

The Portrayal of Liberal Feminism in the Main Character's Roles in *Difret* Film

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the personality of Meaza and the portrayal of liberal feminist values in the *Difret* film. The researchers use the theory of characterization theory by Boggs and Patrie and liberal feminism values by Wollstonecraft, Mill, and Taylor. The researchers use qualitative research by Tracy and data analysis by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana for the film. The findings of this research showed three aspects of liberal feminism portrayed in the film, namely equal education, equal liberty, and suffrage. Those aspects are portrayed through the personality of Meaza when she struggles to help women in Ethiopia get justice by being intelligent to get an equal education, hard-working and independent to get equal liberty. Also, care, determined, and brave are included in getting suffrage.

Key words: Liberal Feminism, Personality, *Difret*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini membahas kepribadian Meaza dan penggambaran nilai-nilai feminisme liberal dalam film Difret. Peneliti menggunakan teori karakterisasi dari Boggs dan Patrie dan nilai feminisme liberal dari Wollstonecraft, Mill, dan Taylor. Para peneliti menggunakan penelitian kualitatif oleh Tracy dan analisis data oleh Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana untuk film tersebut. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan tiga aspek feminisme liberal yang digambarkan dalam film tersebut, yaitu pendidikan yang setara, kebebasan yang setara, dan hak pilih. Aspek-aspek tersebut digambarkan melalui kepribadian Meaza ketika ia berjuang untuk membantu perempuan di Ethiopia mendapatkan keadilan dengan menjadi cerdas untuk mendapatkan pendidikan yang setara, pekerja keras dan mandiri untuk mendapatkan kebebasan yang sama. Juga, perhatian, tekad, dan keberanian termasuk dalam mendapatkan hak pilih.

Kata kunci: *Feminisme Liberal, Kepribadian, Difret*

A. INTRODUCTION

Liberal feminism is based on the classic perspective formulation in Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Women," John Stuart Mill's "The Subjection of Women," and the women's suffrage movement in the nineteenth century, female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that blocks women's entrance to and success in the so-called public world. To the extent that society holds the false belief that women are, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men, it tends to discriminate against women in the academy, the forum, and the

marketplace. As liberal feminists see it, this discrimination against women is unfair. Women should have as much chance to succeed in the public realm as men do (Tong 1-2). It means liberal feminism is a women's movement to change women's position and emphasizes women's power to keep equality through their actions in life.

The topic discussed in this research is interesting because *Difret* film is based on a true story. The title *Difret* has a double meaning in Amharic, the primary language of Ethiopia. In its most common usage, it means courage or "to dare," but it can also refer to rape. Both meanings are relevant to this true story set in 1996 (Westcott). The main character in *Difret* film is Meaza, who tries to break the patriarchal system so that women can have the same rights to get justice in law and freedom to choose, such as marriage, education, and work opportunities as men.

From the explanations on the background of the study above, the researcher formulates two research questions to analyze, as follows: (1) What are the personalities of Meaza described in the *Difret* film?; (2) What are the liberal feminism values of Meaza depicted in the *Difret* film?

Based on the research questions above, the objectives of this study are expected:

(1) To find out the personality of Meaza as the main character in the *Difret* film; (2) To find out the liberal feminism values of Meaza as the main character that is depicted in the *Difret* film.

Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich knowledge about liberal feminism values based on Wollstonecraft, Mill, and Taylor. Practically, Practically, the researcher hopes that this research can contribute to the next researchers so that they can use this research as a theory to analyze this film with other theories. Also, the researchers hope that this research can help the next researcher to understand the way to analyze this film using Wollstonecraft, Mill, and Taylor.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Character and Characterization

According to Bennett and Royle, character is the people in a literary work with an identity made up of name, appearance, conversation, and action (60). It means the character is an identity to be an actor in the story. While characterization in literature is the process authors use to develop characters and create images of the characters for the audience. On the other hand, it is a way in which the author reveals his character in a work of fiction or, in other words, the characterization method of character portrayal (Bennett and Royle 65). There are many ways to know characterization's analysis in the film. Based on Boggs and Patries, there are five types of characterization theory in the film, namely: (1) characterization through appearance, (2) characterization through dialogue, (3) characterization through external action, (4)

characterization through internal action, and (5) characterization through the reaction of other characters (50-52).

