibit in their fight against political oppression in the aforementioned novels. His views on how both the coloniser and the ruling regime in a post independent nation employ violence in order to force people to be submissive to their leadership is essential in bringing to light the kind of hostile atmosphere that the heroes encounter as they fight against political oppression and injustice in the primary texts. His ideas on the failures of political leadership of postcolonial regimes is relevant in exploring the driving factors that motivate the heroes to fight against oppression in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*.

With regards to Marxism theory, the chapter draws from Marxist's idea that the bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat. The idea of the need for the proletariat to revolt against the bourgeoisie is relevant in examining how the oppressed masses react to the oppressive political leadership in the primary texts. The chapter also hinges on Louis Althusser's concepts of Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (IDAs). These concepts are relevant in understanding how the postcolonial regimes attempt to control and oppress the masses in both Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*.

Finally, the chapter is anchored on feminism theory. It specifically relies on Judith Butler's concept of mournable and unmournable bodies. This concept is relevant in exploring whether the fictitious characters who die in the process of fighting against political oppression are worthy to be recognised as heroes or not.

3.2 EXPLORING HEROIC ACHIEVEMENTS IN MENGISTE'S *THE SHADOW KING*.

In Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, the heroism of the male characters is revealed through their resistance and fight against political oppression. They are portrayed as warrior heroes who engage in direct combat against the Italian invaders in their effort to protect their nation from being colonised. As already pointed out, in this thesis, I use the term warrior hero, to refer to characters who lead their fellow citizens to fight against political oppression as well as the ones who are led by military leaders in fighting against political oppression. I perceive that one of the ways in which the warrior heroes resist and fight against political oppression is by employing violence.

Firstly, Seifu is depicted as one among many Ethiopian warrior heroes who employ violence as a weapon of resisting and fighting against Italian colonial domination. He launches violent attacks on the Italian Colonel, Carlo Fucelli, on two occasions. It should be noted that Seifu is not demotivated but rather inspired by the death of his son, Tariku, to charge against the Italian soldiers furiously. Through the process of mourning Tariku, Seifu gets transformed and strengthened to fight against the Italian invaders. Butler rightly concurs that “mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation, there is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss” (21). The transformative effect of losing his son is depicted in Seifu’s life in the sense that his anger towards the Italian invaders increases and he also gains courage to continue fighting against the Italian invaders. In her paper, “Narrating the Italo- Ethiopian War in Gabriella Ghemarndi’s *Regina di fiori e di perle* and Maaza Mengiste’s *The Shadow King*”, Brandon Breen posits that there is depiction of enchantment form of violence in Mengiste’s *The Shadow King*. According to Sarah Cole, enchantment refers to “the idea of ‘violent death’ as having a sort of sublime transformative power” (1632). Enchantment violence is revealed in the sense that “Tariku’s parent [Seifu] do[es] not heed the warning represented by his [Tariku’s] dead body left hanging, nor [does he] collapse into an overwhelming grief that prevents [him] from taking action; rather, [he] allow Tariku’s death to motivate him to fight against the Italians” (Breen 132). In his fight against Italian colonial domination, Seifu intentionally enacts physical torture with the aim of leaving Colonel Carlo Fucelli, to suffer for the rest of his life.

In addition, we learn that Fucelli “tries to jerk free and the knife pokes into his thigh, so quick it is cold as the tip of the blade comes out” (228). The preceding reveals that Seifu enacts physical violence on Colonel Fucelli as he cuts various body parts like the thigh of Carlo Fucelli with a sharp knife. Consequently, Fucelli feels excruciating pain all over his body and begins to feel cold as his own blood gushes out of his body and moves over his own skin. The omniscient narrator further reveals that “from a place inside his head, he understands that a stranger’s hand is reaching for the base of his penis, grasping it and tugging as another arm slips beneath his chin and forces his head back so he cannot see what is going to happen, so that he cannot see that brutal cut (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 228). The foregoing confirms the fact that Seifu is holding the base of Fucelli’s penis and threatens to cut it as he tries to move Fucelli’s head so that he should not see his manhood being cut. This makes Fucelli to be mentally troubled and gripped with fear as he risks losing his manhood in the hands of the warrior hero, Seifu. It is revealed that “hard fist drives

into his head again and again and [Fucelli begins to] see blackbirds and dying light” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 229).

The above information denotes that the result of Seifu’s torture on Colonel Fucelli is not only physical mutilation but also mental torture. It further substantiates the fact that Seifu is a warrior hero who employs violence in resisting and fighting against Italian invaders who want to colonise them. Seifu exhibits heroic attributes of courage and patriotism as he confidently invades the place where Italian soldiers are residing and attacks Colonel Carlo Fucelli in an effort to defend the Ethiopian nation from being colonised. Seifu’s intention of attacking Colonel Fucelli is to cause Fucelli to become “useless to the army, too humiliated to tell what happened, useless and unfit for war” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 232). With regard to his cause of fighting against colonial domination, I argue that Seifu is portrayed as a successful warrior hero as his violent attacks on Fucelli helps in weakening the Italian army indirectly. The Italian army becomes weakened because their commander is injured and traumatised which makes him fail to properly lead his army in fighting against the Ethiopian warriors. This paves way for the Ethiopian warriors to have an upper hand in winning the battle against the Italian invaders.

As already pointed out, Seifu launches violent attacks on Fucelli in his effort of resisting and fighting against political oppression. In another violent scene, while shouting his own name and his dead son’s name, Tariku, Seifu “pulls out his knife and bends to grasp Fucelli’s head and arch his neck” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 355). This shows that Seifu kills Colonel Carlo Fucelli with a sharp knife. I read this as his way of both fighting against political oppression and also enacting vengeance upon Fucelli who necessitates the death of his son, Tariku. It is Hirut who later “finds Carlo’s dead body, a tattered handkerchief draped over his swollen face and neck, his belt and bloody trousers gaping open, his legs spread wide” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 355). Seifu’s acts of violence augurs well with Fanon’s idea that “decolonisation could only occur successfully when the colonised not only seized their freedom through a liberation struggle but participated in violent action to expunge the colonial heritage of inferiority and submission” (36). Indeed, Seifu’s act of enacting violence upon Colonel Fucelli is his way of resisting and fighting against political oppression against the Italian invaders. It also depicts his determination of fighting for freedom of the Ethiopian nation, his refusal and that of the Ethiopians to submit to and be looked down upon by the Italian invaders. I read Mengiste’s depiction of the heroic deeds of Seifu as her technique

of appreciating and bringing forward the contribution of uncelebrated heroes who took part in resisting and fighting against Italian colonial domination.

Additionally, in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, Kidane is portrayed as a warrior hero as he leads the fictitious Ethiopian army as commander in resisting and fighting against political oppression. Just like Ethiopian heroes like Seifu, Kidane employs violence in fighting against political oppression. He uses guns and knives to eliminate the Italian opponents as a way of resisting and fighting against political oppression. This is because the Italian soldiers are oppressing the people by unjustly killing and leaving a lot of Ethiopians wounded in order to force Ethiopians to submit under colonial rule. Upon hearing the war signal, with the aid of his gun, Kidane shoots at the charging Italian soldiers (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 120). In his quest to defend the integrity and freedom of the Ethiopian nation, Kidane engages in a physical battle with one of the Italian soldiers who attacks Dawit. Employing his military prowess, Kidane lifts "his knife at Dawit's attacker, his own gun forgotten at his shoulder as he lunges forward before the *ascaro* [Italian soldier] has time to aim once more and then, the two of them spiral in the momentary quiet: ethereal and warm" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 119). In the end, Kidane manages to kill this Italian soldier with a knife. Kidane's tactics of using a gun and a knife in fighting against Italian colonial domination in fictitious Ethiopia is in compliance with Fanon's argument that "the naked truth of decolonisation evokes for us the searing of bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it" (37). This accentuates the fact that it is essential to employ liberating violence for one to be free from colonial oppression. Kidane employs liberating violence by shooting and stabbing Italian soldiers in his endeavor to defend the freedom and integrity of Ethiopia.

As an army commander, Kidane successfully leads the fictitious Ethiopian warrior heroes in their fight against political oppression against the Italian invaders thereby displaying the heroic attribute of victory (Gabriel 12). Grip and Hart observe that in real Ethiopian history the Ethiopian army "had largely outdated equipment that included rifles and artillery, but most Ethiopian soldiers were armed with traditional weaponry, especially spears" (1). Despite lacking advanced war weapons, the Ethiopians emerged victorious in their fight against Italian colonial domination. Ruibal et al postulate that in African history Ethiopia is regarded as the "only country that had been able to obtain a lasting victory over a colonial power during the scramble for Africa" (42). This confirms the idea that Mengiste's *The Shadow King* is indeed a historical allusion to some of the actual

experiences that the Ethiopian nation went through. For instance, Mengiste portrays characters like Kidane and Seifu who use spears and old guns in fighting against Italian colonial domination. Additionally, Mengiste portrays Ethiopian characters who win the battle against the Italian invaders just like it happened in real Ethiopian history during the second Italo-Ethiopian war. Mengiste's excavation and portrayal of the heroic deeds of Kidane can be read as her way of honouring and alluding to heroic deeds of many ordinary uncelebrated Ethiopian men who took part in fighting against political oppression during the war.

It is worth noting that Kidane affirms to his fellow soldiers that:

My blood is not afraid to leave my body and soak into this soil that is also mine. I'm giving you this oath today: from now on, I'll act as your shield in battle. You must lead the rest of my army in the same way. I'll protect you with my life, I swear that to each of you right now. You've each become my sons, my own flesh and blood. To lose any of you is to lose part of myself (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 60).

Kidane's speech denotes that he embodies heroic attributes in several ways. He possesses the heroic attributes of courage and patriotism as he is not afraid to die in the course of fighting against political oppression in the Italo-Ethiopian war. He risks his own life for the sake of protecting and preserving the life of his fellow Ethiopian soldiers in the course of fighting against political oppression in his country. The way he protects Dawit from being killed by an Italian soldier in the course of the war is one of the instances that depict his heroic attributes of strong love for others, courage and patriotism in action.

It is also interesting to note that Kidane attempts to evoke a patriotic spirit in his fellow Ethiopian soldiers by asking them, "Will you die for your country?" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 59). In response to Kidane's question, Seifu replies "first I'll kill" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 59) and Aklilu responds "I'm the greatest sniper you'll ever meet, no man can stop me" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 60). Seifu's response shows that he is inspired by Kidane's question as he is ready to lose his life and to kill a lot of Italian soldiers in the course of fighting against political oppression. In the same vein, Aklilu's response depicts that he is ready to use his military skills in defending Ethiopia from being colonised by the Italian invaders. Kidane's question inspires his fellow soldiers to put in much effort in fighting against the Italian soldiers who want to colonise them.

