



# “ZOGONFO”

## Mr. Ehdego Menghis

### An Eritrean hero

When I was a young girl in Asmara and lived between Amba Galliano and Edaga Hamus, I used to be fascinated by a man known as “Zogonfo”.

He looked like a spit image of the Ethiopian Emperor occupying my country (Eritrea).



*Mr. EHDEGO MENGHIS “ZOGONFO”*  
Photo: courtesy of Ms. Lemlem Tsehaye

Zogonfo was gifted with a personality loved by many and a skilled vocabulary that could make Shakespeare sick with envy.

Zogonfo would instantly create a poem telling about the suffering of the Eritrean people and the madness of the Ethiopian occupation.

My favorite costume he wore was the copy of the military uniform the Ethiopian Emperor would wear on official visits. It was either green color or Khaki color.

The Ethiopian Emperor took all his time to add medals on his uniform for battles he never fought and Zogonfo would also adorn his uniform with bottles’ caps (baleeka in Eritrean language) he would collect all over the city of Asmara.

He would place them in a methodical way in his chest, adjust his military hat and trim his beard to look as much as possible as the Emperor.

I did not memorize much about his poetry, but I do remember that all local bus transportation would stop for Zogonfo and take him around to listen to his verses without making him pay any bus fare.

One day, I followed him so close and once the bus stopped {in the surrounding of Aghaazian School}, he was invited in and I was told to go home or pay for the fare. The bus driver knew I



The Emperor of Ethiopia and his medals, Source: Wikipedia

could not pay. Zogonfo asked the bus driver to let me in and I sat next to him enchanted and star struck by this man of so humble origins and with courage to spare. If my memory serves me right, he said: “Look at my medals. I never went to war and each day I add one medal in my uniform. Soon I will have to put them on my back. I can do that because I am the Emperor” we all laughed and then left once he decided to get off the bus. I followed him still to a public garden where he told about more stories and poetry or made up-on-the-spot verses.

I went home late that day and I had to answer to my mother that was trying to teach me a strict discipline about time outside the house; she could not understand my justification when I told her that I simply followed Zogonfo and enjoyed the history lesson more than the one I was learning at the Catholic school I was attending.

The Ethiopian system eventually got tired of Zogonfo and took him to the psychiatric hospital at the outskirts of Asmara; this was the only psychiatric facility run by Catholic Nuns. The Italian doctor in charge of the facility – Dr. Manfredonia- sent Zogonfo home and declared him mentally stable and fit.

Zogonfo was brought back another time to the psychiatric hospital and this time Dr. Manfredonia made it clear that “THIS time Zogonfo was mentally unstable”

That made many of us – the young and rebel generation of Asmara – understand that eventually Zogonfo was made to lose his mind with some medications.

Zogonfo had a very particular personality and brilliant mind. He is – in my mind- the equal of Joanne Greenberg.

“Joanne Greenberg is the author of the novel “I never promised you a rose garden”. At the time she wrote this novel, she was diagnosed with schizophrenia. The narrative clarify differences between the writer’s mental illness and her artistic ability. Greenberg was adamant that her creative skills flourished in spite of and not because of any condition”. (Source: Wikipedia).

We have to ask ourselves if in a society not aware of disorders such as bipolar disorder or autism, Zogonfo did not use his very special mind to illuminate us with his poetry and gypsy life moving from one area of Asmara to another, to simply tell us in his own way about the occupation’s many facets affecting the population. His way was particularly right to amuse us and at the same time make us focus on a pain we did not have to get used to.

The Ancient Greeks believed that creativity came from the gods. The idea of a complete work of art emerging without conscious thought or effort was reinforced by the views of the Romantic era. It has been proposed that the particular link between creativity and some disorders appears to be significantly more acute among playwrights, novelists, biographers, and artists.

I would like to pay my respect to Zogonfo with adding the photo of a military uniform adorned with bottles’ caps he loved so much and to his beautiful mind that made a young Eritrean girl

follow him from one public transportation bus to a public garden and absorb as much as she could to learn about love for country.

I hope one day Eritrea will honor Zogonfo. Until then let us all take a moment and bow our heads to a valiant Eritrean that died at the hands of his torturers just because he loved his country beyond words. Zogonfo was tortured to death in a slow and cruel way.



