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The Voice of the Girls of the Horn of Africa: A Gabay (Poem)

by
'Umar Ma'allin "Hufane"

transcribed and freely translated
by Mariam O. Ali, Lidwien Kapteijns
and Jay Spaulding

The composer of this gabay lives and works in the Republic of Djibouti. He is a member of the group of artists and intellectuals who work in close cooperation with the Ministry of Information and Culture. This group includes Ismail Teni (Secretary-General of the Ministry), Abdi Migenne (Director of the Palais du Peuple), Mohammed 'Abdillahi Rirash (Djibouti Radio and Television), 'Ali Muse Iye (of the weekly newspaper La Nation) and many others.

The poet composed this poem in July, 1986, on the occasion of a poetry contest. While his gabay was generally admired, it was criticized by some of the judges for being inappropriate in contents. The poet recorded the poem for the translators and gave them a rough transcription in July, 1987.

The Somali text is followed by a free English translation.

CODKA GABDHAHA GEESKA AFRIKA

Caado gurraan oo reer Fircoon
Dhaqan gaan ah oo hablaha ugub
Gamuun la ila beegsaday shirqool

inaga soo gaadhay
lagu gedaadayey
la ila gaadayey

Jidhkaygii galaalnaa wixii
Gurdanka iyo goohii wixii
Gelin dhexe miyaan xalay hurdada

gun iyo baar suumeey
gujo la ii geystay
geydh la ladi waayey

Hurgumo igu gaadhneyd miyey
Galgashoo miyuu dhinaca baas
Sidii gorayadii Eles miyaan

gama'a i diiday
geesna qaban waayey
gorodda laallaadshey

Waabayda igu gaaxatee
Gubtaanyaddan naftaydiyo waxaa
Gefkan kuwan arkaayee marnaba

igu gamaahiirtaa
gocashadaa keenay
iga garaabeyn

Gardaradda badheedhka ah xumaha
Sidaa la ii gasaaraan malaha
Gamta la igu dhigo kaan aqoon

aniga la ii geystoo
damqin garaadkiinee
bal aan garwaaqsiyo

anoo gibin yaroo curdin ah
Oo guudka un la i daboo
Bay gacaladii aan jeclaa

oo toban jir aan gaadhin
Golomis daashooda
i garbaduubtayee

Kolba habar gasaastoo jidhkuba
Naxdin miday ka guurtooy gudheen
Baa guri madow la ii gashaa

wada gariirayoo
indhaha geerkoodu
goor iyo ayaaneh

Guladdada intay iga xidhooy
Lugba meel intay geyssoy
Bay hammiga ka gardaadiyo

gacmaha duuduubtoo
galyax ii gooshtoo
halista goysayee

Gebiyada kaleetee magliga
Golxad wada majiiraystay bay
Gudinbay ba qaar igu dayaan

gobol ku heertayee
igu gedaadayee
geed sidaan ahayee

Marka ay gamuuntee hilibaha
Malmal wada gahayriyo qodxaa
God yar bay bannaysaa mar kale

guudka kala jeentoo
la igu giijayee
mudac ku goobtayee

Xadhig gudaha yaal baa lugaha
Gelin buu la yaabaa dadkuba
Sidii ruux gaboobaan gargaar

Dhiigga iga gufaaciyo ilmadaan
Gurxanka iga soo baxayabay
Ma gar baa in Faayiyo Canjeex

Gaddaafadu intaa kuma eekee
Hadba caadadaa igu go'doo
Inta u geeriyootaa ka badan

Gelbiskiyo arooskayga oo
Golayga iyo loolkiyo markii
Gundhiggii abuurkiyo kolkii

Gogosha iyo raaxada jidhkani
Naxariistu waa u guud khalqiga
Waxa goobta wiil joogay kaan

Way jacaylku kuu i gubay een
Sidaan xoolo u soo gatiyo
Ama guunyadiisii aan dhacay

Guhaad iyo dagaalaan filayn
Damqashiyo xanuun kuma godlado
Waa wadar dareen nii galaa

Hadduu midi galoof yahay ka kali
Markaan gaadho bay tahay dhalmadu
Hilbihii guullaamaan hurgumo

Intaasoo dhibaatiyo gef ahi
Guullahay abuurkiisibaad
Maxaad ii giigaysaan nafluhu

Dhaqankii gaboobaba mar baa
Gabal baa u dhaca oo mar buu
Gabdahaad qodbaysaani waa

Nin hinaase galay baad warkii
Garaw nimaan laheyn iyo jahlaa
Maxaad ii gudaysaan khalqigu

