

Sorrows of the Black City

(Muhammad Al Fayeturi) (Sudan)

When night casts its net of shadows over the streets of the city

shrouding it in grief,

you can still see them —

slumped in silence, staring at the cracks.

And you think they are calm,

but you're wrong — they're on fire!

When darkness raises its statues of marble

on the streets of the city

then smashes them in fury

then the city will lead all the people

down the spiral staircase of the night

into the deep distant past.

The past with its ambergris shores

is dreaming of memories

too deeply to be roused.

And inside everyone something begins to stir —

a fresh wall made of clay,

stuck with diamonds and desires.

When night sleeps and day wakes

raising its candles in the dark

peace ebbs back to its home in the grave.

At that, the heart of the city

turns futile and wretched —

it is an oven at noon, a lamp for the blind.

Like ancient Africa, the city is truly

an old woman veiled in frankincense,

a great pit of fire, the horn of a ram,

an amulet of old prayers, a night full of mirrors,

the dance of black women, naked,

shouting their black joy.

This coma of sins was kept alive by the master,

ships filled with slave girls,

with musk, ivory and saffron —

gifts, all without joy, despatched by the winds of all ages

to the white man of our time

to the master of all time.

A plantation stretches out in imagination

to clothe the naked, to loosen their clothes,

flowing like its ancestors through the veins of life,

dyeing the water, and dyeing God's face,

its sorrows on every mouth

breeding tyrants and iron and slaves,

breeding chains, every day breeding some new horror....

And yet, on the streets of the city,

when night constructs
its barriers of black stone — they stretch out their hands,
in silence, to the balconies of the future.
They are locked-up cries
in a locked-up land.
Their memories are stab-wounds.
Their faces are sad, like the faces of the blind.
Look, there they are,
heads slumped in silence. And you think they are calm.
But you're wrong. Truth is, they're on fire....