2. Personality

Personality is the sum total of how an individual reacts and interacts with others. Alternatively, personality is generally defined as the deeply ingrained and relatively enduring patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior (“Personality Development 1”) There are six personalities namely; care, determined, brave, intelligent, hard-working, and independence.

3. Liberal Feminism

Feminism is a women's movement to change women's position and emphasizes women's power to keep equality through their actions in life. According to Delmar, in the 19th century, the women's movement was looked at as a movement for the increased participation by women in social and political life or as a movement that negotiated the relative and shared positions men and women were to occupy in the social, political, and economy. In order, it makes sense to invoke each woman as a symbolic figure (15).

The pioneers of liberal feminism are Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), and Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858). It is called the classical liberals. Tong said, To the extent that society holds the false belief that women are, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men, it tends to discriminate against women in the academy, the forum, and the marketplace. As liberal feminists see it, this discrimination against women is unfair. Women should have as much chance to succeed in the public realm as men do (2). From the explanation, it can be known that liberal feminism is a women's movement to change the perception wrongly to women and a movement to fight for justice and opportunities. The researcher only focuses on the ideas and values of liberal feminism related to this study, namely equal education, equal liberty, and suffrage by Mary Wollstonecraft, Mill, and Taylor.

a. Equal Education

Equal education is eighteenth-century thought; Wollstonecraft said women, as well as men, deserve an equal chance to develop into autonomous agents. In “*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,” Wollstonecraft urged women to become autonomous decision-makers, and beyond that, the path to autonomy passes through the academy qtd. in Tong 25. It means liberal feminism relates to education. Women fight for women's education so they can attend school and receive an education.

b. Equal Liberty

Equal liberty is nineteenth-century thought. It taught Mill and Taylor. This movement has a different perspective; Mill said to fight for women's rights in marriage and divorce. Then Taylor fights for the same position in terms of equal work opportunities. It means women can express themselves by doing everything they want to do. Women can choose unmarried or delay, as the thought patriarchy forces women to marry. Also, women can get opportunities to work like a man, and women can also support material contributions.

c. Suffrage

Suffrage is nineteenth-century thought. According to Mill and Taylor, women needed Suffrage to become men's equals. They claimed that the vote gives people the power to express their political views and change those systems, structures, and attitudes that contribute to their and others' oppression (qtd. in Tong 21). It means liberal feminism also fight for women to get Suffrage. Women can speak up in public to gain support for changing the system that curbs them.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This research used qualitative research. According to Tracy, qualitative research has two concepts: context and description. In context, qualitative research purposefully examines and makes a note of small cues in order to decide how to behave, as well as to make sense of the context and build more significant knowledge claims about the culture. Directly related to context is the idea of the description (3). In addition, Qualitative research helps to understand various societal issues that arise from particular cultural contexts (30). The researchers chooses qualitative research because the researcher's data are (1) described and explained in the form of words and also pictures, and (2) qualitative research helps and develops the researcher to see the social issue of liberal feminism reflected in the film.

The data in this study were taken from character dialogues and pictures that show the personality related the characterization of Meaza and the aspects of liberal feminism in *Difret* film. The source for this research is the *Difret* film (2014), written and directed by Zeresenay Berhana Mehari and producer by Angelina Jolie. In this study, the researcher collected the data by watching the *Difret* film and tried to understand the whole story in the film. After that, the researcher observed and focused on every scene and also the script in the film that related to liberal feminism values. Then, the researcher took notes on important data from the scenes and script that indicated liberal feminism to be analyzed.

Based on the steps of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, qualitative data analysis entails three main flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (30). To the first flow, the research condenses or focuses on the Meaza personality related to characterization and liberal feminism values that reflected Meaza. Second, in displaying the data, the researcher organized or grouped data related personality, characterization, and liberal feminism of Meaza. Finally, the researcher drawing a conclusion about the study's findings based on the problem formulation, theory of personality related to characterization, and liberal feminism values.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Personality of Meaza

The research analyzes the personality of Meaza as the main character, which relates to characterization theory by Boggs and Patrie, and there are five ways to identify the personality of Meaza in the *Difret* film that relates to the theory of characterization through appearance, dialogue, external action, internal action, and reactions of another character.

a. Care

The authors state, "care is an emotional offer, and emotional offer is interpreted as love, concern, sensitivity, touch" (Krepia, Lavdaniti, and Psychogiou 6). Women in Ethiopia occupy low positions in society. Women's low decision-making power in Ethiopia is more pronounced at the household level. From the problems, Meaza is concerned as a woman and cares about providing legal aid and protection to poor women. She helps people and works professionally without even paying. The dialogue shows that Maeza has a caring nature which is manifested by the words "**Help**" and "**service is free**". Her actions and words are related to the theory of characterization through external action, which proves that Meaza is a person who likes to help and provide free services.

