



No woman - no cry The 1976 killing of the notorious Ethiopian Colonel Beshouu (1976)

The day was later on known as one of the darkest nights of Asmara under occupation.

From inside our houses, we could hear the heavy curfew's silence. No one was allowed to venture outside. We could hear a voice defying that order and that silence as thick as a heavy curtain draping itself around our beloved city.

The drunk person was screaming Bob Marley's song "no Woman no cry". He did repeat those same lyrics not more than 2 times when a loud and precise sound of a single bullet covered his song and was followed by a human moaning; like a person hit by a sniper bullet.

The previous day the notorious Ethiopian colonel Bishouu was killed point blank by Eritrean freedom fighters while sitting in his car at the door of "Nebiat" bar and having a drink with Nebiat herself, owner of said bar. He died instantly and the next day all houses in the area were surrounded and all males killed in a way that makes Asmara and its population cringes to this day.

In a particular building in the same area and during night time, young men were shot straight in their heads without mercy. All of them were hunted down the stairs or up to the top of the building. Those who made it to the top were shot and their body thrown down to the sidewalk.

The Ethiopian commandos did not stop there and randomly surrounded houses all over Asmara; they took away men and killed them. But this time the killings were beyond what a human mind could plan or think about. My brother had not spent the night at home and my mother was literally having a heart attack because of the all the commotion of military trucks and shooting we could clearly hear all along the night.

Amete – our house helper - and I run outside at the lifting of the curfew and reached the "Palma" place as it was known because of a tall palm tree sitting at a street circle. My cousin and her kids lived in the building facing the place. We saw what seem to this day - in my mind - about 100 bodies scattered around the palm tree. I was told later on that the number was smaller, but the shock made me multiply those human remains. Each body was covered with a plain white "nezela" (Eritrean shawl women cover themselves with) saturated with blood. I just had a baby by C-section and Amete asked me not to uncover and try to identify the bodies. I told her that either I had to do it or my mother had to.

The first body I uncovered was of man my father's age. He was laid down on his back as if he was to face the sky above him; his dead body was mutilated and his eyes were gouged and stuffed in his mouth. The killers left us with a message that the victim should face the sky in his death, but be left eye-less. Some went through the torture of scalping (tearing part of the human scalp).

Somehow, I made it to cover him back and check the other bodies. We all went around like a procession of women praying around a palm tree. We did not talk. We stuffed our hearts with our tears and silent

screams and did not utter a word. We did not trust each other. But despite the mistrust, we helped women that were collapsing after finding the remains of a loved one.

I reached a body and when I was ready to uncover the “nezela” I suddenly saw a human hand cut from the wrist and stuffed in a sandal sitting next to it. The same body had its feet uncovered and one foot was wearing the same sandal holding the cut-off hand. I remember saying to myself “Is that a human hand? Is that his hand?” before I could put the dot together, I start vomiting. Amete hugged me and made me seat on the sidewalk across that body. I stuttered “kendey wesidulom edu k’korzuo” {how long did it take them to cut off his hands?} Amete answered “adeyom t’keroz, meaulna muluu korezomna” { I curse their mothers, they have been cutting us all our lives”}.

Suddenly my brother showed up; I stood up and start hitting him as hard as I could and told him I was terrorized one of the dead bodies would be him. He hugged me and guided both Amete and myself towards home. My brother’s jaw was shacking. I told him that I needed to enter the building and make sure our cousin was safe. He could not stop me after I literally ordered Amete to take him home. Our sweet Amete told him “you walk home with me; we are not ready to see you with your eyes gouged out”

I walked each step of the building and saw human blood all over. Shoes were left around and then I saw an elderly lady sitting on a step rocking herself covered with her nezela socked with blood. She was repeating “I could not save him; I could not save him...” I sat next to her and wrapped my arm around her shoulder. She literally collapsed in my arms and only then I noticed something dry splattered in her face and also noticed that she was tightly holding part of her nezela in her fist. I asked her to let the nezela go and only then she showed me pieces of human brain and coagulated blood and she explained to me that after a young man run to her and asked “Adei yekubanee” {Mom protect me} the Ethiopian soldier made the young man stand against the wall and shot him several times in the head. He then took his time to splatter some of the young man blood and pieces of his brain in the old lady face. She had just cleaned her face with her own nezela. I asked her to take off her “nezela” and covered her shoulder with my sweater.

That Eritrean grandma became one of the main reasons I dedicated my life and my skills towards Eritrea’s freedom.

I walked home and stumbled several times. By the time I reached my Mom’s house, I knew I had to see my doctor because of my C-section bleeding all over again.

It was a dark day and someone was killed by a sniper because he decided to sing “No woman no cry”. Did he know how many women would cry that day? Was it a premonition or just a drunk man venturing towards his death?

Never forget beloved country. Always stand together. As Berhane said an “An Eritrean is never alone”. We have each other.

Kiki Tzeggai - July 15 th 1980 –

P.S. note: I cannot remember the bar’s name; therefore I named it after its owner (Nebiat).