Moreover, in *The Shadow King*, Mengiste portrays Dawit and Tariku as the first martyrs who die in the course of resisting and fighting against political oppression. They are martyrs as they “knowingly put their lives in jeopardy in the service of a cause” (Franco et al 102). Martyrdom is connected to the idea of sacrifice. Micheal Lambek observes that “sacrifice takes place in the interest of some later good” (433). Martyrs are considered as people who have died a good death because of the people’s belief that martyrs die for a higher cause which in turn may benefit people in the society when it’s materialised. Dawit and Tariku are portrayed as patriotic, courageous and are indeed martyrs as they die in the process of rendering a noble service to their country, a service of fighting against political oppression in Ethiopia. Prior to their death, both Tariku and Dawit are portrayed as warrior heroes as they fight against Italian soldiers who want to colonise them. In the battlefield, Dawit holds his gun and “aims with precision and pulls the trigger” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 119) in order to kill Italian soldiers. In his fight against political oppression against the Italian invaders, Tariku uses guns to kill the Italian soldiers and he also spies on the Italian army so that he can relay important information to his fellow Ethiopian soldiers. Dawit’s and Tariku’s usage of guns to shoot Italian soldiers as well as Tariku’s tactic of spying on the Italian army is in harmony with Fanon’s argument that in fighting against colonial oppression the natives “can only triumph if they use all means to turn the scale, including of course, that of violence” (37). Unfortunately, Tariku gets captured by the Italian soldiers. Consequently, the Italian soldiers led by Fucelli tie him to a tree with a rope. Tariku, “the younger captive throws back his head to emit an extended shout, his voice echoing and multiplying. Then he releases his full weight against the guards holding him, throwing them off balance. He yanks down on their arms as they stumble forward” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 184). This incident highlights that even though he is tied, Tariku is courageous and determined to fight against the Italian soldiers. He tactfully uses the weight of his body to fight the Italian soldiers to the extent that they lose balance.

Pertaining to their martyrdom, Tariku is hanged to death by the Italian soldiers and Dawit dies from an injury he sustains in the war after being shot by one of the Italian soldiers. Dawit suffers from a serious injury as his “leg explores into splintered flesh, bone rips out of place, and Dawit falls, splattered in his own blood” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 119). Dawit’s patriotism is portrayed as he suffers and eventually dies in the course of fighting against political oppression in his country. It is revealed that Hirut “found Hailu sitting at the campfire cradling the wujigra, doubled over in grief so intense that his entire body seemed ready to split from unspent cries: this was the

way he announced Dawit's death, and he has refused to mention his brother's name ever since" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 139). Hailu who is also a warrior hero is greatly grieved by the demise of his brother, Dawit. Regarding Tariku's death, we learn that his "bloated face is slack. The neck strains against the unnatural angle. Blood has dried from the fresh stab wounds in his chest. His bare feet splay, twitching gently in the bottomless bend of earth" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 191). This depicts the visual imagery of a violent hanging scene of Tariku. It cements the fact that Tariku suffers physical pain to the point of death as he is violently murdered by the Italian soldiers who use a rope to hang him to death. It also signifies that the Italian soldiers use knives to inflict pain on Tariku's body thereby torturing and necessitating Tariku's death.

The death of the martyrs, Tariku and Dawit, whose death is necessitated by the Italian soldiers reflects the violent nature of colonialism. It also exposes the negative effects of the process of colonialism as it results in the death of innocent people. Fanon postulates that the natives first encounter of the colonisers "was marked by violence and their existence together, that is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler- was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons" (36). In Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, I observe that Mengiste exposes and criticises the negative effects of the violent process of colonialism. She depicts the Italian soldiers, who represent the colonisers, who employ violence, for instance, killing the Ethiopian soldiers, with the aim of forcing the Ethiopians to submit to Italian colonial rule. Commenting on the death of Tariku, Breen asserts that his death depicts disenchanted form of violence. Disenchanted violence "depicts violence as having no spiritual significance since it only brings destruction" (Cole 1632). The Ethiopians mourn his dead body and "will have to do with Tariku what they've had to do with all the other corpses: they will have to bury him without ceremony, in the dark, on nondescript land" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 209). The foregoing depicts "the uselessness of violent death and how war counteracts religion, leaving dead bodies in unmarked graves, their sacrifice almost futile" (Breen 132).

In Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, because of the violent nature of the war it is difficult for people to properly mourn the death of Tariku. He is buried without conducting proper burial ceremony. Judith Butler posits that some bodies are considered mournable while other bodies are considered unmournable (20). I observe that even though Tariku is not properly mourned and gets buried without conducting proper burial ceremony, his deeds and sacrifice in resisting and fighting against

colonial oppression makes him to be worth of recognition as a martyred hero. The death of Tariku and Dawit is a true reflection and allusion of the negative impact of colonial oppression on Ethiopians and Africa in general. I read Mengiste's portrayal of Tariku's and Dawit's death as her way of exposing and criticising the suffering and unjust treatment that the Ethiopian characters encounter in the hands of Italian colonisers.

It is quite significant to note that male character heroes engage in other heroic deeds that are not violent in nature but are helpful in fighting against political oppression in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*. For instance, Minim is portrayed as a warrior hero who takes part in fighting against political oppression in Ethiopia in two ways. In the first place, he is depicted as a skilled person who blows his horn in order to send a signal to the Ethiopian soldiers to attack the Italian invaders. Kidane admits that "his order to attack will ricochet through the hills with the blast of the horn. A recent recruit, a slightly built man with the strange name of Minim, Nothing, will blow that thunderous instrument" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 143). This proves that Minim takes part in sensitising the Ethiopian heroes to know the right time to launch an attack on the Italian army in their effort to resist and fight against colonial domination. It is interesting to note that the name Minim means "nothing" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 143). The preceding signifies that Minim is a microcosmic representation of the common people who help in fighting against colonial oppression but their efforts remain unappreciated.

Additionally, Minim plays the crucial role of impersonating the Ethiopian emperor at a time when the real emperor, Haile Selassie, had fled to England in the course of war between the Ethiopian and Italian soldiers. He is chosen to play the role of an emperor, the Shadow King, because his physical appearance resembles that of the emperor Haile Selassie. Kidane convinces Minim that "Empress Zewditu even had her Shadow queen when she led her armies. Our leaders couldn't be in two places at once, so they had their doubles" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 213). The title of the novel, *The Shadow King*, symbolises and foreshadows the crucial role that Minim plays of impersonating the Ethiopian emperor. In regards to the actual king, the aforementioned title of the novel, signifies the absence of the Ethiopian emperor during the war. It also criticises the ineffective leadership of the emperor in this fictitious Ethiopia. Minim's action of impersonating the Ethiopian emperor helps in motivating and inspiring the Ethiopian citizens to continue resisting and fighting against political oppression in their own nation. His physical presence and appearance

helps in strengthening the Ethiopians' belief that the emperor never leaves them. Aklilu, a warrior hero, reveals that the Ethiopians "believe in the emperor and have never fought a war without our [their] leader [the emperor]" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 211). In her paper, "Eastern African women writers' 'national epics': A new force in creative fiction?", Gagliano confirms that Minim "enacts the role of the revered leader to re-inspire the Ethiopians" (43).

Minim's acceptance and action of impersonating the emperor is in tandem with Franco et al understanding of heroes "as individuals who choose to take physical risks on behalf of one or more people, despite the possibility of suffering serious consequences, including death" (6). In his impersonating capacity, Minim displays heroic attributes of courage, self-sacrifice, inspiring, helpful and patriotism as he risks his life in playing the role of an emperor so that the Ethiopians can continue fighting and win the battle against Italian soldiers who want to colonise them. He is prone to death because the Italian soldiers want to kill him so that they can gain political domination over Ethiopia.

Hailu, and Aklilu are portrayed as warrior heroes who help in fighting against political oppression in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*. They are depicted as warrior heroes who employ both violent and non-violent means in defending and protecting the freedom and sovereignty of the Ethiopian nation. Their violent heroic deeds are portrayed through their use of guns in shooting to death the Italian soldiers, among others. Hailu together with Amha, a warrior hero, attack the Italian construction workers' camp to puncture tires, steal tools and weapons and cut communication lines. They also burn tents and kill the Italian soldiers who get in their way (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 274). The stealing of the Italian war weapons like guns helps in strengthening the Ethiopian army as the Ethiopian warriors use such weapons to unleash violent attacks on the Italian army.

Hailu and Aklilu engage in non-violent heroic deeds, for instance, taking care of the wounded soldiers. After the Italian soldiers unleash an attack on the Ethiopians, we learn that Aklilu "has spent most of his day inside the caves, checking on injured men, sending some back with villagers and burying others" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 127). Similarly, Hailu also takes care of the wounded soldiers. Hailu is portrayed as a knowledgeable person who "can identify poisonous plants and those they can crush for medicine" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 60). He uses this knowledge to treat the wounded soldiers. For instance, Hailu wraps the injured leg of Dawit in bandage and pours turmeric and honey on the sore of Dawit (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 128). Both Aklilu and Hailu

depict the heroic attributes of patriotism and strong love for others as they take care of the wounded soldiers so that they can recover quickly and return to battlefield to continue fighting against political oppression by fighting against the Italian invaders.

In closing, Mengiste's *The Shadow King* portrays warrior heroes and martyrs who engage in both violent and non-violent means in their fight against political oppression. Their use of violence is depicted through their capacity to use war weapons in fighting against Italian invaders. For instance, Seifu, a warrior hero, uses a knife to stab to death Colonel Carlo Fucelli while Kidane uses a gun to shoot Italian soldiers. The use of violence by the warrior heroes is in conformity with Fanon's idea that the natives should employ violence as a liberating force from colonial oppression. Some of the non-violent means in fighting against political oppression are carried out by Hailu and Akliu who take care of the wounded soldiers. Many of these heroes display the heroic attributes of courage and patriotism in their effort to defend the freedom and integrity of Ethiopia. Mengiste's unearthing of the heroic deeds of the uncelebrated heroes can be read as her way of appreciating and bringing into view the uncelebrated ordinary Ethiopian men who play different crucial roles in fighting against Italian colonial domination over Ethiopia.

3.3 RECALLING UNCELEBRATED HEROES IN MENGISTE'S *BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE*

In Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, there is depiction of male characters whose heroism is reflected through their participation in resisting and fighting against political oppression. These heroes employ different tactics in their endeavor to topple the Derg regime and replace it with a better one. I discern that the male characters fall under the categories of martyrs and warrior heroes. Some of these heroes are Dawit, Anbessa and Solomon. I observe that Mengiste highlights the heroic deeds of these uncelebrated heroes as a means of appreciating them and bringing into view the contribution of ordinary uncelebrated fictitious Ethiopian men who take part in the building of Ethiopia.

It is worth noting that in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, both Dawit and Anbessa are portrayed as warrior heroes who employ violence in fighting against political oppression propelled by the Derg regime in post-colonial Ethiopia. Dawit joins the underground movement which aims to depose the Derg regime. Anbessa laments that the Derg regime has "jailed us, they are killing us, they have started dumping us like trash on the road" (Mengiste, *Beneath* 190). The precedent

cements the fact that the underground movement is formed because the people are disillusioned with the failed and oppressive leadership of the Derg regime. The oppressive rule of the Derg regime is an allusion to the leadership of “Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam who exercised autocratic rule and the popular exercise of power soon gave way to personal dictatorship rule” (Burgess 99). Burgess observes that during the reign of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam there was “political repression, plunder and corruption which led to widespread opposition in different parts of the country” (100). Similarly, in *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze*, Anbessa laments that the Derg regime led by Major Guddu is associated with political repression and atrocities. This prompts Anbessa and other people to form an underground movement known as “Revolutionary Lion Resistance” (Mengiste, *Beneath* 190). The formation of this movement historically alludes to the formation of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) which was formed by opposition groups in order to fight against the Derg regime (Burgess 100). Burgess elucidates that “this armed force entered Addis Ababa in 1991 and the rule of the Derg came to an end” (100).

The reasons that Anbessa gives for the formation of the underground movement attunes with Sigmund Freud’s idea that “people in groups crave heroic leadership but those that would be leaders must not only be powerful and charismatic, they must themselves be held in fascination by a strong faith (in an idea) in order to awaken the group’s faith” (Freud 8). He further asserts that “leaders make themselves felt by means of the ideas in which they themselves are fanatical believers” (Freud 10). Anbessa, the leader of the underground movement, believes in the common suffering of the people and the need to fight against political oppression and urges Dawit and the rest of his followers to believe the same. Dawit and Anbessa use guns to launch a violent attack on the Derg regime with the intention of killing its leader so that they can replace the oppressive government with a better one.

