

Innovations

Depiction of Basic Rights Abuses in Amelmal's Amharic Novel Yältäkoäche Guzo (From 1974-2018)

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Abstract

The main objective of the study was to examine the depiction of democratic right and human right abuses in Amelmal's Amharic Novel, Yältäkoäche Guzo (the Endless Journey). Literature uses sympathetic and attractive literary language to expose basic human right abuses. Therefore, the roles of Amharic literature in portraying basic human right violations are paramount. It has a long history in the literary traditions of Ethiopia and has great affiliation with the political, social and economic situations of Ethiopia. Amharic literature has been playing vital roles in becoming the voice of the people whose basic rights have been abused. Regardless of these facts, Amharic literature has not been well studied although this study was to fill the gap. New Historicism was the literary approach the study considered to realize the depiction of basic rights, and the novel was selected through purposive sampling method. Through close reading of the novel, the depiction of basic rights abuses (both human right and democratic right abuses from 1974-2018) were identified, interpreted and analyzed. The analysis of the novel depicted that there were bad handlings of the basic human rights in Ethiopia. The depiction of all the abused rights is overt, so the relation between what the novel shows and what Ethiopian history says regarding basic human right abuses are explicit. Human right violations like the right to life, the right to liberty, the right to equality and the right to privacy and violations of democratic right like the right to demonstration and the right to freedom of movement during Darg (during Mengistu Hailamaria) and during the EPRDF (during Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) were depicted.

Key terms: 1. depiction, 2. new historicism, 3. basic rights, 4. Abuses

1. Introduction

Literature plays great roles in exposing issues related to basic human rights. Concerning this, Hezam (2016) argues that literature echoes the ills of the society with a view to making the people to realize their mistakes and to project the virtues to amend them. According to Hazem, literature is a powerful instrument that goes deep into readers' heart and evokes the feel people have regarding their rights. Hazem says that literature has a unique power to touch the hearts and minds and engage readers in a way that is distinctly different from other texts. It has the capacity to drive change and motivate people to take action.

Literary works can be seen as a powerful instrument to correlate the concept of human rights as both literature and human rights always go hand in hand for the betterment of society. No one can deny the role of literature to create awareness among people of their rights (Hezam, M. 2016).

Equally, Amharic literature has the power to touch the hearts and minds of the readers, engage them emotionally and helps them understand basic human right handlings. Although Amharic literature has long history in relation to other Ethiopian languages' literature, there are few researches done on Amharic literature's role of visualizing basic human right abuses in various Ethiopian regimes. *Anteneh* (2014) conducted his study on the title: *The representation of politics in some selected Amharic novels from 1930 until 2010*. The study approves that novels represent the historical and political events with more details and from different perspectives than the historical and political documents which focus on the general political history of the country, and there is a possibility to witness that the novels had the power to show historical facts, human and class relationships implicitly, through the interactions of characters, story developments, and organization of the whole work. This study further confirms that novels exhibit so much of what has been unsaid in the political and historical documents through the interactions of characters. The study tells us nothing about basic rights handlings in Ethiopia in the period it takes into account, from 1930 to 2010 G.C.

The other researcher, *Michael* (2016), conducted his study on *Literature and Human Rights: A Study on the Role of Literature in Promoting Human Rights*. This article has explored the relationship between literature and human rights. It argues that literature can play paramount role in promoting human rights in two ways. First, as a reflection of reality, literature can expose the various human rights violations and abuses happening around the world. Secondly, using its unique power to touch the hearts and minds of people, literature can help people become more sympathetic towards those people who suffer and live in pain as a result of the violations of their rights. *Michael*, On the other hand, focuses on two African English short stories (The American Embassy and Sola, written by the Nigerian writer, *Adichie*) whose scope of themes and number of character are limited. However, customarily novels are long in pages, and Characters in Novel can change and develop over the course of time and the theme(s) can be broader and more intricate than in shorter forms of fiction.

