

Wore Negari, Sick Man Talking and Qebatari-cum-Qelamadje??

Wore Negari

My initial reaction was to comment on the slanted allegations, but then I dropped the idea. His drooling is too much to wipe and takes another book to dab. After I finished reading, I realized that the book is a memoir of a neurotic man addicted to *Khat* and alcohol.

Sad to write, there are not many books as nauseating as Mohamaed Yimam's (Mo hereafter) "Wore Negari". It is a waste of time to be leery of his assertion (as it is full of it) and validate his claims with other sources. Since, the book is a memoir of a neurotic disillusioned party member there is no need on my part to comment, except revert when the allegations have relevance for the understanding of his pathology.

When I bought the book, I thought Mo was high on the party echelon and was eager to know the inside workings of the CC and the politburo. Unfortunately, Mo was just a cell member occasionally called for to be a member of a publication committee (did not contribute any article), and all his information in his memoir came as a result of a buzz talk. Mo spent most of his time duplicating *Demorcracia* and later as a writer for *Goh* magazine. Mezy gave a job to her cousin at *Goh*, when Mo was unemployed and short of money. During his stay in *Goh*, his input was quite negligible. Except for the articles on Coffee, *Chu Teh*, and *Angela Davis* (plagiarized from books) and as a one-time soccer reporter, there wasn't much to his name. It was neither due to his skills nor competence (at the time he was a graduate of Jimma TTI and a freshman student at AAU) but through networking he became Party member and got a job at *Goh*. What a loose chatterbox Birhanu had recruited one can read it from Mo's memoir. "How I was selected from the many others in the party, I never knew, nor did I care to ask. It certainly had something to do with my

friendship with Birhanu and Mezy” (Yimam, 2013, p. 98). He drops the party membership requirement and recruitment procedure much lower than and Idir and tells us how he hitched to the party,

“He (Birhanu Ejegu) asked us what we thought about it (underground party). I felt the question was directed at me but waited until the others spoke. Mohammed said that he was pleased to be a member and other nodded. I probably mumbled “teru new” (it is okay) with visibly less conviction, adding that it is good we have become members” (Yimam, 2013, p. 54).

Mo spittle unashamedly and writes that the party and youth league members were semi-literate, drunken lout, *khat* addicted, with talent for deceit and conspiracy. He writes,

“People I *thought* were very senior in EPRP ate *khat* and discussed ideology and strategy under the influence. Most of what we read, theoretical, propaganda pieces, were written under the influence of *Khat*” (Yimam, 2013, p. 44).

Mo frequently went mental, and many in places in the memoir, he tells us what he *thought* without affirming its correctness. He slobbered over the elite group, “I was mostly quiet in front of them out of peasant like deference to these individuals who were better-educated, more confident, and smarter” (Yimam, 2013, p. 110) yet insolently writes the Party was brain dead and that the writing, reading and publications of *Democracia* were conducted under the influence of *Khat* and alcohol (Yimam, 2013, pp. 52,66,71). He does not give any confirmation, in his memoir, where and how he had seen *Democracia* being written in such manner, for he was no part of it. He was a duplicator and occasional writer to *Goh* and as he confirmed it in his words “the party never assigned me sensitive positions” (Yimam, 2013, p. 173), and on the very few assignments, he was apathetic “I was a fellow traveller who was passive in the organization” (Yimam, 2013, p. 127). He deserves credit with his confession that he was an alcoholic and *Khat* addict (Yimam, 2013, pp. 44,52,66,71,72,73,83,105,133...). I lost hope to the rationality of his statements after

I read that Mo had suffered from a drug-induced amnesia and visited a mental Hospital.

“ I was experiencing a problem with my balance. I could not sleep for many days in a row. I never had such a severe sleeping disorder before. Strangely enough, I did not feel like I had not slept. *Khat* began to affect my memory. I looked very distracted...I decided to to Amanuel Hospital, the hospital for the mentally ill” (Yimam, 2013, p. 105).

Mo's baloney continues, and down the pages he seems an *Anja* avatar from the '70s. He describes the squad members as *magerat-mechi*, liars and ignorant bums. He states they kill each other and take collateral damages lightly. According to Mo, squads killed wantonly children and bar ladies, and if for any reason a child was left unhurt during an operation, it was not the operation of EPRP squad members. Squad left their mark by killing innocents (Yimam, 2013, pp. 114, 137, 146). Mo is of the opinion that it was EPRP that turned the sleeping Derg into a rabid dog. It was the brain dead leadership of the Party that brought the fascist psychopathic behavior of Mengistu and company. Through some twisted argument, Mo hogwash that the fascist fangs of Mengistu and Co were not of their own but of EPRP's making. It is quite a waste of time to argue on each of these prevarications. He occasionally tells about ordinary people, some likeable, some not, enticed into the party underground work through fear, group allegiance and few out of conviction. So it is with this background one should understand Mo and read his memoir.