We learn that Dawit “pulled the trigger and fired one shot after another. Dawit shot repeatedly, caught in the magic of bullets rolling out of a cool polished barrel, exploding with sound, ricocheting off metal and bone” (Mengiste *Beneath* 273) as he aims to kill the Derg leader and his guards. The usage of guns by Dawit and Anbessa in fighting against political oppression against the Derg regime is a result of the political disillusionment of the masses. Marx argues that the “proletariat must seize state power in order to destroy the existing bourgeois state apparatus, in a first phase, replace it with a quite different, proletarian, state apparatus, then in later phases set in

motion a radical process, that of the destruction of the state” (13). This idea reveals that for the proletariat to be free from exploitation and economic oppression they have to stage a revolution against the leadership of the ruling regime which keeps them in political and economic bondage. In Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze*, the masses who can be read as the proletariat are oppressed both economically and politically by the political leaders who can be read as the bourgeoisie. Dawit and Anbessa who are among the masses, fight against the Derg regime in order to overthrow it from political power and also to liberate the masses from economic, physical and political oppression perpetuated by the Derg regime. Both Anbessa and Dawit exhibit heroic attributes of courage and patriotism as they risk their lives in fighting against the Derg regime with the hope of liberating the masses from political oppression. This is in accordance with the idea that a hero is associated with such attributes like courage and patriotism (Gabriel 3). Even though they fail to kill the leader of the Derg regime, they manage to kill some soldiers and leaders of the Derg regime.

In his quest of fighting against political oppression, Dawit is portrayed as a mythical figure as he engages in warrior heroic deeds in Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze*. Dawit is portrayed as a character who is endowed with superhuman strength and bravery in the way he murders a soldier with his bare hands. Mengiste presents a violent murder scene where Dawit “twisted the soldier’s neck, surprised by its pliancy, its snap muffled by his own startled gasp. The soldier slumped to the ground” (*Beneath* 230). I read Dawit’s action of killing the soldier as his way of fighting against political oppression since the Derg regime uses the soldiers to oppress the Ethiopian citizens. He murders this soldier at a time when he is collecting dead bodies to give them befitting burial. I read this collecting of dead bodies as a form of resistance against political oppression since the government forbids people from doing so. Consequently, the oppressed people begin to praise Dawit and nickname him Mekonnen in a hyperbolic fashion for his triumph in killing the soldier, collecting and handing over the dead bodies to the relatives for proper burial. It is revealed that:

From a fading teahouse with plastered walls, a hushed name travelled like current and grew into a tide of admiration: Mekonnen. Mekonnen collects dead bodies. Mekonnen guides them to angels. Mekonnen, avenger of the weak, has heard our cries. And from mouths that whispered stories under the candlelight and incense, Mekonnen, killer of soldiers, grew large and strong, more powerful than a thousand raging armies (Mengiste, *Beneath* 233).

The above quote signifies that the warrior hero, Dawit, becomes famous as his stories of engaging in heroic deeds, specifically killing the soldiers, are told in hyperbolic fashion and spread among the people like wildfire. The Ethiopian masses applaud Dawit as “the avenger of the weak” (Mengiste, 233) as they are in support of his heroic action of killing the soldiers thereby helping the masses in resisting and fighting against political oppression. The soldiers can be read as an example of repressive state apparatus which the Derg regime uses to enact violence on the Ethiopian masses in order to force them to submit under its oppressive leadership. For instance, in order to deter people from protesting against his regime, Major Guddu with the help of the soldiers launched a violent attack on the Ethiopian masses. Consequently, “All of Addis Ababa erupted in chaos, doors were torn off hinges, sons pulled from homes and shot, daughters raped, men and women hanged in public. Thousands were herded to prisons where morbid cries and agonized screams spiraled out of small dark rooms” (Mengiste, *Beneath* 274). I read the soldiers’ action of raping, killing and jailing innocent people as their way of inculcating fear among the masses so that they should not rebel against the Derg regime but should be submissive under its leadership.

In the text, Major Guddu declares that “we will fight bourgeois White terror with Red terror! Until Ethiopians soil is soaked with their bones and flesh and cries, we will not stop! Death to our enemies!” (Mengiste, *Beneath* 274). Commenting on the negative effects of violence that people go through in the world, Butler argues that “violence is surely a touch of the worst order, a way a primary human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way, a way in which we are given over, without control, to the will of another, a way in which life itself can be expunged by the willful action of another” (28). Indeed, in *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze*, the violence that the Derg regime enact upon the masses has disastrous effects as it leads to the death and arrest of many innocent people. The violent attack that Major Guddu declares to be unleashed upon the Ethiopian masses by the soldiers depicts the theme of political oppression and alludes to “Mengistu’s call in 1977 for a ‘Red Terror’ to combat what he referred to as the counter-revolutionaries which was followed by some of the regime’s most repugnant acts of violence” (Burgess 100). In real Ethiopian history, Burgess highlights that during this period of ‘Red Terror’, “it is conservatively estimated that 100 000 educated Ethiopians were killed while several hundreds of thousands more were forced to flee the country. Unlawful killing, torture, imprisonment, illegal searches, arbitrary arrest and general derogation from basic freedoms and liberties were common place throughout the reign of the Derg” (100). The foregoing proves that Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* alludes

to the suffering of the Ethiopians during the reign of Colonel Mengistu. It portrays the hostile environment that the fictitious uncelebrated heroes endure and show forth their determination in fighting against political oppression in the aforementioned novel.

From the onset of Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, Dawit is portrayed as a courageous warrior hero as he takes part in fighting against political injustice and oppression. We learn that Dawit takes part in demonstrating against corruption and the high cost of living perpetuated by their political leaders. He displays the heroic attributes of patriotism, bravery and selflessness as he risks his life by taking part in the demonstrations against the autocratic rule of Emperor Haile Selassie. A student who takes part in the demonstrations gets shot by the police and when he is brought to the hospital Hailu tries "to imagine the fervor that had led this boy to believe he was stronger than Emperor Haile Selassie's highly trained police" (Mengiste, *Beneath* 11). The police's action of shooting the students who are protesting alludes to the "brutal massacre of university students by the government of Haile Selassie [which] took place on 29 December 1969" (Tegegn 250). In the end, Emperor Haile Selassie is deposed by a military coup. Dawit and the rest of the Ethiopian masses hopes that "All those ministers he [Emperor] made rich should be charged with a crime! That's what a new government will fix. These rich elites are nothing but traitors to their people, and until we get rid of all of them, nothing will change!" (Mengiste 56). This denotes that the masses are hopeful that the new government will serve them better, in sincerity and truth.

However, the new government known as the *Derg* led by Major Guddu becomes oppressive and corrupt. People begin to suffer and languish in poverty but the political leader and his subjects enrich themselves with the public resources. As a result, the Ethiopian masses become politically disillusioned with the leadership of the *Derg* regime. Commenting on the failures of postcolonial nations, Fanon upholds the view that, "the national bourgeoisie, since it is strung up to defend its immediate interests, and sees no further than the end of its nose, reveals itself incapable of simply bringing national unity or building up the nation on a stable and productive basis" (157). Indeed, in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, the Ethiopian masses become politically disillusioned with the corrupt, exploitative and oppressive leadership of the *Derg* regime. Instead of implementing developmental programs that can transform the lives of the masses, the *Derg* leaders misuse and enrich themselves with the public resources. McFadden concurs that many African postcolonial

regimes fail to deliver the promises that they make to the masses during the liberation struggle. The problem of many African postcolonial leaders lies in the fact that:

instead of transforming the liberation project through long-term sustainable policies and democratic practice, the newly emergent ruling classes have tended to consolidate further the unequal relationships between themselves and the working poor by using the state and the private sector for their interests, and more lately through economic restructuring programs, have systematically excluded large sections of the populace from access to and the use of essential resources like health, shelter and education (McFadden 38).

The above information depicts the theme of political betrayal as the Derg political leaders fail to implement the promises they made to the masses during their tenure. The gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen during the Derg regime. The Ethiopian masses who take part in demonstrating against the Emperor Haile Selassie regime become embittered with the Derg regime. This is because they are politically disillusioned as they are not able to enjoy the fruits of their labour like being prosperous and being free from the bondage of political and economic oppression. Consequently, Dawit and the Ethiopian masses revolt against the autocratic reign of the Derg regime.

Furthermore, Solomon is portrayed as a cunning warrior hero who helps in fighting against political oppression in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. His cunning warrior heroism is depicted through his ability to use his wisdom and knowledge to strategically plan effective military tactics in fighting against political oppression which is propelled by the Derg regime. It is also reflected through his ability to offer sound advice to his fellow warrior heroes. In one of his strategic effective military attack plan, Solomon gives a uniform to Dawit so that Dawit should disguise himself as one of the Derg soldiers. He tells Anbessa to be the first one to shoot at the convoy of the Derg leader. He informs Dawit to be the second one to shoot. This can make people to think that Dawit in his effort to protect the Derg leader is aiming for the first shooter, Anbessa, while in real sense, he is aiming to kill the Derg leader and his bodyguards (Mengiste, *Beneath* 269). After attacking the soldiers, Dawit enacts on Solomon's military trick to "run with the crowd" (Mengiste, *Beneath* 269) and ends up losing "himself in their pressing bodies [crowd] and became just another soldier trying to find a way out of the mayhem" (Mengiste, *Beneath* 273). This military tactic works effectively as the government soldiers fail to recognise that Dawit is

attacking them as he acts as one of them and the soldiers are also blinded by the military uniform that Dawit puts on.

Solomon's cunning warrior heroism is further revealed through the sound advice that he offers to Dawit. At this moment, Dawit longs to get in touch with his relatives some days after he kills a soldier. Solomon advises Dawit to "stay in hiding until its safe [because] the military's crawling all over Addis Ababa looking for Mekonnen the killer of soldiers" (Mengiste, *Beneath* 240). This helps in preserving Dawit's life and protecting him from being easily captured by the regime's soldiers. A cunning character is beneficial to heroes as it helps them to achieve their goals and overcome different obstacles in life in a unique way.

Martyrs who die in the process of fighting against political oppression are portrayed in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. For instance, a young male student who helps the Revolutionary Lion Movement in passing out pamphlets to the masses gets caught by the soldiers and is killed. The pamphlets help in sensitisising the masses about the evils of the Derg regime and stirring them up to revolt against the oppressive Derg regime. We learn that "*Addis Zemen*, the state owned newspaper, showed the typical headshot of a student [the one who distributed the pamphlets], a serious, dignified stare from a young face" (Mengiste, *Beneath* 139). Althusser propounds that "the ideology of the ruling class does not become the ruling ideology by the grace of God. It is by the installation of the Ideological state apparatuses in which this ideology is realised and realises itself that it becomes the ruling ideology" (185). In *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, the *Addis Zemen* newspaper is an example of the Ideological state apparatus that the ruling Derg regime uses to advance its political ideology in order to control the masses. The action of the *Addis Zemen*, the state owned newspaper, of publishing a story with a picture of a dead young man shot by the soldiers can be read as an example of the Ideological state apparatus that the Derg regime uses to scare away people who want to fight against political oppression propelled by the Derg regime.

Nevertheless, the male heroes like Dawit remain composed, resilient and continue to protest and rebel against the autocratic rule of the *Derg* regime by means of violence. This highlights the fact that violence is used by both the oppressor, in this case, the Derg regime and the oppressed who are the Ethiopian masses in the text. However, it should be noted that violence is used for different purposes by both the Derg regime and the Ethiopian heroes and the entire masses. The Derg regime employ violence in order to force the Ethiopian masses to submit under dictatorship rule. On the

other hand, instead of succumbing to harsh dictatorship rule, the oppressed Ethiopian heroes and the entire masses also use violence to engage in warrior heroic deeds as a way of resisting and liberating themselves from political oppression. Instead of being demotivated to fight against political oppression due to the violence they incur in the hands of the Derg regime, the heroes are energised by such brutality and they continue to fight for freedom from political oppression.