Another researcher, *Tewodros Gebre* (2013) conducted his study on Amharic literature by entitling his study: *Period, History, and the Literary Art: Historicizing Amharic Novels*. He argues that the period between 1960 (the failed coup) and 1974 (the successful military takeover of power), was a significant segment of contemporary Ethiopian history. He proved that the period was an era teeming with social unrest among various social classes and strata of society.

This study, however, focused on the depiction of basic right abuses in selected Amharic novel. To identify how literature portrays human right and democratic right handlings in Ethiopia, the study focused on Amharic novel. In doing so, the following research questions were answered: What abused human rights elements are depicted in the selected Amharic novel? What abused democratic rights elements are depicted in the selected Amharic novel?

2. Methods

In exploring the depiction of the basic rights in Amharic novels, the researcher took qualitative research design into consideration and used New Historicism literary approach to analyze the extracts which were taken from *Yältäkoäche Guzo*. New Historicism is an approach to literary criticism based on the premise that a literary work should be considered a product of its time, place and circumstances of its composition (Greenblatt S, 1986). The novel was selected by purposive sampling method because the novel clearly depicts the basic human rights abuses in the two consecutive Ethiopian regimes (the Darg from 1974-1991 and the EPRDF from 1991-2018). The extracts were translated to English language based on communicative way of translation and clustered into basic human right elements.

3. Analysis of human right and democratic right abuses during the *Dargas* depicted in *YältäkoächeGuzo*

3.1. Depiction of Human Rights Abuses During the Darg(from 1974-1991)

As soon as he came to power, Mengistu denied the public the right to manifest its demands through strikes and demonstrations (Andargachew, 1990:119). Andargachew further says that as of the mid-November, the Derg started taking more and more desperate actions, like killings, on the people. *YältäkoächeGuzo* (2016), through the major character *TirufätMänazowäl*, clearly shows the ways human right to life was abused during the Derg regimes.

Tirufat struggled against the Feudal government. She cheerfully accepted the revolution because she thought that her aim came true. However, the killing of the sixty ministers panicked her. Although the sixty ministers, the military dictatorship killed and buried them in mass grave; this highly annoyed her, made her sad. The ministers of the former government have the right to live as ordinary citizens, but the military government killed ministers (pp. 142).

The Darg's merciless killing of people irritates the *Tirufät*, the major character of the novel. Andargachew (1990) in his dissertation entitled "*The Ethiopian Revolution (1974 to 198: 119-120)*" says that the Darg showed how bloody it could be by a summary execution of well over sixty detainees. The sixty former officials of the Emperor accepted their defeat and surrender; therefore, they deserve their right to life respected although the military junta who came to power killed them. These human right violations depicts that the system was violating the people's right to life. Although the system is changed from Monarchical system to Military dictatorship, the violation of the right of people to life persisted.

YältäkoächeGuzo depicts the more people strengthen their struggle to fight against right violations, the more the dictator government strengthens its violation of human right to life.

Hundreds of political prisoners were executed after unfair trials but thousands more "disappeared" from detention and were secretly killed. Others were openly murdered, particularly during the government's "Red Terror" campaign against "counter-revolutionaries" in the late 1970's (Amnesty International November 1991:1).

Counter-revolutionary groups who were revolting against the Darg were exposed through extrajudicial executions. *YältäkoächeGuzo* clearly shows that the killing was arbitrary. Regardless of any differences, people become the victims of free killings. Amnesty International further noticed that atrocities committed by the Ethiopian armed forces included deliberate bombings of civilian targets in opposition areas and the use of napalm. Extrajudicial executions of both unarmed civilians and captured combatants in areas of conflict were also reported frequently. Correspondingly, *YältäkoächeGuzo*, by taking the historical facts into consideration, shows the suffering the people faced during the military dictatorship.

The people of Gonder were killed in mass in the name of free measure because of the killed revolution defender that day. Regardless of age, sex, ethnicity and language, everybody was killed everywhere (pp. 145).

The military dictatorship continued the killings of people indiscriminately although youths are the focal point of the killing. The way soldiers in *YältäkoächeGuzo* run here and there to kill the people they come across shows that the military dictatorship and its cruel soldiers committed the crimes abusing people's right to life in Ethiopia.