Sick Man Talking

Mo beseeches readers “This book should be seen as window to understanding the Ethiopian left and the psychology of the revolution”(Yimam, 2013, p. 16). The memoir cannot be “the psychology of the revolution” whatever that means, but it sure gives a glimpse into the mind of a mentally tortured maladjusted young man,

Anna O of Ethiopian style. A memoir is a multiple-voice discourse. Therefore, the characters, in the memoir, have no separate identities from the narrator. It is the storyteller himself talking under different identities. A memoir is mirror image of a dream composed under different states. When we read about Yohannes as a *Khat* addict and alcoholic, it is Mo's personality under the garb of Yohannes. Aya is another persona of him, as Birhane too. In short all the characters, in the memoir, are the many voices of one and the same person, Mo.

That Mo was a neurotic party member does not need much argument. From the beginning, he was conflict and stress ridden young man. Torn apart between family and group obligations, he lived in a twilight zone.

“I surely feared for my life and felt guilty about it. Not only did I feel guilty but I also became inherently insecure about it. ...for a long time, this dilemma (supporting family..) would haunt me even as I slowly began to be sucked into the radical political movement that was forever to change my life and that of my country”(Yimam, 2013, p. 41).

Lack of self worth, insecurity and craving for attention are mentioned in many places in the memoir. Neurotic and paranoiac behaviors are accentuated during a stressful period, and that was what happened to the son of Sheik Yimam. In the book, we see the writer being tossed with his own inner conflicts. He was neither open with others nor with himself. In many of the pages, we see the many layers of his character. Mo had not experienced each revolutionary (personal too) state because of his own caginess, worry and anxiety; therefore his experiences are fragmented. Each leaf in the book is a peep into his deep-seated conflict. It is no wonder that he was a *Khat* and alcohol addict. Mo was never contented except when he chewed *Khat* and drinks alcohol. He was a prisoner of his own fear accentuated by existential hook. His own fear was his own prison shutting him off from appreciating his personal and revolutionary experience. We see in the memoir what had started as a jovial friendship with Birhanu and Mezy ending in personal

bickering. Mo is good in disparaging people who trespassed his fear-wired prison cell. "I resented what Birhanu had done to me and to the others" (Yimam, 2013, p. 51). His relationship was scheming, sneaky and had unnecessary expectations of "senior in EPRP". He mixes delight with fright and writes, "There was pride and pleasure in Mezy's eyes. I felt this was an ominous sign" (Yimam, 2013, p. 109). He usually damages his relations, in ways that completed his inmost fears about individuals in the party; or created insalubrious attachments based on his weaknesses. "Those days I was conscious that some discussion was going on between Birhanu and Mesfin from which I was excluded. I felt sensitive about that...and my ego was hurt" (Yimam, 2013, p. 54).

Mo had a terrible time becoming truly friendly with his comrades, echoing a basic cageyness. He was full of appalling anticipation that, at some point, he would be killed or incarcerated. He was repeatedly very perceptive to rebuffs and did not bear ostracism. Mo in the eve and during the revolution was unbalanced and maladjusted young man. He was attracted to the social movement, not because of its ideas but of the senses of belongingness it brought. He came with his insecurity, but the revolution heightened his alienation and turned him to an irrational nerd.

"My discipline was not never good,I never felt comfortable with doing things secretly....I intentionally disobeyed....for anyone with any sense of party discipline, it was clear I did not hack it. ..I kept on masquerading " (Yimam, 2013, p. 99)

The neurotic's dissonance and incompetence are in the memoir. Mo had constant wish to please others and most often he was unable to say no. Moreover, he had difficulty to make up his mind and make a decision and was torn apart with self-doubts. Even after taking a decision he would not like to be responsible for the actions and shifted the blame and responsibility on others. As a member of the party, he failed to express his own opinion and felt crushed with guilt after being assertive.

Mo's neurotic defenses are too many (specially narcissistic defense) that he failed to get what the Party had offered him because lacked emotional spontaneity. Now he claims that he has a good "grip" of life, not through marriage as he claims, but through the death of his closest friends, therefore, he got a chance for chimney sweeping all his fears and insecurities. Now the major characters are gone Mo aggressively attributes his bad luck to his friends.

