

Africa's Woes and Jokes

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**“The time has come, » the Walrus said,
“To talk of many things;
Of shoes and ships—and sealing wax—
Of cabbages—and kings—
And why the sea is boiling hot—
And whether pigs have wings.”**

Lewis Carroll (Alice's Adventure Trough the Looking Glass)

Somalia has done it again. For 18 years it showed the world that a country can exist without a State (which makes the Somali fundamentalists the first real Marxists) and still accomplish all the functions of a proud African State—kill, maim, destroy the country, displace millions, bring in famine, commit atrocities and more. And now, as the whole or at least half the world watches, Somalia has elected its latest president (no fake claim like Meles or other dictators who allege that 99.9% elected them)--, meaning some 500 MPs from various clans—themselves unelected-- elected Sheikh Ahmed as president and did the election not inside Somalia but in a neighboring country, Djibouti.

Imagine the lesson of this novel experience. Instead of having often dangerous elections inside the country (and being forced to rig or cancel) our tyrants can just take a few hundred of their supporters and party loyalists abroad and have them vote His Excellency as president. Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Angola who have had forays into the D.R. of the Congo can benefit from this—an election in Kivu by their battalions of soldiers. It would be legal. The MDC in Harare would be forced to eat its heart out for one. Sheikh Ahmed is being lauded by his former enemies in Washington and Addis Ababa and he may eventually make it back to Mogadishu or Baidoa and claim the palace if it still stands. Who says elections must be held in one's own country? It can now be held abroad or in one's own restricted ethnic enclave and then imposed on the whole country. Who says the whole people have to take part? They never did anyway and even if and when they did their votes have been thrown away and the fraud perpetrated. Why waste energy and money for a charade that has been exposed all over the world?

Another country has tried to steal the thunder of Somalia and to hog the limelight and it is that “off shore” island called Madagascar. In that usually quiet place, civil protests and killings are being registered these days. A 34 years old former DJ who complained that the president of the country ordered the closure of his TV station has taken in charge an opposition movement and as I write this he is claiming he is in charge of the country until a transitional government is established. A first in Africa in that everyone is wondering how the military can allow a simple DJ (actually protesting against an impending unemployment) to cause this much havoc. In Guinea, where the military made its coup just after the dictator Conte died the coup makers are aflame with fury. In Mauritania, where another coup maker general has taken over, the officers are also fuming. Madagascar has no army? The president cannot order them out to crush the protesters as has happened in Ethiopia in 2005 when the ruling front lost the election? How can all self respecting and coup addicted African officers let a DJ wreak havoc and claim “I am in control” as if the general and colonels do not exist? The Madagascar experience is another first in its own way. The latest AU meeting in Addis Ababa, attended by tyrants and coup makers and no DJ, could be discussing it in secret as it augurs not good things.

The situation in Eastern Congo is also weird in its own way. Take the Tutsi rebel pastor, Laurent Nkunda, whose jungle wardrobe could make many in cities jealous. Film footages of Pastor- General Nkunda showed him in different attires, holding different canes like a serious Mzee, jovial and dancing to sweet Tutsi tunes. The whole world knew that he was backed and guided by Rwanda which, like Uganda, has had its own predator interest over Eastern Congo hidden behind an official claim of going after Hutu rebels hiding there. All of a sudden Kabila and Kagame seemed to have found a ground of common accord and action and Rwanda has detained Nkunda (what was he doing in Rwandan territory while he claims he controls much territory in eastern Congo?) and the armies of the two countries are operating in the Congo against the Hutu guerrillas. In this same Congo, Sudanese, Congolese and Ugandan troops are on a joint hunt for Joseph Kony, the commander of the notorious Lord’s Resistance Army which survived all these years thanks to Sudanese full scale backing. As I had written some years back, the notion of Armies without frontiers has led to rebels without frontiers too and the LRA operates in the Sudan the Congo and in Uganda. This is a

development to watch because, in a short while, we may completely fail to understand who is fighting who and where.

Add to the who and where the basic question of why and for what too. Two years after Meles Zenawi sent his troops to invade Somalia and to oust the Islamic Court Militia the very man that the troops chased out has become the new Somali president and the Islamic hardliners have come back strong and with a vengeance. The troops of Meles have left of course. Why then the bloodshed and the deaths of so many Ethiopians and Somalis? Meles and his patrons achieved nothing at all. Thus, the lesson that we are expected to get is the old fact that, in Africa we fight for nothing and we destroy people and countries for no apparent gain. This is not a first by the way. To suffer defeat and trumpet victory is not original either. The other argument, that Sheikh Ahmed is a moderate (as opposed to who else? His friend Aweys? The Taliban?) , is also a lame one after all the cry we had heard about moderate Ayatollahs and how the regime of Meles (which is murderous but “not as brutal”) is moderate compared to the military regime of Mengistu. A comparison that splits hairs and has little or no meaning to crushed skulls and lost lives in the hands of so called moderates. The Islamic Court Union being Sheikh Ahmed’s baby and the brutalities of Al Shabab in accord with his teachings and exhortations. the change is illusory. In other words, the invasion of Somalia was an orgy of bloodletting that changed little in Somalia. It also does not require a prophet to state that the woes of Somalia re not over yet. Bad as this may be we can take solace from the possibility that Somalia may give us another first and make the Horn, if not whole, of Africa an interesting place to watch for pioneer developments.