The soldiers acted as they are told not to leave anybody in Gonder alive. Running here and there just like a mad dog, the soldiers killed people with the help of automatic weapon. Blood thirsty soldiers killed their people (pp. 147)

No soldier sympathizes with the victims being killed here and there. Mothers who run to save their children are killed and are left on the ground.

The woman fell on the dead body whose blood is flowing from his forehead. The soldier quickly arrived where the women fell on the dead body that was smeared with blood lies, and he killed her with bullets. The soldier considered her as nothing and left her there. May be they are mother and son (pp. 147).

YältakoächeGuzo argues that these people are being killed because of their need to see a developed country; they need to see a country in which justice flourishes; they need to see a country in which democracy blossoms; however, the military dictatorship stands against their need and denies them the right to life. The 1987 Ethiopian constitution, on the other hand, guarantees people the right to liberty. Article 44(1) of the constitution states that no person may be arrested except in *flagrante delicto*, or by the order of the procurator, or by a court decision, or as may be prescribed by law. The novel shows the continuation of arbitrary arrest of people by the Darg officials. People should know the reason why they are under control. The military dictatorship, however, arrests people indiscriminately. The youths who are fighting for democracy are exposed to the Darg's arbitrary arrest and detention. The character *Mekbib* who is imprisoned by the military dictatorship does not know the reason why he is taken to the prison, and this character represents the people who were arbitrarily imprisoned by the military regime. He even wants to know why they imprison him.

Mäkbib with his tired sound says, "First of all, what is the cause for my imprisonment? I don't know why I am imprisoned. You take me here from my home. You beat me this much without telling me what I did. (pp. 203)

Mekbib knows nothing about the cause of his imprisonment, but the military junta did not let the people ask the cause of their arrest. *Wägä* who is imprisoned because of *Mäkbib* faces the same thing:

Wägä is imprisoned because of Mäkbib, but they get no evidence on her. It is not the time in which evidence can possibly be asked, however. The cadres of the military dictatorship need no evidence to imprison anyone (pp. 204).

The fact that any arrested person shall be produced in court within 48 hours is forgotten. *Tirufätand Rähel*, for instance, stay in the prison more than a week without coming to the court which is against their right to liberty. "*Tirufat and Rahel stays in prison for more than a week without being investigated.*" (pp. 219).

The Darg arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned the people whom it suspected of different political views of the time. People suspected of supporting EPRP (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party) were indiscriminately arrested and imprisoned. There were mass arrests of suspected EPRP supporters, but many of those arrested were subjected to torture, and many "disappeared" after spending some time in detention. *YaltakoächeGuzo* clearly shows this historically proven fact.

Regarding the equality of the people, the 1987 Ethiopian constitution under article 35(1) states that Ethiopians are equal before the law, irrespective of nationality, sex, religion, occupation, social or other status. The same constitution under article 35(2) states that equality among Ethiopians shall be ensured through equal participation in political, economic, social and cultural affairs. *Tirufät's* action which depicts the actions of the system of the time and which fights for the right to equality of human beings is put as follows:

Yinäbebasks Tirufät, "Why didn't you enter and get treatment? Leaving the farmers on the queue and entering the hospital to get treatment is not started by you." (pp. 140)

Farmers were underestimated at various times in history although they have been the backbone of the economy of the country. Neither the urban dwellers nor other educated part of the society gave them consideration. The equality they have with other social strata of the Ethiopian people is violated. That is why *Tirufät* tries to break this chain of inequality. *Tirufät* wants to respect others' right to equality because unless she starts it today, others may not start respecting the right to equality among human beings. She says, "*Let it be started by me*" (pp. 141). *Tirufät* argues that she is equal to the farmers. She wants to consider them equal to her. "*Why are we underestimating them based on their dirty cloth and the accent they use? When shall we stop overestimating ourselves because of our education?*" *Tirufät* asks herself (pp. 139).

YältäkoächeGuzo also shows the inequality between the government officials and other ordinary employees.