Qebtari-cum-Qelamadj

The memoir futilely attempts to deconstruct what we know of the movement. Mo describes unpalatable relationships among comrades in the Party. The book details on events that took place 40 years ago. Retrospective memory has limitations, especially for people with a history of drug-induced amnesia. Even if the author consults notes, he would lose the context. To countercheck his many fabrications are difficult as he made it too personal and all the witnesses around him are dead. His non-personal assertions can be corroborated with other books and living witnesses. Mo's judgment blurs the boundary between personal and political. He pleads that a future generation would judge him. I have no idea how that could be possible while the history makers are still alive. Memory deteriorates and judgments prevail when writing a memoir after long years. It is true that it is difficult to be impartial, but tarnishing the characters of the actors is vulgar. The *Ihapa-led- Generation* could be amnesic on many counts but never on the *Red Terror*. If the author was limited to describing the events, and refrained passing judgment (let the reader do that) the book would have a possibility of being a page-turner. Unfortunately, the personal judgment makes the book deficient and some chapters do not worth the papers they were written.

The *Ihapa-led generation* was fighting injustice wherever it was found. So trying to set up a base in Tigray, Harar or the south was neither a tactical nor a strategic

oversight, as Mo claims. It flows from the basic principle (which Mo killed) was well and not a misguided idea. How could combating injustice and fighting to bring modernity to backward Ethiopia be the movement of drug addicts, *Monsieur Mo*?

If there were one behavioral modification scheme at a grand scale, it happened in Ethiopia during *Ihapa Gize*. Most lumpen-proletariat, criminal, vagrants and unemployed were turned into revolutionaries. Most bar ladies abandoned their age-old profession and burgeoned the Ethiopian Women movement. Not a few served as agents for the youth league. Western culture and music was literally wiped out, and for sure there was no substance abuse among the youth. The *Khat* culture started during the *Zemecha*, but its effect was limited to Harar and Jimma. It was the time when literature flourished, and music thrived. Young boys and girls sleep in the same room with no sexual advances. How on earth would one characterize the youth of the time as alcoholics and drug addicts? How come one incriminates young girls of the *Zemecha* as bar ladies? “There was one where we used to go and listen to English songs. Most of the girls in this bar seemed to be high school dropouts, and some may have been *Zemecha refuseniks*” (Yimam, 2013, p. 73)

Despite its shortcoming, *Ihapa-led-generation* was not a neurotic mass movement, though it is undisputable that some irrational individuals were in the organization. A party cannot be neurotic only individuals. It was true many turned to alcoholism and Pentecostalism after the *Red Terror* massacre. The situation was anomic, and no wonder to see high turnout in brothels and churches. Most found it difficult to sleep due to vivid flashbacks. Most suffered from a *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD). No wonder quite a number of Red Terror survivors’ adapted maladaptive state of dependency and *Khat* and alcohol were the drugs of choice. Surprisingly, most other *Red Terror* survivors adjusted to the changes and crowded universities and colleges. Bewilderingly, Mo was in reverse gear, he was in the *Pre Traumatic Stress Syndrome* and dived into substance abuse. If Mo had the moral competency of Raskonnikov, he would have shouted, “...it was not a human being I killed, it was a principle!” It is true Mo has no moral qualms to acknowledge that he has martyred the principle for,

without it the generation is nothing. He pronounced the movement lifeless, “We were doomed right from day one (Yimam, 2013, p. 189)”. Even Nazi Herman Hess got it right; it is the generation that is captive between two eras that suffers most. No surprise if such a generation turned to alcohol and *Khat*. As to the *Ihapa-led-generation*, the youth knew what was ahead and was not a cork that bounced with the tides of the revolution. The *Ihapa-led-generation* was not waiting for *Godot* to appear as in Samuel Beckett’s “waiting for Godot”. The generation was *Godot*.

The *Ihapa-led-movement* was not politics of organized insanity, nor it was a psychotic fantasy of masochistic group death. Unfortunately, that was Mo’s understanding. “I became anxious about my life, and my safety, and my sanity in an environment that was anything but sane.” (Yimam, 2013, p. 105)

The leaders were victims but not perpetrators of a large group’s masochistic unconscious wishes and longings for death and martyrdom. There were no death wishes on the part of Tesfaye Debsay, Binyam. Girmachew, Tselote, Debteraw, Tito and many other gold nuggets of that generation. The *Ihapa-led-generation* swallowed cyanides or took the bullets of fascists instead of renouncing its faith , never advised, “it is safer to be against EPRP than for it” (Yimam, 2013, p. 132). Being *Ihapa* means, the promise to die when one was asked to do so. All members were ready to give their life (fight unto death) if that were what it took to bring around a democratic society. Mo should show us how thousands of young people end up joining a pathological political movement.