Overall, it may be said that through the male characters in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, the author exhumes the heroic deeds of the uncelebrated heroes as a way of appreciating them and bringing forward their contribution in the development of Ethiopia. I observe that the heroes employ both violent and nonviolent means in fighting against political oppression. Dawit and Anbessa are some of the heroes who use violent strategies in fighting against political oppression. This is witnessed in their use of guns to shoot the Derg soldiers and their attempt to kill the leader of the Derg regime. The young boy who passes out pamphlets to the masses to stir them to rebel against the Derg regime is one of the heroes who employs non-violent means in fighting against political oppression. The heroes depicted in the text display the heroic attributes of courage, patriotism and selflessness as they risk their lives by engaging in actions that are meant for the public good. The heroic deeds that the heroes engage in their fight against political oppression proves that freedom does not come on a silver platter.

3.4 DISENTOMBING HEROISM IN SABATINI'S *AN ACT OF DEFIANCE*

Irene Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* portrays male characters that fight against political oppression and injustice. I assert that Sabatini excavates the heroic deeds of male characters as a way of appreciating them and bringing into view the impact of the male characters in the building of the fictitious Zimbabwe. I perceive that Sabatini depicts bureaucratic heroes and martyrs whose heroism is revealed through their participation in resisting and fighting against political oppression. Godfrey and Giorgio are the heroes that are depicted in Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*.

Godfrey is depicted as a bureaucratic hero who fights against political oppression in Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*. In this thesis, the term bureaucratic hero is used to refer to characters who use their professional skills, platform and knowledge to fight against injustice and political oppression. McFadden poses that failure of postcolonial leaders to fulfil nationalistic promises makes the masses to become frustrated with their leadership. She postulates that:

Nationalist movements always mobilise the working people on the basis of an anti-colonial rhetoric. They promise education, basic housing, improvement of transportation services, etc. But with the passage of time, the postcolonial leaders are unable to implement real and definite programmes to change the lifestyles of the masses of people who actually fought against colonialism (McFadden 5).

The above information is vital in understanding the reasons that drive the masses to fight against political oppression in postcolonial Zimbabwe. In *An Act of Defiance*, different characters become disillusioned with the failing and oppressive leadership of the ruling regime in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The masses languish in poverty and are unable to enjoy a democratic leadership while the political leaders enrich themselves with public resources. As a result, people begin to revolt and fight against the oppressive ruling regime in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

Just like Trinity, Godfrey uses his journalism profession to fight against political oppression in his country by publishing stories that criticise and expose the malpractices of the postcolonial regime. He works for the Daily News as a journalist (Sabatini 73). He stands on the principle of truth, displays heroic attributes of patriotism and courage as he risks his life by publishing stories that are critical of the oppressive rule of the regime. He publishes such critical stories of the oppressive regime for various reasons. Firstly, he aims to awaken the leaders of the oppressive ruling regime to change their oppressive ways upon reading the stories and realising their mistakes so that they can make the right amendments. Nevertheless, this is something that the oppressive regime can hardly notice. He also intends to highlight the plight of the masses and stir them to revolt against the ruling regime and replace it with a better one by voting the ruling regime out of power. Together with his fellow workers, Godfrey's patriotism and selfless act is reflected as he loses his job. His patriotism is also reflected as he risks losing his own life in the course of fighting against political oppression for the betterment of the public good. He reveals that the "Daily News printing presses had been petrol-bombed and when it continued operating, the newspaper was banned by the government" (Sabatini 318). The government bans the Daily News Printing Press from operating in order to silence it from publishing and disseminating information to the masses about the evils of the regime. This is government's way of controlling information that the masses consume in order to keep the masses subject to the government's ideologies and authority. As a result, the freedom of the press is infringed upon and Godfrey and his fellow workers become

jobless. Godfrey tells Gabrielle, “They came two weeks ago. They dragged me out of the house, in front of my wife, children. I was not even dressed” (Sabatini 319). The foregoing affirms that Godfrey suffers physical humiliation as he is driven out of his house while naked by the youth militia so that they can torture him. Later on, Gabrielle observes that Godfrey “was wearing thick, green-knitted gloves. She had heard about the fingers put through rat traps” (Sabatini 319). The preceding confirms the physical torture that Godfrey suffers in the hands of the youth militia like that of having his fingers injured and even deformed by being forced to pass his hand through rat traps.

Althusser advances the idea that “repressive state apparatus functions massively and predominantly by repression (including physical repression)” (145). He further elucidates that it is the ruling class, in this case, the Derg regime leaders, who use state agents to force the subordinate class, the masses, to submit to its leadership (151). From a Marxist perspective, the youth militia can be read as an example of a repressive state apparatus that use violence to force the masses to submit under the regime’s leadership. The youth militia use violence in order to coerce, silence and intimidate people whom the regime deem as rebellious. As already alluded to, Godfrey is tortured by the youth militia, for instance, he is forced to pass his fingers through rat traps in order to coerce and silence him from publishing stories that expose the evils of the regime. The youth militia enact violence on the masses to force them to obey and submit under the autocratic leadership of the regime. Fanon postulates that the “agents of government [like the youth militia, indeed] speak the language of pure force” (38). The government uses violence in order to impart fear in the masses so that the political leaders can continue exploiting and oppressing the masses without any hindrance. The continual suffering of people and political oppression in a fictitious Zimbabwe represents the failures of the political leadership of post-colonial nations in Africa.

In their paper, “A Literary Exploration of Trauma and Resilience in Tagwira’s *The Uncertainty of Hope*”, Ina Cloete and Nelson Mlambo comment that resilience in times of hardship is an attribute that is associated with heroes (96). They understand resilience “as a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma” (Cloete and Mlambo 93). The heroic attribute of resilience is reflected in Godfrey’s life in two ways. Firstly, after losing his job at the Daily News, Godfrey attempts to establish a magazine in order to continue his battle against political oppression by featuring stories that criticise the

oppressive rule of the ruling regime (Sabatini 318). His resilience is also depicted in his speech. He tells Gabrielle that “They [the Youth Militia] burnt my opposition card but they can’t burn my commitment” (319). Such a bold statement signifies that Godfrey is determined, resilient and courageous to continue fighting against political oppression despite being tortured, intimidated and having his card burned by one of the repressive state apparatus, the youth militia. I read Sabatini’s portrayal of the heroic deeds of Godfrey as a way of honouring him and bringing forward the contribution of the uncelebrated hero in his fight against political oppression in the fictitious Zimbabwe. It also alludes to many ordinary uncelebrated Zimbabwean men who used their journalism profession to fight against the autocratic rule of Robert Mugabe who is simply referred to as “The Old Man” (Sabatini 20) in the novel.

Furthermore, Giorgio is portrayed as a bureaucratic hero who helps in fighting against political injustice and oppression in Sabatini’s *An Act of Defiance*. He accomplishes the task of fighting against political injustice by helping the poor masses and political victims in Zimbabwe. One of the ways in which the theme of political oppression and injustice is depicted in the novel is that the food aid that is meant to be given to the poor masses is stolen by the political party leaders. In his endeavor to fight against political injustice, Giorgio is set on a journey to “check what’s happening in Matebeleland, in Gwanda, [as] there have been terrible stories coming out, of food aid being taken out of the hands of the starving, displaced children by Party militia” (Sabatini 305). Giorgio goes out to places such as Gwanda in order to find out ways of helping the poor people who are denied access to food aid as well as to witness the veracity of truth regarding the matter of food aid being stolen by the political party leaders. Giorgio finds out that indeed the food aid is being stolen by the party militia leaders. Giorgio learns that it is Gabrielle’s father, Mr Langa, the leader of the Party militia in that area who is the one engineering the embezzlement of the food aid. It is quite absurd to learn that while Gabrielle is busy fighting against political injustice and oppression, her father is busy perpetuating political injustice and oppression. Even though Gabrielle’s father is in charge of a truck that is loaded with sacks of maize that are stamped WFP, he refuses to give food, even one sack of maize to the starving old woman and two children who are in need of the food aid (Sabatini 305). Instead, Mr Langa insults the old woman and the children that they are pretending to be hungry. Giorgio asks Mr Langa to take him to the feeding centre after seeing the truck loaded with maize stamped WFP. Mr Langa lies to Giorgio that people have been fed and he instructs the youth militia boys to cover the maize bags with canvas so that he can

take them home without being detected. The embezzlement of the food aid by party militia leaders resonates with Fanon's avowment that:

As soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches bread, land, and the restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose: to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie (166).

Even though Zimbabwe got independent in 1980, Mr Langa is an example of the political leaders of the oppressive ruling regime who steal and enrich themselves with tax payers' money and resources that are meant to benefit the public. It is this habit of corruption by the leaders of the ruling postcolonial regime that keeps the masses in abject poverty. Driven by heroic attributes of compassion and strong love for others, Giorgio takes the starving old woman and the two children to give them food as well as to help them receive medical treatment at the hospital. This helps in lessening the suffering of the masses. It is worth noting that during the period of elections "Giorgio has been instructed to stay in place, in case a humanitarian disaster unfolds, something that might require his particular expertise, if enough people are beaten, killed, displaced, starved, if enough youths are unleashed to do The Old Man's bidding" (Sabatini 227). Giorgio is professionally skilled and entrusted to take care of the political victims who may be hurt by the youth militia. A case in point is Gabrielle who is helped by Giorgio to receive medical care after being brutally abused by the youth militia.

Additionally, in *An Act of Defiance* there is depiction of martyrs who die in the course of fighting against political oppression under the oppressive regime. Through Trinity's conversation with Gabrielle, we learn that Trinity has "the names of hundreds of victims, tortured, dead" (Sabatini 300). This signifies that many people, heroes and heroines inclusive, who attempt to fight against political oppression are not only tortured but are even killed by the regime's agents like the youth militia, in order to silence their protests against the oppressive rule of the regime. The ones who want to bring change by influencing people to vote the ruling regime out of power so that they can replace it with a better one get attacked by the government agents. These martyrs display the heroic attributes of courage and patriotism as they lose their lives in the course of fighting against a national problem of political oppression fostered by the ruling regime. The regime enacts violence

on its citizens in order to maintain political power over the citizens. The ruling regime uses the youth militia to attack people who support the opposition party. Opposition party members and critics of the autocratic ruling regime are being killed, abducted and even their close relations suffer. For instance, “an opposition activist’s wife is burnt alive in her hut, when her husband could not be found” (320). This evidence depicts the theme of political oppression as it uncovers the brutal acts of the ruling regime. Later on, we learn that:

The voting has ended. The waiting game begins. The drama and brutality of the presidential elections has yielded The Old Man his victory- so onwards with land confiscations, indigenizations, beatings; what does he care if the international community condemns him, if the Commonwealth suspends him, if the Commonwealth suspends his country’s membership, it just shows what a revolutionary he is (Sabatini 228).

This autocratic rule led by The Old Man alludes to the oppressive leadership of the late President Robert Mugabe who ruled Zimbabwe for thirty seven years. Asante Mtenje observes that “at independence, Zimbabwe was the global poster child for a newly self-governing, thriving nation” (10). Nevertheless, she asserts that “it was not long before Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF began to exhibit authoritarian tendencies, unleashing terror, and atrocities on those people who were perceived as political dissidents, apparently representing a threat to the unity of the newly formed nation” (Mtenje 10). Such atrocities and horrific scenes are depicted in Sabatini’s *An Act of Defiance*.