Zogonfo's uniform with his hand-made medals, Source: Google and edited by Kiki Tzeggai

His poetry remains imprinted in gold letters in our minds and our hearts.



("Baleka" bottles' caps)

Hopefully we – Eritreans – will be able to collect as much documentation and photos of Zogonfo. An Eritrean hero.

Kiki Tzeggai

November 18, 2015

**NB:**

Please send any information (stories, photos and any related material) to help us remember our Great Hero, ZOGONFO, by clicking our [contact page here](#).

Please also visit this facebook page ([Mahder Jeganuna](#)) to follow the discussion about ZOGONFO.

Comments from Readers ርእይቶታትን ሓበሬታን ካብ ኣንበብቲ:-

● ብኣንቶንዮ ተስፋይ (24 November 2015)

ሰላም ኪኪ ጸጋይ

ዝኹብርኪ ኪኪ ጸጋይ፡ ብመጀመርያ ሰላምታይ ይብጻሕኪ፡ ከምታ ኣብ ስም ደራሲት ዘላ ስምኪ ኪኪ ጸጋይ ቢላ እጽሕፈልኪ ኣለኹ። ኣብ'ቲ ብዛዕባ ዘገንፎ ዝጸሓፍኩዮ ብሓጺሩ ግን ከኣ ብዙሕ መግለጺታት ዝርከቡሉ ድርሰት ደስ ዘብልኹ።

1 ንዘገንፎ ዘኪርኪ

2 ቦታ ኣብ መንጎ እምባጋልዮያኖን ዕዳጋ ሓሙስ ስም ቦታ ዘኪርኪ

- 3 ስነ ስርዓት ቀጥቶን መጓዣያ ከተማ አስመራውን ሕልፍ አላልከደሁ
- 4 አብ መንገ ወላድን ውላድን ዘሎ ዝምድና ( ንስነ ምግባር) ዝምልከት
- 5 መግዛእትን ሳዕባናቱን ብፍላይ አብ ልዕሊ ዘገንፎ ዝተፈጸመ ተግባራት

ብዘኸኸነ፡ ሓፈሻዊ ድርሰት ኣነ ብዙሕ ትዕዛብቲ፡ ትምህርቲ፡ ተመክሮ፡ ተዘክሮ ኣንቢቢ። ብድሕሪኡ ማለት ካብ ድርሰትኪ ኣዝዩ ብዙሕ ነገር ክትዘክር ይገብረካ። የቕንዩልና ከኣ ንስለ እቲ ተዘክሮታትኪ። ብሓቂ ዘገንፎ ክዘክር ዝግብኣ ተባዕ ጅግና ኤርትራዊ ዜጋዮ። ይኹንምበር ከምቲ ዝበልከዮ ብወታሃደራት ኢትዮጵያ ይህደን ስለ ዝነበረ ብማዕረ ማዕረ ከኣ ብዙሕ ጸገም፡ ግፍዒ፡ ራዕዒ፡ ምፍርራሕ፡ የጋጥሞ ነበረ።

ኣነ ኣብ ቅዱስ በርናንዶስ መካነ ገነት (ፕራዲዞ) ደሓር ከኣ ኣብ ከባቢ ዝዓበኹሉ ዝሓዘኹ ይመሃር ስለ ዝነበርኩ፡ እቶም ኣብ ኣግኣዝያን፡ ብርሃንና ሰላም፡ ቅዱስ ጳውሎስ፡ እንዳማርያም፡ እተገመነን፡ ዝመሃሩ ዝነበሩ ደቂ ዝሓዘኹና፡ ብዛዕባ ዘገንፎ ክዘረቡን ከዕልሉን እንከለዉ ብተመስጦ ይሰምዖም፡ በቲ ሓደ ወገን ከኣ ባዕለይ ብኣካል ርእየስ ከም መሓዙተይ ክዘረብ ዘይምኽኣለይ ብዙሕ ይቐንእ ነበርኩ።