The youth, the bulwark of *Ihapa*, were not a bunch of gullible that marched to their cemetery singing “*Le Zemenat*”. The leaders did not initiate mass suicide of members nor called for a suicide pact. When the going got tough, the tough opted their death and committed suicide. Mo doubted the honesty and valor of Mohammed, Tekalegn, Kadri, and Kassaye that were martyred (sorry killed ÷) right beside him (there is an alternative narration and plausible one too on what

happened the day Mo was rounded up). These were not deluded people as Mo presented them. In fact he was projecting his own dissonance. Was it a “miracle” that saved Mo’s life, “escape torture”? What did he feed Haji the butcher to satiate him, and get leniency from any form of torture? What can we learn from the survival secret he told others on how to expose comrades and save oneself for dummies, “I told him to try to save his life....there was nothing wrong trying save life” (Yimam, 2013, p. 173) According to Mo “it is safer to be against EPRP than for it” (Yimam, 2013, p. 132) Mo was the only survivor in the shoot out. The others “foolhardy” went to their graves. Mo’s confusion made him believe that it was the myopic vision (brain dead too) of the party leaders that brought the carnage. He jumps to blame the victim instead of the culprit, and like a rapist argues that the victim 'asked for it'. Call it if you want masochistic submission, but the rank and file members, as well as the squads, were exemplary and followed orders, the leaders too were models to their subordinates. I wish Mo cited from the “politically savvy” Woyanee and Meison thugs such heroic deeds of leaders (kindly discount Haylom as he was *Martyred* in a bar). Where were the Woyane leaders when they send their herd to their graves? Can you name one leader from any political movement in Ethiopia where leaders preferred suicide to giving up their loyalty? To die on the battlefield was noble for the leaders as it was for the followers. The captured squad leaders were not weaklings, stunned, traumatized, and foolhardy individuals, “*Many of these fighters* when caught looked frightened and nervous, just as *one would expect of them*” (Yimam, 2013, p. 108). *How many* squads had Mo saw to warrant him to make such a silly hasty generalization? Has he noted how *many* times he used “*Many, and Most*” in his memoir committing fallacies in induction. The squads looked into their killers’ eye and did not blink for a moment, if you did not go through “The Red Terror Dossier” kindly do so when you come/go to Addis. You will read in the dossier the *Red Terror* perpetrator statement on squads. Since Mo has not seen a captured squad member for real, what he saw on the ETV was his own terror stricken face. Like Narcissus he fall in love with his own reflection and recounts it in

his memoir under multiple character voicing, “no it is not me alone even squads are terror stricken”.

We can think of individuals without a political party, but can we think of a Party without individuals? Here is Mo’s neurotic dilemma, his sixty-four thousand-dollar question. His schizoid personality wants to divide individual members from the party and weirdly argues that the party is less than the sum of its parts. He admits his argument is “absurd” (Yimam, 2013, p. 216) but continues, “I admit, in many ways the tone of this book is critical of the organization” (Yimam, 2013, p. 16). No, the book is not critical; it is an outright denigration of the party and its members.

Mo is not that schizophrenic to know that it is absurd to separate individuals from the Party, but he craftily inserted it to disparage individuals. He took the outer garb (the party cover) and made the individuals bare and naked then thrashed their character. Since he was insecure and fraidy-cat when the actors were alive, he unpitifully self-flogged himself crafting the dead bodies of Yohannes, Birhanu, Mezy and many others. As a catharsis to his loose neurotic conflicts, he created his characters. He formed Yohannes in his own image as a *Khat* addict, alcoholic, fainthearted, and womanizer, and then he killed him using Melaku, another symbolic handiwork of his neurotic mind. (Yimam, 2013, pp. 110,129) He formed Jale Biya as an alcoholic and informer, Birhanu Ejigu as an impulsive and imprudent, Mezy as a disoriented woman, Mesfin as an alcoholic, and Mo’s identity (real and imagined) became a combination of all these individuals.