Fanon comments on the failures of the political leadership of post-colonial nations. He posits that the “state, which by its strength and discretion ought to inspire confidence and disarm and lull everybody to sleep, on the contrary it seeks to impose itself in spectacular fashion. It makes a display, it jostles people and bullies them, thus intimating to the citizen that he is in continual danger” (Fanon 165). This further reveals that the peace, unity and equity of sharing resources is far from being realised in a postcolonial regime. Indeed, in Sabatini’s *An Act of Defiance*, the oppressive post-colonial regime wins the election by means of intimidating the opposition party members to vote for the ruling regime and also eliminating the supporters of the opposition party members. This make the ones who vote for the opposition party members to be few in number and eventually the ruling regime wins the election. It should be noted that one of the factors that drive the heroes to fight against political oppression and injustice is because they are suffering and

disillusioned with the oppressive leadership of the regime. As already alluded to, in the novel, people are killed, denied justice and like Godfrey their freedom of expression is comprised.

3.5 CONCLUSION

Ultimately, it has been noted that male characters employ different means in fighting against political oppression in the novels under study. In Mengiste's novels, the heroes employ both violent and non-violent means in fighting against political oppression. *The Shadow King* depicts male characters as warrior heroes who employ violence as a liberating strategy from colonial oppression. They use guns and knives in their effort to defend the sovereignty and integrity of Ethiopia. Kidane and Seifu are some of the warrior heroes who employ violence in fighting against colonisation in the novel. Non-violent heroic deeds like taking care of the wounded soldiers are carried out by some heroes. In *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, male characters are depicted as warrior heroes as they use guns in fighting against political oppression perpetuated by the Derg regime. Some characters employ non-violent methods of fighting against political oppression. For instance, they distribute pamphlets that stir the masses to revolt against the Derg regime. On the other hand, in Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*, the heroes employ non-violent means in fighting against political oppression and injustice. The male characters are portrayed as bureaucratic heroes as they employ their profession to fight against political oppression. For instance, Godfrey, through his journalism profession, fights against political oppression by writing stories that expose and criticise the malpractices of the ruling regime. These heroes face obstacles in their fight against political oppression. For instance, they are beaten and end up losing their jobs. Unfortunately, their heroic deeds are uncelebrated. The following chapter examines factors that lead to the uncelebrated life of the heroes and heroines portrayed in the primary texts.

CHAPTER 4

UNCELEBRATED HEROES AND HEROINES IN MAAZA MENGISTE'S *THE SHADOW KING*, *BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE* AND IRENE SABATINI'S *AN ACT OF DEFIANCE*.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

People who achieve great things are celebrated in different ways. For instance, they are celebrated by being publicly honoured, recognised, glorified and remembered by the citizens of their nations. Martyrs are celebrated by dedicating a specific day which is held in honour and remembrance of their heroic deeds. Masiya and Maringira assert that in Zimbabwe when the heroes die they are buried at “district heroes’ acre, provincial heroes’ acre and national heroes’ acre” (4) as a way of honouring and celebrating them. Adugna observes that in Ethiopia some people who took part in fighting against Italian invaders were given medals by Emperor Haile Selassie as a token of appreciation (31). Nevertheless, there are some people whose life is uncelebrated in spite of their great positive impact on society. This chapter seeks to examine factors that lead to the uncelebrated life of the heroes and heroines in Maaza Mengiste’s *The Shadow King*, *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze* and Irene Sabatini’s *An Act of Defiance*. I assert that there are different factors that make the heroes and heroines to be uncelebrated in their nations. One of the factors that lead to the uncelebrated life of the heroines is because they carry out their heroic deeds in a society that is infested with patriarchal ideals, among others.

This chapter is anchored on post-colonial and feminist theories. The study relies on the ideas of Judith Butler and Patricia McFadden. This thesis is hinged on Butler’s idea of gender performance. In her article, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” she posits that “gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualised and reproduced as reality once again” (526). She further elucidates that just as a script may be enacted in various ways and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives (526). This information is pertinent in examining how heroines attempt to deconstruct gender social roles in a patriarchal society. The study also draws from Butler’s view of mournable and unmournable bodies. This idea is pertinent in

exploring whether the characters depicted in the primary texts are worthy of being accorded a heroic status. McFadden ideas on sexuality and political issues in postcolonial and colonial Africa are pertinent in examining the necessity of according a heroic status to the female and male characters. Fanon's ideas like disillusionment and violence are also incorporated in understanding the political atmosphere that the uncelebrated heroes and heroines emerge from.

4.2 UNDOCUMENTED HEROES AND HEROINES, MISPLACED HONOUR IN MENGISTE'S *THE SHADOW KING*, *BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE* AND IRENE SABATINI'S *AN ACT OF DEFIANCE*

As it has been pointed out at the beginning of this study, there is a mutual relationship between literature and history. Literary authors draw from events that happened in the past and incorporate them in their novels in a fictitious manner. In his paper, "The Relationship of Literature and Society", Milton Albrecht rightly observes that "literature has been thought to reflect economics, family relationships, climate and landscapes, attitudes, morals, races, social classes, political events, wars, religion and many other more detailed aspects of environment and social life" (426). Heroism is a product of documentation. The ruling regimes of power advance ideology of heroism in a way that serves their political interests. It is the voice of the ruling regime that has power in the writing of national histories. Oftentimes, the ones who are in power and close to the ruling regime are accorded heroic status. For instance, Haile Selassie I, a powerful political figure, is regarded as a hero while other ordinary people who take part in fighting against political oppression are not regarded as heroes and heroines in the fictitious Ethiopia.

One of the factors that lead to the uncelebrated life of heroes and heroines is lack of proper recognition and documentation of the heroic deeds of the heroes and heroines. The common people who take part in fighting against political and sexual oppression are not accorded heroic status by the ruling regimes of power. McFadden rightly postulates that the "anticolonial [and colonial] struggles of Africa have provided a platform, a context for African women of all ages to come to the fore, to become more conspicuous and to redefine the terms and the terrain of political activism" (4). Mengiste and Sabatini are among the African women who critically comment on political issues that affect their nations. Through the process of writing novels, Mengiste and Sabatini present a counter narrative discourse of heroism as they present a new understanding of heroism contrary to the one that is propagated by the ruling regimes of power. They highlight on

the significance of celebrating the ordinary people who engage in heroic deeds in the fictitious Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. Mengiste brings to light the need to celebrate the heroic deeds of the ordinary people who take part in fighting against political oppression in the fictitious Ethiopia in her novel, *The Shadow King*. From the prologue, Hirut attests that she can hear the dead heroes and heroines who take part in resisting and fighting against Italian colonial domination speaking to her: “There is no time but now. She can hear the [sound of the] dead growing louder: We must be heard. We must be known. We will not rest until we have been mourned” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 14). This foreshadows the voice of lamentation of the uncelebrated fictitious dead heroes and heroines that Hirut hears at the end of the novel. It also signifies the fact that after the second Italo-Ethiopian war ends, the ruling regime under the reign of Haile Selassie fails to honour and celebrate the efforts of the ordinary people who take part in defeating the Italian invaders in the fictitious Ethiopia. The cry of the dead heroes and heroines reveals that their heroic deeds are not documented and recognised among the people in the fictitious Ethiopia. This makes it difficult for people to honour and celebrate the life of the fictitious heroes and heroines because the people are incognizant of their heroic deeds.

Butler posits that there is a need to “critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others, and thus certain human lives are more grievable than others” (30). In line with Butler’s observation, in *The Shadow King*, Mengiste challenges the practice of political leaders of unrecognising the efforts of the ordinary female and male characters who play crucial roles in the building of Ethiopia. After the Italo-Ethiopian war ended, the male and female characters who take part in fighting against colonial oppression are not honoured for their efforts. This could be because they belong to the lower rank of people in the society so they are not regarded as important people who are worthy of recognition for their efforts. In the novel, the king, Haile Selassie I is the one who gets honoured even though he flees to England during the war. Mengiste challenges this malpractice of conferring honour upon the political leaders only and neglecting the masses. I read her depiction of the heroic deeds of the ordinary characters as a way of teaching the society that the lives and impact of ordinary people to their nations matters. Therefore, the ordinary people are also worthy of honour and recognition for their efforts in the building of their nations.

It is revealed that while at a train station, the fictitious new Ethiopian generation who are engaging in protests against the government, “stared at her [Hirut], an aging woman in her long drab dress, as if they did not know those who came before them. As if this were a first time a woman carried a gun. As if the ground beneath their feet had not been won by some of the greatest fighters Ethiopia had ever known” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 12). This depicts that the new Ethiopian generation remain in dark of the undocumented heroic deeds and names of the heroes and heroines who take part in resisting and fighting against political oppression in the fictitious Ethiopia, for instance, Hirut. Normally, in a society people who achieve great things are properly mourned and honoured when they die. The female and male characters who fight against political oppression are deprived of such honour as they are not properly mourned and recognised by their fellow Ethiopians. I argue that it is the ignorance of the Ethiopians about the heroic deeds carried out by these female and male characters in fighting against political oppression that makes them fail to honour, remember and properly mourn them as heroes and heroines. Hence, their uncelebrated lives.

The fact that the heroes and heroines are uncelebrated due to the ignorance of the Ethiopians about their contribution to the fictitious Ethiopia is also revealed through Hirut’s further interaction with the dead and the words she utters in the presence of the emperor in Mengiste’s *The Shadow King*. This occurs at a train station when Hirut meets the emperor who has fled the palace because people are rebelling against him. While in the presence of the emperor, Hirut begins to mention the names of the dead heroes and heroines who take part in fighting against political oppression. For instance, she mentions Aster, Dawit, Kidane, Fifi and Tariku just to mention a few. I read her action of mentioning the names of the people who take part in fighting against political oppression as a way of celebrating the impact of these uncelebrated heroes and heroines upon the fictitious Ethiopia. These uncelebrated heroes and heroines represent the unrecognised effort of the masses who take part in resisting and fighting against political oppression. Hirut is depicted as a mouthpiece that gives a voice to the public of the need to recognise and appreciate the efforts of the uncelebrated heroes and heroines. With the knowledge that the emperor and those around him get about the impact of these heroes and heroines, there is hope that these heroes and heroines can be properly mourned and honoured by their fellow Ethiopians.

In addition, the unfamiliarity with the names and deeds of both the living and the dead Ethiopian heroes and heroines by the new Ethiopian generation further cements the fact that lack of proper recognition of the heroic deeds of the fictitious Ethiopian heroes and heroines lead to their uncelebrated lives. After some years when the war between the Ethiopian and Italian soldiers has ended, Ettore searches for Hirut. He asks the people if they know Hirut, “the girl who once fought with the great Aster” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 362). To his surprise, the new Ethiopian generation are not familiar with neither the names and heroic deeds of Hirut, the surviving warrior heroine nor Aster, the martyr, due to the fact that their heroic deeds and names are not recorded in Ethiopian history. After posing the aforementioned question to the new Ethiopian generation, Ettore “waited to hear about Aster but there was nothing” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 362) from the mouths of the new Ethiopian generation. Lack of information by the new Ethiopian generation regarding the names and heroic deeds of the living fictitious Ethiopian heroine, Hirut and the dead Ethiopian heroes and heroines speaks highly of why the Ethiopian heroes and heroines are uncelebrated. I observe that it is quite difficult for the Ethiopians to celebrate and honour their heroes and heroines because they are unfamiliar with both the names and the impact of the heroes and heroines to the fictitious Ethiopia.