ከምቲ ዝበልከዮ ዘገንፎ ተኸለሚካኤል ወይ ሃብተሚካኤል ከም ዝበሃል፡ ትጉህ ሓረስታይ ምንባሩን ትውልዲ ዓዲ ወኪ- ዛግር ምዃኑ ይዘረብን ይሰማዕን። ምስቲ ዝተወለደሉን ዝዓበየሉን ከባቢ ዝዛመድ ( one man show) ትያትር ይሰርሕ፡ ማለት፡ ብዙሓት ሰባት ዝዋስኡ ክነሱ ባዕሉ ኣብ ክንዲ ኩሎም ኮይኑ፡ ኣብቲ ሰብ ኣኪቡ ዝዘረበሉ ግዜ ይዋሳእ ነበረ። ዝገርምዩ!

ከምቲ ዘገንፎ፡ ገጣማይ፡ ደራፋይ ተዋሳኢይ፡ ተዋዛያይ፡ መስሓቕ ( comedian) እዩ ዝነበረ። ብካልእ ኣዘራርባ ኣብ ተዋስኦ ባህርያቱ እንዳቐያየረ ከም ብዙሓት ሰባት ኮይኑ ክዋሳእን ክሰርሕን ዝኸእል ዓቕምን ኣኸእሎን ዝነበሮ ሰብዮ። ከምቲ ዝውረን ዝዘረብን፡ ሓረታይ ምንባሩዮ፡ ይኹንምበር ብትሕዝቶ ግጥምታቱን፡ ብኣውራኡ ከኣ ንተዓዛቢ ንመንእሰይ ይኹን ህዝቢ ኣስመራ ዘመሓላልፎ ዝነበረ መልእኽቲ ብቀሊሉ ዝግመት ኣይነበረን።

ዘገንፎ ብጣዕሚ ጎራሕን ለባን ብምንባሩ፡ ብጉርሑ ንመንግስቲ ኢትዮጵያ ዝተዓሻሹ፡ ብልቦንኡ ከኣ ንዝህቢ ኤርትራ መልእኽቱ ዘመሓላልፍ ምንባሩ ካብቲ ገለ ዝገለጽከዮ ተመክሮታትዮ። ብዛዕባ ዘገንፎ መጽሓፍ ክጻጻፍ ምተኻእለ ነይሩ እብል።

ብዘኸኸነ፡ ከምቲ ዝበልከዮ ኣብ ከተማ ኣስመራ ንዘገንፎ ዘይፈቱን ዘየፍቅርን ሰብ ኣይነበረን። ብፍላይ ህጻናትን መንእሰያትን ደድሕሪ ዘገንፎ ኣስመራ ክዘርዋ ይውዕሉ ነበሩ። ዘገንፎ ከምቲ ቅድም ክብል ዝጠቐስክዎ፡ ኣብ ስትራተጂካዊ ቦታታት ብምዃን፡ ኣብ ሓደ ግዜ ኣቐልቦ ብዙሓት ከም ዝሰሓብ ናይ ምግባር ዓቕምን ክእለትን ነይርዎዮ ክብል ይደፍር።

ንኣብነት፡ ኣብ ከባቢ ኣግኣዝያን ዘለዎ ቤት ትምህርቲ 1. ኣግኣዝያን፡ ብርሃንና ሰላም፡ ቅዱስ ጳውሎስ፡ ክንደይ ዝኣኸሉ መንእሰያት ምንባሮም ፈሊጡ፡ ኣብቲ ከባቢ እምባጋልዮኖ ዕዳጋ ሓሙስ ብተደጋጋሚ ይዘዋወር ነይሩ። ምሽት እቶ'እቶ ምስ ኮነ፡ ኣብ ከባቢ ጎደና ቀዳማዊ-ምነሊክ ከባቢ ኪዳነ-ምህረት፡ ብዙሕ ሰራሕተኛታት ዝመሓላልፍሉ ቦታ ብምዃን፡ ሰባት ኣኪቡ ይዘረብ ነበረ። ዘገንፎ ኣብ ዝዘረበሉ ግዜ ኣውቶቡስ ከተማ፡ መኪና፡ ብሽግለታ፡ ዓረብያ ይኹን ኣጋር መሕለፊ ኣይርኩብን ነበረ። በዚ ምኽንያት ከኣ፡ ፖሊስ መጻኢም የቋርጽዎን የጋፍዕዎን ነበሩ።

