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By *Kassahun WoldeGiorgis*

(Published in 2001E.C in Tigrigna, Adigrat, Tigray)

By the spring of 1991, the battle between Ethiopia's ruling military junta known as the Derg and the rebels was drawing to a close. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front's (EPRDF, የኢትዮጵያ ሕዝቦች አብዮታዊ ዲሞክራሲያዊ ግንባር) forces were sweeping through Ethiopia. These events sprinkled much needed hope and rekindled a sense of freedom for all political prisoners who were under brutal prison system of the Derg. One of the political prisoners to walk scot free from Addis Ababa Prison was the author of a book title **ምስትያት** (**Mistyat**, a Tigrigna word meaning Mirror).

Arguably Kassahun was one of the finest artists (Tigrigna song writer and singer) to come out of Adigrat, Tigray. Political leaders of the Derg did not take them that much time to recognize his God-given talents and his offensive charm. They had hoped to use him as a kind of political pundit for their propaganda to shape public opinion on political issues of the day. Not surprisingly he was assigned to Ethiopian TV as a Tigrigna commentator and writer. In that role, he suffered many agonies of conscience and he attempted to flee out of the country via the Sudan but to no avail. He dreamed of crossing the border and settled in the U.S.A. with his wife and four children. Unfortunately his dream was cut short and he was caught trying to cross the border at a bridge near the town of Asosa. His gripping narration about his physically grueling and mentally exhausting ordeal starts in the prison of Asosa.

ምስትያት is a true story about Kassahun's prison years of experience as a political prisoner in one of the most dangerous prisons of Ethiopia. The main theme of the book is the great violation of the dignity of man which the Ethiopian government under Mengistu Hailemariam committed on Tigrean "political prisoners" in the 1980s and 1990s. The book describes the day to day cruelty of the Derg regime on its citizens and builds on its impact on social, political, economic and psychological make-up of the people of Tigray.

ምስትያት is a gripping, insightful, and highly informative look into what truly went on behind the prison walls of Derg era. The author's prison time, which spanned nearly nine years, has provided him with the first-hand knowledge necessary to expose the inhumane nature of the prison systems and the unimaginable cruelty of the national security apparatus of the country towards its citizens. The brutality would not have been possible without the bonding of collective passion on the part of the rank and file members of the Derg regime.

ምስትያት shows a fascinating account of the Kassahun's inner struggle within himself to make sense of the shocking scenes he and other prisoners witnessed inside the prison system. They want him to confess to all sorts of political crimes that he did not commit. He is innocent, but in the constant torture and brutal interrogation, he feared that he will no longer be able to defend himself against their accusations. When confronted with these kinds of false accusations and unjust, inhumane and repressive measures that sat ill with his conscience of being Ethiopian citizen, kassahun is longed for detail explanations on what means to be an Ethiopian citizen.

Kassahun's vivid descriptions and shocking accounts of the politically motivated murders, violence, political manipulation and corruption that he and other prisoners encountered throughout their prison time will give readers an insider's look into a world of which little is known by the public. I highly recommend **ምስትያት** to anyone who is looking to become informed via a fascinating trip inside the mind of a man dubbed by the Derg as “political prisoner” and “Wonbede.” The author firmly believes that he had to show the prison system in honest, unflinching detail so that the next generation of Ethiopians will learn from it. The book is a good read and it would shock some readers and provide others with gruesome fascination.

Author Kassahun WoldeGiorgis considers himself lucky to be alive and thriving in the charming town of his birthplace Adigrat, Tigray. With the support of his beloved children, he is now a successful business man. It is a future he dared not imagine in the mid 1980s and 90s.

Halefom Belay

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