Meaza: **We help** women and girls like Hirut who are in legal trouble and don't get proper professional representation.

Hirut Mother: But we don't have anything to pay you

Meaza: Money is not necessary, our **service is free**. (00:20: 17-00:20: 30)

b. Determined

Meaza is a determined woman. Based on the personality theory, autonomy is about being volitional and self-endorsing in one's behavior and having the control to make choices from one's own will (K.P Hui and K.M Tsang 11). *Difret* film talks about the position of women subordinated by men. Women are often belittled in opinion, not free to speak, and almost all the rules in society on controlled by men. However, Meaza shows that women can speak up and are not easily controlled by men.

Mr. Gazaw : I do be careful of what I say if I were you. It is an unfounded accusation to say that the state is not doing its job.

Meaza : You know that is not what I am saying. **And I want not to be that easily intimidated**, if that is what you are getting at. The girl is underage. (00: 25: 33- 00: 25: 42)



This scene and dialogue show that Meaza is determined and related to characterization through appearance. It can be proven from her words and actions. Meaza's appearance looks like a stern face, and she speaks very firmly to Mr. Gazaw. Moreover, she does not want to be controlled by a man and is firm in her actions and decisions. It shows Meaza is an autonomous person who cannot be easily controlled or intimidated by other people, especially a man.

c. Brave

This is Meaza's conversation with Mr. Zenebe, Meaza's bravery in dealing with the problem of women's injustice, and it is related to Characterization through dialogue. This can be proven through her words and actions to try to give a warning and emphasize to Mr. Zenebe not to hurt her wife again. It shows Meaza has moral bravery. In personality theory, a morally brave person is brave to speak up for what is right ("Character Strengths Bravery"). Meaza does not fear in front of a patriarchal man; in patriarchy, a wife is only positioned as a companion figure who serves her husband, and the husband can freely do anything to his wife. This system of patriarchy is what Meaza wants to abolish because the system always puts women in low positions. In other words, Meaza is brave to speak up and fight the things not to be equitable for women.

Meaza : **I am here to let you know that if you ever touch your wife again, I will have you arrested**

Mr. Zenebe : Listen you little shit, I am old enough to be your father

Meaza : And man enough to beat your wife, right? You want to keep your job and be nice to your wife. (00: 07: 08- 00: 07: 22)

d. Hard-Working

Meaza is hard-working. Hardworking is the ability to be determined and work hard to achieve goals is a talent of its own. For one to be successful, talent alone can merely be a push forward. There are five characteristics of hardworking people dependability, prioritization, motivation, perseverance, and self-care ("The Healthy Journal").

The *Difret* film tells of many underage girls who are married. The women do not have hopes for a career or work in public but rather grow up and get married. The researchers find that Meaza is a career woman, so she works very hard without thinking about the demands of marriage at a mature age. Moreover, researchers can find the characterization of Meaza based on the theory of Boggs and Patrie, namely through appearance. This can be proven through Meaza's talking with a smiling face. It shows that Meaza is not worried about marriage because it is not her priority.

Hirut : Why don't you have a husband?

Meaza : I don't know. My mother always asks the question

Hirut : Are you a bad woman? Because in the village when a girl is married, do you wish you were married?

Meaza : No. I think about it sometimes, though. **But I am always working. I think men are afraid to marry me since I don't always stay at home.** (00: 43: 15-00: 43: 26)



The dialogue shows Meaza is a hard worker and prioritizes her work. Working hard is one way to survive in difficult situations and to be motivated to not depend on others and can help people.

e. Intelligent

Meaza is an intelligent person. Intelligence is the ability to learn from experience (Polgar 1). Meaza has brothers who have an education. The situation in Ethiopia, men always get enough education than women. Meaza got the same education as her older brother through her mother's encouragement. From experiencing her brothers, Meaza also proves her ability to get the same education.