It is worth noting that Mengiste plays a crucial role of celebrating the uncelebrated heroes and heroines through her writing of the novel, *The Shadow King*. Mengiste brings out the heroic deeds of the unrecognised common people who take part in fighting against political oppression in the fictitious Ethiopia. According to Gayatri Spivak, the term subaltern refers to the oppressed subject or people of inferior rank whom she deems as incapable of speaking for themselves (285). From Spivak’s perspective, the uncelebrated heroes and heroines can be regarded as the subaltern, the oppressed common people in a society who are speechless and powerless. Leela Gandhi highlights that “subaltern studies defined itself as an attempt to allow the ‘people’ finally to speak within the jealous pages of elitist historiography and, in so doing, to speak for, or to sound the muted voices of, the truly oppressed” (2). In *The Shadow King*, it is Mengiste whom through the narrator speaks for the oppressed and unrecognised common people who are not accorded heroic status and celebrated in spite of carrying out heroic deeds in their nation. She achieves this by featuring the heroic deeds of different characters in the novel. Mengiste brings out unrecognised male and female characters in order to raise an awareness to the Ethiopian nation of the need to celebrate heroes and heroines. Susan Andrade rightly posits that there is a need to read the “literary

production of African women as their self-inscription into history” (97). Mengiste attempts to rewrite the Ethiopian history by bringing to light the need to celebrate the ordinary people who contributed to the building of their nation. In Mengiste’s *The Shadow King*, we learn that there is a box that belongs to Ettore where he keeps his personal letters. In the course of the war, Hirut gets hold of Ettore’s box as Ettore keeps the box in the ground and escapes to a safer place. It is quite significant to note that apart from containing Ettore’s personal letters, the box is symbolic as it contains pictures of some of the dead Ethiopian heroes and heroines who were killed during the war. These pictures are captured by Ettore who works as a photographer for the Italian army. Just like the novel, the box serves the same function of unearthing Ethiopian hidden history as it acts as a storage that brings to memory the life of uncelebrated heroes and heroines.

Mengiste’s endeavour to fictionalise history in her texts depicts the social relevance of literature. Upon looking at the box, it reminds Hirut of the heroic deeds carried out by the fictitious Ethiopian heroes and heroines. It is also a reminder of the atrocities that Ethiopian heroes and heroines suffered in the course of the war. Pavel Medvedev and Mikhail Bakhtin assert that “the literary work is an immediate part of the literary environment, the aggregate of all socially active literary works of a given epoch and social group” (30). They further opine that “the literary environment itself in its turn is only a dependent and therefore actually inseparable element of the general ideological environment of a given epoch and a given sociological unity” (Medvedev and Bakhtin 30). This confirms that some literatures specifically historical fiction are drawn from observing what happens in a society. Mengiste’s novels depict the circumstances that happens in Ethiopia in an effort to expose and criticise the behaviour of failing to bestow honour to whom it is due.

Minim is another heroic character whose heroism is uncelebrated. He is not celebrated because his heroic deeds are not rewarded and he does not hold a position of higher authority. From the prologue, Hirut reveals that “The real emperor of this country is on his farm tilling the tiny plot of land next to hers. He has never worn a crown and lives alone and has no enemies. He is a quiet man who once led a nation against a steel beast and she was his most trusted soldier: the proud guard of the shadow King” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 14). This depicts the uncelebrated life of the hero, Minim. It alludes to his role of impersonating as an emperor and acting as a figure of inspiration to the Ethiopians to fight against the Italian invaders who are referred to as the steel beast because of the havoc they caused in Ethiopia in their endeavour to colonise it. The use of

violence by the Italian soldiers in order to gain and exercise political domination in Ethiopia is in tandem with Fanon's contention that "in the colonies, it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, the instituted go-betweens, the spokesman of the settler and his rule of oppression" (38). Minim is portrayed as the "proud warrior king who galloped into battle on his horse to fight for them [the Ethiopians] against the enemy [Italian invaders]" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 359). Nevertheless, despite his contribution to the Ethiopian nation, Minim "has never worn a crown" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 14). A crown is an object that is associated with honour and kings wear a crown as a symbol of honour and authority. The fact that Minim has never worn a crown symbolises that he is not honoured in the fictitious Ethiopia even though he risks his life in successfully impersonating and inspiring the Ethiopians as their emperor in the battle between the Italian and Ethiopian soldiers. Minim struggles in life as he tills on a small portion of land to fend for food.

The uncelebrated hero, Minim, "kneels at the steps of St Giorgio's church praying with a heavy heart he cannot seem to push toward joy. He came to this church to be alone but he is surrounded by a crowd of worshippers giving thanks for the return of their king. His heart is a hollow weight sitting in the pocket of his chest" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 358). This is a hyperbolic description that confirms that Minim is greatly distressed and his heart is filled with sorrow as he notices that the people fail to honour and recognise the roles he plays in the battle between the Italian and Ethiopian soldiers. In his agony, he pauses a rhetorical question, "Your Majesty, he says. Who will remember me? There is no answer, only his own silent breathing" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 358). The rhetorical question underscores the fact that Minim is a living hero who experiences the emotional pain of not being awarded nor esteemed by his fellow Ethiopians for his contribution in the fight against political oppression in Ethiopia. His heart is at pains to witness such ingratitude from his own people. In the novel, *The Shadow King*, Mengiste depicts Minim as a microcosmic representation of the unrecognised efforts of common people who take part in fighting against political oppression. Through Minim, Mengiste brings out the value and significance of the common people in the building of the fictitious Ethiopia. As a result of not being celebrated, Minim laments and he attempts to comfort himself as he "tells himself that the tears that fall to the ground are not his alone. They are what Haile Selassie would have shed if they were both allowed to cry" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 358). The idea that the tears that fall from Minim's eyes are not his alone cements the view that Minim's cry represents the disappointment and emotional turmoil of the

common people who are not celebrated despite their contribution to fighting against political oppression in the fictitious Ethiopia.

Overall, it has been revealed that after the second-Italo Ethiopian war ended, the ruling regime did nothing to honour and celebrate the common people who contributed in fighting against political oppression in the fictitious Ethiopia. It is the failure of the ruling regime to confer honour and prestige as a way of celebrating the heroic deeds of the common people that make the heroes and heroines to be uncelebrated. It has also been pointed out that Mengiste attempts to celebrate the life of the common people by bringing to light the impact of their heroic deeds in the building of the fictitious Ethiopia. Even though the female and male characters are not recognised and celebrated as heroes and heroines by the ruling regime in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, I argue that they are worthy to be celebrated as heroes and heroines. We learn that as Hirut utters the names of these uncelebrated heroes and heroines, "she feels them gather around her and urge her on: Tell them [the emperor and those around him], we were those who stepped into a country left dark by an invading plague and gave new hope to Ethiopia's people" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 378). This substantiates the fact that during their lifetime the heroes and heroines are not celebrated and recognised for their contribution to the fictitious Ethiopia. It also depicts an allusion to the heroic deeds that are carried out by the heroes and heroines in resisting and fighting against political oppression. As I have demonstrated in the preceding chapters, the male and female characters are portrayed as martyrs and warrior heroes and heroines as they fight against the Italian invaders in their effort to defend their nation from being colonised. Aster and Hirut are examples of warrior heroines who employ violence as a weapon to resist and fight against political oppression in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*. Tariku is one among many martyrs who die in the course of war as he risks his life to defend Ethiopia from being colonised by the Italian invaders. The act of fighting against colonial oppression by the Ethiopian heroes and heroines commensurate with Fanon's idea that "the well-known principle that all men are equal will be illustrated in the colonies from the moment that the native claims that he is equal to the settler" (44). Indeed, in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, the Ethiopian heroes and heroines do not look at themselves as inferior to the coloniser, the Italians, rather they look at themselves as equal to the coloniser. These heroes and heroines do not see any need for them to be governed by a foreigner in their own country as they are capable of ruling themselves. It is not surprising that they put up a gallant fight against colonial oppression. Their victory helps in protecting the Ethiopian nation from being under Italian colonial

domination. It is really quite absurd to learn that such warrior heroes and heroines are not celebrated during their lifetime and even after their demise.

In Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, the postcolonial Derg regime fails to honour the ordinary masses like Dawit who assists it to depose the government of Haile Selassie in the fictitious Ethiopia. This makes the heroes and heroines to be uncelebrated. Moreover, the Derg regime fails to keep the promises it made to the masses before attaining political power. The masses become disillusioned with the leadership of the Derg regime due to its failure to fulfil the promises it made to the people. The Derg regime becomes oppressive and tortures and kills some of the people that assists it to attain political power. The idea that it is the voice of the ruling regime that matters in the process of writing national histories and according heroic status to people is a contributing factor that leads to the uncelebrated life of the heroes and heroines in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. It is obvious that it is difficult for the Derg regime to celebrate the people who oppose it. The Derg regime presents a negative image to the public of people who oppose it as rebels. For instance, the people who collect the dead bodies like Sara and the ones who distribute the anti-government pamphlets are considered as rebels of the ruling regime and they are tortured and sometimes killed by the Derg soldiers. The Derg regime ensures that "certain images do not appear in the media, certain names of the dead are not utterable, and certain losses are not avowed as losses" (Butler 38). The Derg regime makes sure that no positive image is known to the public about the people who fight against political oppression. It only depicts the negative image of people who oppose its rule. With the negative image that the Derg regime portrays about the people who oppose its rule, it is difficult for such people to be recognised as heroes and heroines in the fictitious Ethiopia.

Nevertheless, through the narrator we learn that the characters whom the Derg regime labels as rebels are worthy to be recognised as heroes and heroines. This is because through the narrator, Mengiste presents a counter narrative discourse of the image of the characters contrary to the one that is advanced by the ruling regimes of power like the Derg regime. For instance, we learn that Sara is a courageous and patriotic heroine who risks her life "by helping Dawit to collect and bury bodies that the military callously tosses onto city roads" (Levy 63). Sara's collection of the dead bodies is her way of fighting against political oppression perpetuated by the Derg regime. Sara's action of collecting the dead bodies of people who rebel against the Derg regime substantiates the

fact that these ordinary people are worth of both being mourned and given a decent burial. This is because these ordinary people can be regarded as martyred heroes and heroines who die in the process of fighting for a noble cause of liberating the masses from economic and political oppression under the reign of the Derg regime. We also learn that people distribute anti-government pamphlets as a way of fighting against political oppression. This shows that Mengiste participates in the action of rewriting history and celebrating the ordinary people who take part in fighting against political oppression in fictitious Ethiopia. She achieves this by bringing to light their heroic deeds and presenting a positive image about them.

In the same vein, in Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*, the idea that it is the voice of the ruling regime that matters in writing national histories including according someone a heroic status is depicted as a factor that make the heroes and heroines to be uncelebrated. The ruling regime also presents a negative image of these characters by portraying them as rebels. It also oppresses the people who are disillusioned with the failing leadership of the postcolonial regime in the fictitious post-colonial Zimbabwe. Fanon postulates that "the national middle class which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is an underdeveloped middle class. It has practically no economic power, and in any case it is in no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country which it hopes to replace" (149). This unveils that political leaders of the postcolonial regimes fail to initiate developmental programs that can boost the economic capacity of their nations. Consequently, they fail to govern the people well due to lack of economic muscle. To make matters worse, the political leaders steal from the same little public funds and resources. This makes the masses to express their dissatisfaction with the leadership of the postcolonial regimes. We learn that both Trinity and Godfrey lose their jobs because they use their journalism profession to write stories that expose the malpractices of the ruling regime. The workmates of Godfrey also lose their jobs because their working place gets petrol bombed by the ruling postcolonial regime (Sabatini 318). With the negative image and maltreatment that these characters encounter in the hands of the ruling regime, it is difficult for them to be recognised as heroes and heroines in the fictitious Zimbabwe.

