

Those Years of Endless Mayhem

(Some reflections on the bitter years of the dictatorial rule of the military clique in Ethiopia- known as Derg- headed by the notorious Mengistu Haile Mariam while marking the 15th anniversary of its ouster)

I couldn't keep
My promise to return home
Much to my old mother's deep
Sorrow after completing my studies
Overseas.

In those years of endless mayhem
Even she joined the chorus
Urging me to stay put
Wherever I was
We both knew
We would never meet
Again
It seemed anywhere else
But home was safe for her son.

In those years of endless mayhem
A period of hellish catastrophe
Ethiopia was turned into an abattoir
Her freedom-loving children were slaughtered
Like unwanted cattle with barbarous efficiency
Without any regard for tomorrow
In our ancient land
A bounteous spring of humanity
Life lost its value and meaning
Bestiality ran riot
Even the dead were not spared indignities
Unabashedly tyrants charged parents
For bullets they had wasted on their children-
Ah, in return for the dead bodies
To give them a proper burial
As if to scale desecration a few notches higher
Corpses riddled with bullets
Were left laying on the streets
To serve as a warning to potential opponents.

In those years of endless mayhem
Certain social abominations quickly sprouted
Like poisonous plants
On the soil of our social fabric:
Rampant sectarianism and divisions over loyalties
To abstract thoughts not wedded to our realities
Betrayal and distrust became commonplace
Even among one-time friends
Violent repression and terror
Traumatized and weighed down
On the soul and spirit of our people
Death lurked everywhere
Fear of death and the very negation of life
Left families asunder
Earning Ethiopia the distinction of being

In the front ranks of the world for producing refugees.
What tears would wash away the hurt
From our hearts as a result of those monstrosities?
What elixir would heal the scars on our souls?
What would amend the cruel times that mercilessly punished
The legitimate desires and promises of a whole nation?
The little military dictator while he was still the man of the hour
Tried to soothe the national spirit with highfalutin words
To build a brand new and prosperous country
Intoxicated with power
Sitting atop a mountain of modern weaponry
So generously extended to him by his external friends
For their own grandiose ambitions
He thought he could will his whims into existence
With impunity
Even the harsh facts of his follies failed to sober him up
He was full of grand declarations
But the opposite of everything he declared happened:
A famine-stricken Ethiopia instead of a prosperous one
A war-torn Ethiopia instead of a peaceful one
A disunited Ethiopia instead of a united one
He at last fled the country like a nocturnal predator
Afraid he would be caught in the dawn of justice
By the very liberation forces he so badly underestimated
Leaving behind a huge mess for them and the nation to correct
He was a simpleton that never showed any regard for reality
Woe to the fool who doesn't respect reality
He will end up being ridiculed by it.

Oh, beloved country,
Your name is fashionably invoked
As an imagery for thirst and hunger
As if to denude your history of its riches
As if you were about to vanish from the face of the earth
Arise, Ethiopia, arise!
As you have always done against the odds
How can you not rise with your 80 million strong?
How can you not rise with your fertile lands?
How can you not rise with your life-giving rivers:
The Abbay, Awash, Baro, Omo, Tekeze and Wabi Shebele?
Turn your back on mindless blood-letting and destruction
We have had enough of that foolishness
Let those years of endless mayhem be consigned to history
Forge ahead along the long tortuous road of construction
Without any hesitation
This is not the time to dawdle and be held back
By political adventurism wearing the beautiful face of democracy
This is the time for your children
In their resplendent diversity
Coming together to build you step by step
On a strong foundation of law and enlightened governance
In an environment of enduring peace and stability
Arise, Ethiopia, arise!

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