Hirut : They say she disgraced the family and she is forced to live by herself. Did you disgrace your family?

Maeza : No. You see when I was a little girl, I grew up in a village just like yours. I have five brothers and I am the only girl. **My mother made sure I was raised equally with my brothers. So, I went to school with them every day**, I didn't want to get married and have children like everybody in the village. (00: 42:01-00:42:18)

From the dialogue, Meaza looks like an intelligent person who can ability and compete with her brothers to get knowledge. It is related to characterization through external action that can be proven through words, "**so, I went to school with them every day**," it shows her action that she went to school with her brothers the same way to get an education.

f. Independent

According to Chaplin, independence is a condition where people do not hang themselves from others when making decisions and is accompanied by an attitude of self-confidence (qtd. in Haiq,etl 2). It means independence if someone does not depend on others and can make a decision or not under the control of others.

In Ethiopia, people still have a patriarchal mindset that often causes underage marriage in girls. The girls are always victims of being married off, which is not even their choice. Instead, Meaza knows that she can make decisions without being influenced by others. She does not want to marry others' decision but through her choice. It shows Meaza has a strong personality with her decision that she did not want to marry. Also, Meaza is not a material woman because she has a job that can generate her own money without depending on a man.

Hirut : Are you a bad woman, because in the village a girl is married.

Meaza : **I did not want to get married and have children like everybody in the village**. Men kept asking my father to give me to their sons. He told them that I was a difficult child. **Not wife material**. (00: 41: 45 - 00: 42: 35)

Meaza is an Independent person, which is related to characterization through dialogue that is proved by her words, "**I did not want to get married and have children like everybody in the village**" and "**Not wife material**" it shows Meaza is a woman confident with her decision and action that she was able to be independent in things of decision or choice and material without having depended on a man.

2. Liberal Fennism Values of Meaza

The researchers then discuss the second research question of how liberal feminism values are reflected through Meaza's personality throughout the film in the second section of the analysis. The theory used in analyzing the research is Wollstonecraft, Mill, and Taylor's theory. As a result of the research, the researchers discovered three liberal feminism values reflected in the personalities of Meaza: equal education, equal liberty, and suffrage.

a. Equal Education

Wollstonecraft stated that women have the same ability (qtd. in Tong 14). All human beings deserve an equal chance to develop their rational and moral capacities to achieve full personhood, including women. Women should have equal rights to be educated and be able to achieve any educational level they want. However, in traditional society, men's education is more prioritized than women's, and women do not have the opportunity to receive the same education as men. Meaza is an intelligent woman; as explained in the characterization part, it can be seen how she can compete with her five brothers to get the same education.

Maeza: You see, when I was a little girl, I grew up in a village just like yours. I have five brothers and I am the only girl. **My mother made sure I was raised equally with my brothers. So, I went to school with them every day**, I didn't want to get married and have children like everybody in the village. (00:42:18)

As it said, what Meaza experienced is exceptional, judging from how she grew up in the village and got a good education. Different from what Meaza had experienced, many girls in some of the regions in Ethiopia face challenges that exclude them from education.

b. Equal Liberty

Equal liberty is a liberal feminism that fights for the equality in economy, work opportunities, and independent women who do not rely on men. In the *Difret* film, Meaza's character is depicted as a figure against patriarchal practice. The image that Meaza's character is portrayed as a single woman and independent, which the some of the Liberal Feminism values, as it explained Meaza chose not to marry or delay, which known the thought that patriarchy forces women to marry. Meaza is an independent and hard-working woman, as explained in the characterization part, and it shows how Meaza is a single woman and independent who has a career.

Hirut : **Why don't you have a husband ?**

Maeza : I don't know. My mother always asks questions.

Hirut : **Are you a bad woman ? Because in the village when a girl imarried**, if she is not a virgin, the husband throws her out of the house. She can't even get back to her family. They say she disgraced the family and she is forced to live by herself. Did you disgrace your family? (00: 41: 31- 00:41:32)

The dialogue interpreted that single or unmarried women are seen as a bad thing whereas people look at them as bad women in Ethiopia. The paradigm of women, in this case, shows how unusual it is in their society to see a single woman living by themselves, even when women have already gained good in life and career, their

culture sees that women need to be married as a necessity and obligation which becomes women's responsibility in society.

c. Suffrage

The third feminist value reflected in the *Difret* film is Suffrage. Mill and Taylor Said, women needed Suffrage to become men's equals. They claimed that the vote gives people the power to express their political views and change those systems, structures, and attitudes that contribute to their and others' oppression (qtd. in Tong 21). In this film, the values of Suffrage are fought to change the system patriarchy to get equal treatment, such as equal employment opportunities in society and individual civil rights through Meaza's character. This is related to the determined, care, and brave personality of Meaza.