Additionally, in Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*, Danika's heroic deed of fighting against political and sexual oppression is not celebrated. Danika's heroic action of afflicting the party man who rapes her with madness is not celebrated because her heroic action is in contrast to the interest of the ruling regime. She uses the supernatural magic power to afflict the party man with madness.

Even though the ruling regime can become aware that the party man is afflicted with madness by Danika, it is difficult for the ruling regime to spread such news and accord a heroic status to Danika in the fictitious Zimbabwe. This is because such news is going to present a bad image to the public concerning the immoral and oppressive conduct of the political leaders in the fictitious Zimbabwe. This can increase the disappointment and hatred that the masses have towards the political leaders of the ruling regime.

Moreover, it is also difficult for people to celebrate Danika's supernatural heroic deed because it is difficult for people to see with their naked eyes the supernatural power moving and causing harm to the person. This makes people to hardly believe in the power of the supernatural and to easily dismiss her supernatural ability to afflict the rapist with madness. It is worth noting that Danika resorts to use the magic power to fight against political and sexual oppression after she fails to get justice at the court. After Danika fails to get judicial justice, she later on meets Gabrielle, Danika's lawyer. Danika shares her idea of using magical power in fighting against sexual and political oppression with Gabrielle. However, Gabrielle is portrayed as a character who does not believe in the supernatural powers. This is revealed when Danika tells Gabrielle that: "I used to believe in God. I prayed to him for revenge but he was just laughing at my suffering, making those boys run free, unpunished. So now I am using traditional medicines. They will work. They have power" (Sabatini 298). This depicts Danika's firm belief and her practice of using magic power. In response to Danika's speech, Gabrielle tells Danika that the traditional medicines cannot work which reveals her lack of belief in supernatural powers. It is difficult for people like Gabrielle who do not believe in the supernatural to appreciate and honour the supernatural heroic deeds carried out by characters like Danika.

Even though it is regarded as an obvious thing that a ruling regime fights against the people who oppose it; I perceive that there is a need to critically examine this idea. I observe that it is quite essential for the ruling regimes in both Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*, to critically consider the reasons that drive the fictitious characters to oppose its rule rather than rushing to oppress and kill such characters. It is quite significant for the political leaders like the Derg leader to address the grievances of the people rather than silencing them with different forms of oppression like imprisonment and torture. In Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, the Derg regime would have hearkened to the cry of the oppressed masses by changing its

autocratic ways and fulfilling the promises that it made to the masses before assuming power. Similarly, in Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*, the post-colonial ruling regime would have abandoned its oppressive ways and find ways of fulfilling nationalistic promises that can help in ending the masses' disillusionment with the leadership of the ruling regime. This can help in fostering development, unity and peace in the fictitious Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Africa in general. The idea of regarding every person who protest against a ruling regime as an enemy of the regime can also be eliminated. This is because the political leaders can become open minded to understand that people protest for the betterment of the whole people in a nation.

Furthermore, the other reason that makes the heroes and heroines to be uncelebrated is because they carry out their heroic deeds in the underground. Heroic deeds that are carried out in the public make the people who engage in the heroic actions to be easily recognised by the public. In Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, some characters like Kidane and Minim carried out their heroic deeds in public even though they ended up not being celebrated. Some characters like Fifi carried out their heroic deeds in secret. Even though fighting against the Italian colonial regime in secret can be regarded as a good way of fighting an oppressive system, I perceive that the nature of carrying out heroic deeds in secret in fighting against political oppression is a contributing factor that makes the heroes and heroines to be uncelebrated in the primary texts.

In Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, the heroine, Fifi, carries out her heroic deeds in secret which leads to her uncelebrated life. It is revealed that "No one has discovered that Ferres is a stunningly beautiful woman named Fifi, once known as Faven. Not even the emperor's best spies have managed to find out where she is located" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 177). The aforesaid alludes to the heroic act of Fifi who uses a nickname in sending messages to the fictitious Ethiopian warriors. As already pointed out, she spies on the Italian army and sends messages to alert the Ethiopian army. The fact that she does not use her real name and many people do not know her by face acts as a contributing factor that leads to her uncelebrated life. This is because it is hard for people to honour and celebrate the life of a person they do not know. Fifi is portrayed as a concubine of Italian Colonel Carlo Fucelli and it is revealed that during the war "more than 90% of the Italian soldiers in Ethiopia had no families, and the shortage of Italian women had in turn led to uncontrolled sexual relations with Ethiopian women in the form of concubinage, rape and

prostitution” (Adugna 32). This creates a platform for Ethiopian women like Fifi to use their wit in resisting and fighting against colonial domination.

We further learn that there are “rumors that hint that Ferres is an Italian, an officer of aristocratic blood with deep empathy for Ethiopia. They do not imagine that Ferres is a woman who provides special services for only the richest Italian men at an astonishing price” (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 177). This is a situational irony which depicts the ignorance of the fictitious Ethiopians about the real identity of Fifi. Some fictitious Ethiopians wrongly identify Fifi as an Italian but the reality is that she is their fellow Ethiopian. With such a mistaken identity of Fifi as an Italian, it is hard for the fictitious Ethiopians to recognise and celebrate her positive impact in the liberation struggle.

Additionally, in Mengiste’s *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze*, the people who distribute the pamphlets in their act of resisting and fighting against the oppressive Derg regime are uncelebrated because they also carry out their heroic deeds in secrecy. Through Hailu we learn that the pamphlets “were printed in dark print shops in the dead of night, then furiously distributed into the streets, dropped on doorsteps, and thrown into office buildings and into car windows overnight. They blanketed Addis Ababa’s roadsides, benches and tables” (Mengiste, *Beneath* 114). This proves that the heroic act of making and distributing the pamphlets is done in secret and the heroes and heroines distribute large amounts of pamphlets in various places within a single night. The heroes and heroines print and distribute the pamphlets at night. As a result, people fail to honour and celebrate the life of such heroes and heroines because they do not know them by face and they also do not have solid evidence of noticing the heroes and heroines distributing the pamphlets at night.

In a nutshell, it is revealed that failure of the ruling regimes to honour the common people who help them in fighting against political oppression during the colonial and postcolonial era is a contributing factor that makes the heroes and heroines to be uncelebrated in the primary texts. The nature of carrying out heroic deeds in secrecy is another contributing factor that makes the heroes and heroines to be uncelebrated. The impact that the heroic deeds of the characters have on the Ethiopia and Zimbabwe proves that these characters are worthy to be honoured and celebrated as heroes and heroines.

4.3 PATRIARCHY: A STUMBLING BLOCK IN MAAZA MENGISTE'S *THE SHADOW KING*, *BENEATH THE LION'S GAZE* AND IRENE SABATINI'S *AN ACT OF DEFIANCE*.

In Africa, it is revealed that a lot of men take in part war than women. Men are encouraged to take participate in war because they regard themselves as strong and protectors of their nations. During the war, women suffer different forms of oppression. For instance, some women get raped in the course of the war. Patriarchal ideals that people hold in a society are also linked to gender roles that are assigned to people of male and female genders. This section aims to explore how patriarchal ideals act as a stumbling block for many women to engage in heroic deeds and also being accorded a heroic status in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*.

In the first place, in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, Kidane who embodies the patriarchal ideals forbids the fictitious Ethiopian women from taking part in the war. The women are forbidden from being in frontline because in this patriarchal society women are regarded as weak and incapable of using guns in shooting against the Italian invaders. This prevent women from engaging in heroic deeds. Aster and Hirut are among the women who are forbidden by Kidane to engage in direct combat against the Italian invaders. For instance, we learn that when Hirut gets back her wujigra, a gun that she is given by her father, she gets beaten by Kidane. Kidane tells Hirut that the "gun is not yours! What have you done? She [Hirut] shakes her head. Her thoughts are a single, unbroken thread of nothingness. She does not expect the hard slap [from Kidane] that seems to land on both sides of her face at once [...] He [Kidane] grabs the Wujigra and strides away" (Mengiste, *Shadow King* 131-132). This reveals that women like Hirut are deemed as incapable of using a gun to fight against the Italian invaders. This is confirmed as Hirut's gun is taken away from her so that it should be given to a male soldier who is deemed as capable of using the gun in war. It also reveals that in a patriarchal society, there are stereotypes that women are weak, incapable of fighting and that they can easily die in war. A case in point is Aster who is forbidden to take part in war because men in the patriarchal society are of the view that she can easily die. There are socially constructed gender roles that women are expected to perform and other roles that they are not expected to perform in a patriarchal society. Butler argues that "performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all" (528). In line with Butler's assertion, Hirut is

beaten as a form of punishment for performing a gender role that she is not expected to perform in a patriarchal society.

Nevertheless, with the passage of time the Ethiopian women like Hirut and Aster defy patriarchal stereotypes and engage in direct combat against the Italians. Contrary to patriarchal perception of women, Aster and Hirut prove that women are capable of engaging in battle and using war weapons to kill the Italian soldiers. McFadden observes that “women’s roles in African liberation movements are highly conjunctural. During the war against colonialism, for example, women were armed and engaged in battle against the colonisers” (4). In agreement with McFadden’s observation, Hirut and Aster play crucial roles in fighting against colonial oppression in Ethiopia as they use guns to fight against Italian invaders. Aster also empowers her fellow Ethiopian women to take part in the Italo-Ethiopian war, for instance, Ethiopian women prepare food for the Ethiopian army. Hirut also takes care of the wounded Ethiopian soldiers.

The ability of women like Aster and Hirut to perform actions that are considered as masculine in nature reveals the idea that gender is based on performance and not necessary a natural fact. It also deconstructs the patriarchal idea of regarding women as weak who are incapable of engaging in direct combat against an enemy. This proves that it is wrong to judge women as incapable of performing certain acts just because they are born female. Butler rightly asserts that “gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalised, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalised” (“Gender Regulations” 43). There is a need for people to be open minded and accept the fact that women are capable of performing actions that are regarded as masculine in nature. This can help women to engage in heroic deeds and being appreciated for their contribution in the building of a nation.

In the same vein, in *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze*, Sara’s heroic act is hardly noticed due to the patriarchal ideals that people hold in the society. Sara’s husband, Yonas, holds the patriarchal views that women are inferior and immoral. This makes him to regard his wife as incapable of fighting against political oppression to the extent that she could risk her life helping Dawit to collect the dead bodies and give them back to their relatives for proper burial ceremony. It never crosses her husband’s mind that Sarah could collect the dead bodies at night with Dawit in her effort to resist and fight against political oppression. Rather, Yonas thinks that Sara is cheating on

him with Dawit. A conversation between Sara and Yonas reveals that Yonas wrongly accuses Sara of cheating on him with Dawit. Yonas asks Sara “what else is going on? She stopped and turned. ‘What do you mean’? ‘There’s nothing else’ she said. Fatigue and love softened her tone. You don’t think I know about the late nights? You go somewhere and don’t come until curfew. I used to pace until you came home. I knew you were with Dawit” (Mengiste, *Beneath* 265). This accusatory tone reveals that Yonas thinks that whenever Sara goes out in the evening, she cheats on him by sleeping with Dawit during the night.

Nevertheless, contrary to Yona’s thoughts, Sara denies Yonas’ accusations and she begins to tell him the truth “about the bodies, the identification, the nausea and the stench, the broken bones and destroyed families, the wailing mothers and stunned fathers. She told him of late night drives in the womb of a shuttered city, the crawls under starlight and trees” (Mengiste, *Beneath* 266). It is worth noting that Sara is chosen to take part in collecting the dead bodies not necessarily because the underground movement have the trust that she can do it but because they think no one will suspect that she is collecting the dead bodies. This is because collecting the dead bodies is considered as a masculine task that requires brave men to do it. Women are considered as weak and incapable of engaging in such heroic deed. As such, although Sara participates in collecting the dead bodies; her heroic deed is hardly noticed in a patriarchal society.