Mo was over the edge though his passion for conspiracy was intact and unbounded. It is common among neurotics to focus on a single word and spin it around without getting dizzy. One such word is “martyred”. He watched how Mezy shifted her temperament on the use of the word “killed and martyred” (Yimam, 2013, pp. 15, 139). He projected his calumny and became a psychic and tells us, “Mezy had concluded *in her mind* that Birhanu’s death was attributable to *Anja*” (Yimam, 2013, pp. 139,140). Mo’s understanding of “martyred” is creepy he reserved it for

winners; EPRP members lost the battle hence their fallen can not deserve the word “martyred”. He reserved it for Derg and TPLF for they were the winners. Birhanu Ejiegu was *killed* but not *martyred*. Yohanes was *killed* but not *martyred*. Markos was *killed* but not *martyred*. Tesfaye Debsay case was suicide and, therefore, not *martyred*. Melese died of natural death he was *martyred*. Hayalom died in a drinking bout, and he was *martyred*. It is not because the word is hallowed for Mo that he would not like to waste it unwisely on every “killing”, but had an ulterior neurotic motive.

When I read through his memoir, I could not find a rational (except neurotic) reason why he stayed in the party. “There were *many* people who lost faith in the party very early but went on with their membership for inexplicable reason” (Yimam, 2013, p. 121) and he continues his passive-aggression without telling us *how many*, “I was very angry with the party and was ashamed of my membership in it”. His heart nevertheless beat with *Meison* while he was a duplicator of *Democracia* and a writer to *Goh*. He admires *Meison’s*, *The voice of the Masses*, (Yimam, 2013, p. 112). He writes that their leaders were politically sophisticated (Yimam, 2013, p. 90). He lauded them as pragmatist (Yimam, 2013, p. 102) and finally drops his neurotic bombshell “Given time and more interaction (with *Meison*) I could have been persuaded” (Yimam, 2013, p. 102). Continuing his diatribe, “After EPRP became politically bankrupt, I thought the political line of *Meison* made much more sense than EPRP’s” (Yimam, 2013, p. 141). Mo tells us that any political party was better than EPRP (he held this stand while he was still a member of the EPRP), *Meison*, *Derg*, *Anja* etc. (Yimam, 2013, p. 147). His dissociate mind tells him that EPRP squad were murderers of innocents (kids, bar ladies), and the Party was/is a criminal organization. I wonder if this man was a bona fide member of the party or an infiltrator working for others. Time will tell.

Finally, I plastered a neurotic smile on my face when Mo says, “EPRP was a phenomenon; it was a contradiction; it was as bad as its enemies say it was and was as noble as its supporters fervently claim. Everyone can find something to love or

hate about it” (Yimam, 2013, p. 216). I laughed because it reminded me an old Jewish joke I read some weeks ago, “The rabbi who tells a plaintiff that he is right, and then says the same to the defendant. “But they can not both be right!” remonstrates his wife. “You are right, too!” he answers. :)

After I read the memoir, I pondered over the central message of the book. On the non-personal issues, there was nothing new Mo wrote that had not been said on *Addis Zemen*, *Serto Ader* and *Ye Sefew Hizb Demets*. There was nothing new in the memoir Mo missed that had not been labeled against the Party by *Mesion*, *Malered*, TPLF, EPLF, OLF, and ELF and many others. The central message of the book is found on the last page. Mo seems to suffer a form of Stockholm syndrome (name it Addis syndrome); there was a “freak” emotional clicks with Haji and Mo protects his captor. He does it in a very subtle way by placing victims and the criminals in the same basket. He tags Mohammed, Tekalegn, Kadri, and Kassaye with Haji. Haji was a *Malread*. Here is how he puts it,

“In fact the vast majority of Ethiopian youth engaged in one or the other of the revolutionary organizations-EPRP, *Meison*, *Malered*, TPLF, EPLF, OLF, and ELF-and were motivated by a commitment to an ideal, a dedication to the poor and the oppressed of Ethiopia (Yimam, 2013, p. 217).

I am at a loss to guess why Mo has disregarded *Isepa*, *Echat* and *Woz league* from the crowd. I presume they were all members of the infamous *Emaledh*.

By lumping all together, he neurotically thinks he will kill the Party with its members. In so doing, his neurotically wired mind avails him a venue to expurgate his soiled linen in a socially acceptable way.

Hopefully, survivors from Haji death chamber will come up with alternative narrative that Mo’s bravado resulted in the massacre of prisoners (Yimam, 2013, p. 181). How Mo deliberately overlooked the brother of Tekalegn, Andre, who was in

the same detention center and why he mentioned a non-existent “cadre in the same kebele” (Yimam, 2013, p. 174). I hope we will read many other flaws in his storylines.