Meaza : I asked the Ministry of justice to do something about it, they said “we do not mix ourselves with the customary law”. So, **I’m prepared to challenge the Ministry of Justice in the High Court.**

Mr. Hiruy : Well, that’s a serious step. You will have a hard time convincing any judge to take your case. They will be terrified to summon the Minister to court.

Meaza : **The law needs to be enforced.** (00: 57: 57-00:58:24)

Meaza feels it is the right time to enforce the law embroiled with their traditional customary law and rearrange the national law through Hirut’s case. To liberate women and children from gender-based violence and get freedom equally. The depiction of the Meaza character who fights for suffrage is a liberal feminist form in which she is boldly against discrimination to change the system of patriarchy in law.

Based on the analysis, the research found that there are three aspects of liberal feminism. They are equal education, equal liberty, and suffrage. Furthermore, the research found some personalities of Meaza related to liberal feminism: care, determination, bravery, hard work, intelligence, and independence. Thus, her personality could be classified as the values of liberal feminism. The first value is equal education. These values concern the women's movement to get equality in education. Wollstonecraft said women must get an education to develop their rational and moral capacities and potential (qtd. in Tong 14). Based on the findings, these things include Meaza's personality, and intelligence.

The next value is equal liberty. Based on findings, these things include Meaza's personality, hard-working and independent, which concerns how women express themselves by doing everything they want to do. Mill believes that women can choose late and even not marry to minimize divorce. Taylor believes that men and women should be equal in opportunities to do something just like a man, such as women having opportunities to work with men, which can contribute material to the family.

Meaza's hard-working personality. She wants the freedom to live according to her choice without having to depend on or be directed by others like women in Ethiopia. She thinks that women have the same freedom as men to want whatever they want, especially about marriage. Then, Her independent personality showed when she did not want to get married because she was busy and wanted to focus on her work. She did not want to marry because of coercion of people, but her desire. Meaza does

not depend on men and does not want to be under the control of men. She can be independent and make money by working as a lawyer. Suffrage is concerned with the women's movement to fight discrimination and try to change the system of unjust laws to get the same opportunities and equality as men. It is related to fair laws and equal employment. These things include personality: care, determination, and bravery. First is care. Her care is shown in some cases, such as when she helps a girl named Hirut, who is poor and does not get fair representation law. As a lawyer, she attempts to help Hirut win in court by collecting evidence accurately.

The second personality is determined, kind of her determined, such as when she struggles to win in the case of Hirut. She has a big goal when she wins the Hirut case. It will have a big impact, namely, to change the system of legal inequality in Ethiopia to be fair. Moreover, Meaza is an intelligent woman who does not easily intimidate men, making her a determined person. The third character is brave, firm and never gives up when she dares to criticize Mr. Zenebe, which hurts his wife. Discrimination often occurs in Ethiopia. Meaza has a role in helping women who experience violence to bring the legal arena.

E. CONCLUSIONS

The research presents the conclusion of findings and discussions about the research questions, which are the main character's personalities and liberal feminism values in the film. The research revealed that the personalities of Meaza are caring, determined, brave, hardworking, and independent. In this case, the researcher used three ways of characterization theory by Boggs and Patrie: characterization through appearance, characterization through dialogue, and characterization through external action.

Furthermore, the research found three images of liberal feminism values represented by Meaza's character: equal education, liberty, and suffrage. Equal education is a concern of the women's movement to get equality. It is related to the independent personality of Meaza. Equal liberty concerns how women express themselves by doing everything they want to do. It relates to her hardworking personality by Meaza. Suffrage concerns the women's movement to get the same opportunities and equality as men. Suffrage that relates to the personality of Meaza are care, determination, and bravery. This research can bring the reader's awareness of how women were treated and positioned by society at the time, especially in Ethiopia. Moreover, this research also provides a deeper understanding of how Meaza can break the patriarchal system, which has been practiced for a long time.

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