Again, Sara’s action of collecting the dead bodies accentuates the fact that gender is tied to performance and not necessary a natural fact. Butler rightly opines that “certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity and that these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way” (527). Sara manages to collect the dead bodies thereby deconstructing and contesting the idea that women are incapable of engaging in brave heroic actions. This solidifies the fact that Sara is a courageous and patriotic heroine who risks her life in collecting the dead bodies as a form of fighting against political oppression and also helping the bereaved families to bury their dead relations with dignity. Nevertheless, in this patriarchal society, it is hard for people to recognise her heroic deeds and appreciate her contribution to the society because people’s mindset is filled with patriarchal conceptions that women are immoral and cowards, they are not expected to engage in such risky tasks. Busra Cinar appropriately observes that the “binary oppositions of considering men as strong and women as weak bring limitations to society and people’s lives” (56). This is true because these

binary oppositions remove the probability of accepting different situations that are contrary to social norms.

Similarly, in Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* the work of heroines in fighting against sexual oppression is hardly noticed and uncelebrated due to the patriarchal ideals that people hold in the society. In a patriarchal society victims of rape specifically women are ashamed to talk about their predicament in the society because of the stereotypes that makes them to be regarded as loose women, tainted and not fit for marriage. The magistrate who is handling Danika's rape case says that "I want to correctly suggest if it is not better, for all parties concerned, but particularly for Mr Dube, in order to duly maintain the honour of his daughter, if this matter should not be handled in a more discreet fashion, that is to say, in the traditional manner, by the elders" (113). This statement depicts that the magistrate embodies patriarchal ideals as he holds the patriarchal view that discussing Danika's rape case in court is going to bring shame to her, rather, the case should be discussed by the authorities in the village in order to preserve the honour of Danika. I read the magistrate's conduct of persuading Mr Dube to drop Danika's rape case as well as his constant adjournment of Danika's rape case as a technique of frustrating Danika from getting justice at the court after being raped by the party man.

In the patriarchal society, women are treated as sexual objects by men and men use sex as a way of asserting their male dominance over women. Unfortunately, this leads to suffering of women and young female children like Danika who suffers sexual abuse in the hands of the party man. In her paper, "Sheroes and Villains: Conceptualizing Colonial and Contemporary Violence Against Women in Africa" Amina Mama accurately postulates that "in many countries, violent abuse has been taken up as the most salient and immediate manifestation of women's oppression by men, and in Africa, widespread violence against women is now probably the most direct and unequivocal manifestation of women's oppressed status" (46). Danika, a victim of sexual oppression, attempts to get judicial justice at the court with the help of Gabrielle. Their efforts to get justice in the rape case is unappreciated because the women are deemed as sexual tools and their human rights including that of choosing a sexual partner is violated by men who do not regard raping a woman as an issue. People also consider it a taboo to talk about rape cases in public, so even if they win the case their victory is not recognised, discussed and celebrated by the people in the society.

The continual suffering of people under postcolonial regimes in both Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* highlights the fact that the liberation wars that people engage in do not necessarily guarantee the birth of egalitarian societies. As it has already been pointed out, both male and female characters suffer under the oppressive post-colonial regimes in the primary texts. For instance, both men and women are arrested and others get killed by the agents of the oppressive postcolonial ruling regimes. However, women suffer more than men in postcolonial regimes because of the patriarchal ideals that people hold in society. McFadden argues that during the liberation struggle both men and women used:

Any kind of weapon that was a threat to the white colonial regime. And so, having armed themselves, formed organisations, mobilised hundreds of thousands of people, and engaged in long wars of resistance, which cost many young lives, they thought and hoped that this would be the vehicle through which egalitarian systems could be developed. But ten to fifteen years after the wars, we see that actually there is no guarantee, particularly for women, that liberation wars are the stepping stone, the transition mechanism, to egalitarian societies which are non-sexist and which are not gender- biased (5).

The above information accentuates the fact that women suffer more than men in postcolonial regimes because they are considered as inferior to men in a patriarchal society. Men who regard themselves as superior to women end up maltreating the women in different ways. Mike Kesby observes that in post independent nations like Zimbabwe, the “high hopes for a radical change in women’s position have given way to the realisation that social relations generated by patriarchy have the power to persist, at least in the medium term, and to metamorphose unpredictably in the future” (562). This proves that women continue to be oppressed in post independent nations due to the patriarchal ideals that are held by people. As it has been already alluded to, some men rape women as a way of asserting their male dominance over women. For instance, we learn that Danika gets raped by a party man and her efforts to get justice at the court prove futile.

4.4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter has examined various factors that lead to the uncelebrated lives of the heroes and heroines in the primary texts. Lack of proper recognition and documentation of the heroic deeds of people who take part in fighting against political oppression in fictitious Ethiopia and Zimbabwe is one of the factors that leads to the uncelebrated life of the heroes and heroines

in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*. This is necessitated by the failure of the ruling regimes to honour and appreciate the common people who successfully help them in fighting against political oppression in the primary texts. Nevertheless, it is revealed that the authors manage to participate in celebrating the ordinary masses by bringing to light their heroic deeds and presenting a positive image of the ordinary people. The heroes' and heroines' acts of carrying out their heroic deeds in the underground is another reason that makes the heroes and heroines to be uncelebrated. In the primary texts, we also learn that the heroic deeds of the heroines is not appreciated and does not come to light because the heroines carry out their heroic deeds in a patriarchal society. In this patriarchal society, the women are regarded as inferior and are hindered from engaging in heroic deeds due to the patriarchal ideals that people hold in the society. The few women who manage to engage in heroic deeds in a patriarchal society are hardly noticed, frowned upon and looked down with contempt. As such, the heroic deeds of women do not spread in the society and the women end up being uncelebrated. I observe that proper recognition of the heroic deeds and names of the heroes and heroines in a society is one of the ways that can make the heroes and heroines to be recognised and honoured. The change in mindset concerning the way men regard women as weak and incapable of engaging in heroic deeds is another factor that can make the heroines in our society to be recognised and celebrated. In the next chapter, I present the concluding remarks of the topic under discussion.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 CONCLUSION

This thesis has analysed the idea of uncelebrated heroes and heroines in Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Irene Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance*. It has specifically focused on how Mengiste and Sabatini excavate and portray the heroic deeds of some unfamiliar and uncelebrated male and female characters as a way of honouring them and also bringing to light their significant contribution to the building of their nations. In the course of this study, it has been established that Mengiste's and Sabatini's work speak to each other in different ways. Firstly, the study has established that there is a mutual relationship between fiction and history. Both authors borrow from some past events that happened in their nations and incorporate them in their novels. Mengiste draws from past events that happened during the second Italo-Ethiopian war and incorporates them in the writing of *The Shadow King*. She also borrows from past political events that took place in Ethiopia during the reign of Haile Selassie I and Colonel Mengistu and incorporates them in the writing of *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. Sabatini incorporates in her novel, *An Act of Defiance*, the political events that took place in Zimbabwe during the reign of Robert Mugabe. Both Mengiste and Sabatini fictionalise history of their nations in their novels.

This study has also found that both authors give voice to people on the periphery by narrating the stories of ordinary people in their nations. It is through the process of reading such stories in the primary texts that I have learnt of heroic deeds carried out by ordinary people. I have also learnt that the ordinary people are not honoured in their countries despite of their effort in carrying out heroic deeds that help in the building of their nations. Both authors depict female and male characters that carry out heroic deeds in their nations. Through this study, I have learnt of the heroic deeds that heroines carry out in fighting against political and sexual oppression in the primary texts. It has been revealed that in Mengiste's *The Shadow King*, heroines like Aster and Hirut are portrayed as warrior heroines. They carry out their heroic deeds by means of violent and non-violent means in fighting against colonial oppression. The heroism of the heroines in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* is depicted in their actions of fighting against political oppression perpetuated by leaders of the postcolonial regimes.

In the course of this study, I have come to realise that male and female characters have something in common. What is common among them is that both male and female characters are depicted as

courageous and patriotic as they take part in fighting against political oppression for the betterment of the whole nation. Both heroes and heroines employ violent and non-violent methods in fighting against political oppression. In Mengiste's novels, the heroes employ both violent and non-violent means in fighting against political oppression. For instance, in *The Shadow King*, Seifu employs violence as he uses guns and knives in fighting against colonial oppression. In the same novel, Hailu employs non-violent tactics in fighting against colonial oppression as he takes care of the wounded soldiers. In *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, the heroes like Dawit employ both violent and non-violent means in fighting against political oppression. Dawit employs violence as he uses a gun to shoot the Derg soldiers. He uses non-violent strategy as he collects dead bodies of people who are murdered by the Derg regime and left to rot in the streets. I have learnt that the heroes in Sabatini's novel are a little bit different from the ones depicted in Mengiste's novels. This is because the heroes in Sabatini's novel employ non-violent methods only in fighting against political oppression. On the other hand, Mengiste's heroes employ both violent and non-violent methods in fighting against political oppression. In Sabatini's novel, Godfrey is depicted as a bureaucratic hero who uses his journalism profession to fight against political oppression by writing stories that expose the malpractices of the ruling postcolonial regime.

By paying attention to heroic deeds of both female and male characters, the study has revealed that the heroes and heroines differ a little bit. This is because it is only female characters who are depicted as heroines in their fight against sexual oppression. Through their actions, the heroines deconstruct the patriarchal ideals that keep them in bondage. There is no record of a male character who is sexually oppressed in the primary texts. The study has also found out that the other common attribute among the heroes and heroines is that both of them are not celebrated in their countries. The female and male characters are not honoured despite of carrying out heroic deeds that have a positive impact on their countries. This thesis has explored different factors that lead to the uncelebrated lives of the heroes and heroines. Failure of the political leaders to honour the heroic efforts of the ordinary female and male characters is one of the factors that lead to the uncelebrated lives of the heroes and heroines. This study has established that through narration of the heroic deeds of people on the periphery, Mengiste and Sabatini have been able to present a new dimension of understanding heroism which is contrary to the one that is advocated by the ruling regimes. This study has unveiled that Mengiste and Sabatini participate in celebrating the uncelebrated heroes

and heroines through the depiction of the heroic achievements of ordinary female and male characters.

This study has helped to bring to an end to my quest of finding out factors that lead to the uncelebrated life of the heroes and heroines in the novels under study. This is because through the study, I have been able to learn some of the unique factors that lead to the uncelebrated life of the heroes and heroines. In the course of this study, I have learnt to appreciate different tactics that the heroes and heroines employ in carrying out the heroic deeds. The idea of examining uncelebrated heroes and heroines has been examined by using the postcolonial, feminist and Marxist theoretical lens only. This study has focused on analysing the idea of uncelebrated heroes and heroines by using African literary texts only. My suggestion to future researchers is to examine the idea of uncelebrated heroes and heroines in other literary texts from other continents like Asia and Europe.

Overall, it has been evidenced that literature plays a crucial role of uncovering the hidden history of the heroic deeds of the uncelebrated heroes and heroines. It also helps in inspiring readers of literature to cultivate the virtues of bravery and resilience, among others. Philip Zimbardo affirms that “we care about heroic stories because they serve as powerful reminders that people are capable of resisting evil, of not giving in to temptations, of rising above mediocrity, and of heeding the call to action and to service when others fail to act” (461). Indeed, heroic stories inspire readers to be determined to carry out heroic tasks in order to overcome challenges in life.

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