The house Turifät lives in right now is rented her by the Kebele(hamlet managers). During the Hailassillassie regime, the house was a teacher's house. Every government employee gets house based on their coming to the area and based on their order of registration. However, the priority is for the government officials always (pp.149).

3.2. Depiction of Democratic Rights Abuses During the Darg(from 1974-1991)

YältäkoächeGuzo depicts that the military dictatorship abuses people's right to movement. From the dialogue between *Getähun* and *Yinäbeb*, it is clear that people were hindered from moving from place to place in their own country.

Oh, brother Yinebeb, let alone you who lives in town and educated, they could not let us move.

Without password, we could not go to Addis Zemen and Hamusit market (pp. 163).

Getähun argues that the situation becomes worse than the previous time. "*Dear Getähun, we are not allowed to make movement from place to place in our country. We are in serious time*" says *Yinäbeb* angrily (pp.163). In *YältäkoächeGuzo*, *Tirufat* remembers what *Zemedkun* always says: "*The dictator government should be removed by the voice of the people*" (pp. 147)

Tirufät has been struggling to bring democratic system in Ethiopia for a long period of time. The change from Aristocratic system to military dictatorship brings the worst human right violations in Ethiopia. Detention, torture, killing and other form of basic right abuses continued. That is the disillusionment Ethiopians face.

4. Analysis of Human and Democratic Right Abuses During EPRDFas Depicted in *YältäkoächeGuzo*

4.1. Depiction of Human Rights Abuses During EPRDF (1991-2018)

May 1991, the TPLF managed to seize state power forming the EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front), a so-called umbrella organisation (AregawiBerhe, 2001:7). TPLF whom the Darg regime considered a terrorist group came to power. *Tirufät*, the major character of the novel, sees Gonder with no change. She sees people suffering from the mistreatment of system as previous. "*Tirufat and Yinebeb get Gonder town just as it was during the Darg regime-still misery. Those who used to imprison people imprisoned; their families start bringing them food supplies*". (pp. 314)

According to *YältäkoächeGuzo*, the inviolable rights of people were abused during the EPRDF government. "*To make you sure about his existance, I can bring one of the materials he handles. I do this deciding on my life.*" (pp. 20)

YältäkoächeGuzo indirectly shows that those who imprison people can unquestionably kill the people they arrest. Mr. *Yinäbeb's* arbitrary arrest also shows the abuse of people's right to liberty.

"If a person has no guarantee to go out and go backhome in peace, how living can be possible?

Are there more human right violations on the world than this? Where does this country heading? Darg's arbitrary dismissal of human being comes to her mind. She is not ready for such a sudden incident.(pp. 15)

The extract depicts that, like during the Darg, people are suffering from arbitrary arrest by the government armed forces. What the military dictator was doing to her people comes to *Tirufät's* mind. She perceived TPLF led EPRDF the way she perceived the Darg regime. The armed government forces arrest innocent people simply because they suspect them.

"I saw the armed forces pushing him into a white car with no plate number and taking him away" she involuntarily hears the sound. Not only her, verybody knows who those armed people are. (pp. 25)

The character's disagreement with what the armed forces of the EPRDF does depict that gross violations of human rights were there during this government system. The armed forces denied what the rule of law says about people's right to liberty and kidnapped *Yinäbeb* when he is on the way to his home. The following extract depicts how the EPRDF armed forces violated *Yinebeb's* right to liberty disregarding what Ethiopian constitution says about people's right to liberty.

"In a country where there are government and rule of law, why are you kidnapping me? If I did something wrong, why can't I be asked legally?" says Yinebeb. He saw the people for few seconds. He never knew them. He understood that they are not people who have personal problems with him. He has no personal enemy who takes him away by car. (pp. 334)

YältäkoächeGuzo indicates that the government armed forces kidnapped Mr. *Yinäbeb*. They ask him no question when they arrest him. EPRDF did this when it suspects any body of opposing its system or tries to oppose its system.

The arrested person has the right to be informed why he/she is arrested, but there are times when an arrested person face inappropriate handling of his/her right. According to *YältäkoächeGuzo*, EPRDF violated the right of arrested person by denying the people the right to be informed why he/she is arrested and the right to see his family.