ሓደ ምሽት ከባቢ ሰዓት ሸምንተ ይኸውን፡ ኣብ ቅድሚ ቤተ ክርስቲያን ኪዳነ-ምህረት ኣስመራ፡ ሰብ ክተኣኻኸብን መንእሰያት ክጎዩን ረኣኹ። ዓብይቲ ሰባት ካብቲ ከባቢ ዝነበረ ባራትን እንዳስዋን ከይተረፈ ወጺኦም ክርእዩ ኣዝዩ ብዙሕ ሰብ ተኣኪቡ ነበረ። ዘገንፎ ኣብቲ ካብ ጎደና ቀዳማዊ መነሊክ ናብ ኪዳነ ምህረት ዘደይብ ዝነበረ ስዩ ወይ ገረብ ተምሪ ዝነበሮ መሳልል( ኣስካላ ኣስካላ) ኣብቲ ገረብ ተምሪ ዝነበሮ ኣዝዩ ዝበረኸ ደይቡ ይዘረብ ነበረ።

ዘጎንፎ፡ ሙሉእ ዕጥቂ ሓደ ወታሃደር ኢትዮጵያ ዝለብሶ ወይ ዝኸደኖ ክዳን ገይሩ፡ ካኪ ዝኸዳኑ፡ ቆቢዕ፡ ቁልፊ ኩሉ ወታሃደራዊ ኮይኑ፡ ቆቢዕ ግን ዳርጋ ንድሕሪት ክትወርድ ትደሊ ገቢሩ ይለብሳ ነበረ። ነቲ መዕጠቂ ቁልፊ'ውን ኣጸቢቐ ሸጥ ስለ ዘብሎ ዝነበረ፡ ከም ሓደ መስሓቕን ተዋሳኢይን ይገብር ነበረ። ስእሊ ዘጎንፎ፡ ኣብ ቤት ስእሊ እተገመነን (ፊት ባር ተወልዶ ሙዘሎ)፡ ንነዊሕ ዓመታት ኣብ ደገ ተለጢፋ ምንባራ እዝክር። ነዛ ስእሊ ከኣ ከም ሓውልቲ ዘጎንፎ ንሹቕ ዝተላእኸ ወዲ ወይ ጓል ከይርኣያ ኣይሓልፍን ነበረ። ኣጋጣሚ ብዙሓት መንእሰያት ነታ ስእሊ ንምርኣይ'ኳ ይጸቓቕጡ ነብሩ።

ዝኸበርኪ ኪኪ፡ ታሪኽ ዘጎንፎ ብዙሕ እንድዩ፡ ገለ ካብ'ቲ ሓፊሻውን ላዕሊ ላዕሉን ነዚ ይመስል ነይሩ፡ ግን ከኣ ገለ ካብ'ቲ ዘጎንፎ ዝብሎ ዝነበረ ከምዚ ዝስዕብ እዝክር።

ግጥሚ 1

ዘጎንፎ ዘጎንፎ  
ኣይሓልፈኒ ኣይሓልፎ  
ኣይገፈኒ ኣይገድፎ።

ግጥሚ 2

ተጋድሎ ተጋድሎ  
ጸሓይ ኣይመሮም  
ጎቦ ኣይተሮም  
ብመኪና ከይከዱ ብእግሮም  
ወዘተ

ደርፊ 1

ኣቲ ሓፍተይ ሸቱ ምቱ  
( ዝረሳዕኸዋ ቃል) ዶ ዓዲ የእቱ  
ሸዊት ዕፉን ጨጨፍካ ይብላዕ  
ንጻኖት ዶ ሰልፍካ ይቐላዕ  
ከሲቦ ኣለ  
ተዓላለ

ትያትር

ትያትር'ውን ይገብር ነበረ፡ ግን ንውሕ ዝበለት ስለ ዝኹነት ንካልእ ግዜ ትኹነልና።

ብዙሕ የምስግነኪ  
ካብ  
ኣንቶንዮ ተስፋይ ስቶክሆልም ሸወደን