Tirufat asked the police, "Okay! Let it be. Is forbidding him from meeting and asking his family appropriate? If they get him criminal, can't they bring him to court? Is it expected from a government governing a great country? Why they punish his children and me?" (pp. 20)

The government and its security agents use such kinds of punishments which violates the rights of the arrested people. Arrested people are expected know why they are arrested and expected to see their families.

4.2. Depiction of Democratic Rights Abuses in During EPRDF (1991-2018)

Democrati rights are the rights which a democratic government lets its people enjoy. *YältäkoächeGuzo* shows that the democrati rights are being violated by the *TPLF*(Tigray People's Liberation Front) led *EPRDF* (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) government. The *EPRDF* fought the military dictatorship to bring democracy to Ethiopians although things started changing after they overthrew the Darg. The novel says, *"Don't you think that they seem to compensate the time they spent to bring democracy, justice--freedom for Ethiopian people?"* (pp. 315). People themselves got disappointed by what the EPRDF was doing. They couldn't enjoy the democratic government they were fighting for. Ethiopians expected democratic government though what they faced was the contrary. *"Even if the Dargue government left and the new government came to power, the society doesn't seem to get the better government. Majority of the people is complaining"*(pp. 316). Many parts of Ethiopia experienced the same kind of situations post Darg. People were being imprisoned. *"Tirufät and YinäbebfindGonderjust the way they found it during the Darg regime; people live in anguish. Those who used to imprison people inturn become prisoners"*(pp. 314). Therefore, *YältäkoächeGuzo* shows the continuity of dictatorial government in Ethiopia. *Yinebeb* says, *"No good evidence than this for the change from one dictatorial government to the other dictatorial government. That is why I say we have to start the struggle as new."* (pp. 329). Like during Darg, *YältäkoächeGuzo*visualizes democratic right abuses during the EPRDF.

The election of 2005 was different in that there was a stiff competition among different political parties, for the first time in the history of Ethiopia. The people of Ethiopia were very much pleased with the situationand millions of people voted for their favorite parties and leaders at different levels. However, the situation was changed overnight when both the EPRDF government and the opposition parties claimed victorywhich led to demonstrations in some big towns of the country, and it causedthe arrest and killing of many people(The Carter Centre, 2005).

Regarding this *YältäkoächeGuzo*, shows the hopeful election being preached by EPRDF in 2005although it was unsuccessful.

EPRDF says, "I decided to conduct democratic election which is free from any drawback was failed." Without considering the forth coming history, the government shot the bare handed civilian citizens who say "Respect our voice". Ethiopia once again shaded by her sons' blood. (pp. 354)

YältäkoacheGuzo depicts that the 2005 election surprisingly turned bad because the election Ethiopians expected was curtailed by the government itself. Bare handed people who came to street with their sentiments were summarily killed. Agony continued everywhere in Ethiopia.

Conclusion

Amharic novel depicts the violation of basic rights of human beings with the help of their imaginary characters. *YältäkoächeGuzo* depicts that there were merciless killing of innocent citizens during the Darg regime. The ministers who were not protesting against the Darg were killed by the military junta, the Darg, and this merciless killing of the sixty ministers has historical basis. With the change of the system from Monarchical system to Military dictatorship, the violation of the right of people to life persisted. The novel *YältäkoächeGuzo* also depicts the situation of the right to equality during the military dictatorship. This fact makes the study possible to analyze the extracts from New Historicism which examines the ways in which a cultural product (especially a literary text) interacts with and participates in its historical context. Like the Darg, EPRDF government is also characterized in the novel by gross basic right violations. The violations of people's right to life, to equality and to liberty are clearly visualized in the novel. The armed government forces arrest, torture and kill the innocent people simply because they suspect them. *YältäkoächeGuzo* indicates the EPRDF violated the right of arrested person by denying the people the right to be informed why he/she is arrested and the right to see his/her family. Generally, *YältäkoächeGuzo* depicts both human rights and democratic rights violations of the Darg regime and the EPRDF government of Ethiopia from 1974-2018.

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