Diiniba kuway gaadhin baan

lagu garaaxayee
gaatin socodkayga
ulo ka raadshayee

gabax ka siinayoo
gebiyo ciiraanee
golli la ii qoolo?

markaan gashaantiyoobo
godollo naafeynee
carro gabiibeedee

farxad dhan loo guusey
ginnida loo leexdoo
talada loo guulloo

waa ka garanuugee
gaal iyo islaane
gooni uga doortay

gacalkay moodayee
ahay gammaantiisa
galab intuu duulay

igu garmaamayay
goodirka daymeede
gola jibaxeen

waa gan kaa dhimmanee
geyhashiyo ciilee
golongol ooyayee

aniga way gaaree
guluf ku qaadaanee
kala go'aan roonee

laga gudbayayee
guduri haagaayee
caado guunimee

meel ku gunuddeen
la igu dawggalayee
kala garaad roonee

falin geddiinaayee

Oon u quudhin googgoyn hablaha
Idinkuna gunduhun baad jartaan

Guullahay wuxuu sheegin uu
Rasuulkii udgoonaa gar uu
Uu Bukhaari soo gaacin uu

Nabruud wixii galaftay Fircoon
Baa had iyo jeer gabadhaha ugub
Miyaad cadho Ilaah ni gashiyo

Waxba guuxu yuu ila durkinee
Qosol hiillimaad buu galaa
Guurtida dhakhaatiirta iyo

Indheergarad guhaan iyo qajare
Naxariista hooyaday ka gudhin
Garab iyo gargaar baan ka sugi

qurux ma guuraanee
gibilka suntaanee

Quraanku soo guurin
gole ka sii daynin
kutub ku soo gaabin

ganbiyay beeshiisa
lagu gumaadaayee
godob ka yaabaynin

waxaan ku gaw siiyay
geeddan dirireedee
gabay nin geeraara

madaxu gaammaystay
gaarida aan daalin
talaba waa gooreh

THE VOICE OF THE GIRLS OF THE HORN OF AFRIKA

From the Pharaohs,*
 has come to us a twisted custom;
 Now rooted strongly in our culture,
 it ravishes innocent girls.

Pain struck me unexpectedly,
 like an arrow from ambush;
 They conspired to set a snare
 to trap me by surprise.
 My body, which was smooth,
 is branded now with pain from top to toe;
 Writhing in agony under their brutality,
 I lament, I cry out.

Last night at midnight,
 was I not too angry to sleep?
 Did not an ailment that afflicts me, and me alone,
 prevent me from sleeping?
 I tossed and turned.
 Damn it, do you think I could sleep on either side?
 Did not my head sag like the neck of Eles, the ostrich,
 as the poison gathered, and spread throughout my body?

This is the experience that returns to haunt me again and again.

You who inflicted this obvious injustice on me;
 You who saw it,
 but have never admitted it was wrong,
 Doesn't the way they butchered me ever trouble your mind?
 If you do not know these things,
 let me make you understand;
 They cut everything away.

When I was but a twig of a girl living happily in Golomis,
 not yet ten,
 and they still plaited my hair for me,

*alluding to the most rampant and dangerous form of Circumcision in the Horn. See the works of Asma El Dareer (Sudan) and Raqiyah Haji Dualch Abdallah (Somalia) - Ed.

My mother, the one I loved, tied my arms behind my back.

They put me in a dark house,
with a shrivelled, sunken-eyed old hag
whose whole body quivers,
who has no mercy.

It is always so.

Having tied my upper arms behind me,

Having tied my hands,
she mixed her medicine.

Having spread my legs,
she cut the crucial place,
she carved out the source of all feeling,

And from either side,
she sliced away my flesh with her knife.

I was cut with a rusty dagger,
Others, like wood, with the blade of the axe.

The raw surfaces of my wounds
she scored with long slices;

With dried myrrh she dusted them,
then stitched me together with thorns,
around a small opening.

With ropes my legs were bound firmly together,

Long would people shudder at my hobbling.

Like one aged, I sought support from a stick.

The poles and mats of the wall shudder;

Is it my tears, my moans, or the blood I have shed?

Like a bait for a jackal, they put my neck into a noose
for Faahiyo Canjeex, the cutter.

When I reach the age of marriage,

it blocks my period
and cripples my desire.

In this fair land,
more girls have died of it than lived.

While they celebrate the wedding procession
and feast with joy,

When you begin the foreplay of love,
Responding to the imperative principle of nature,

In the bed of relaxation,
This body lies without feeling,
a small gazelle frozen in fear.

Have not all creatures,
Muslims and non-Muslims,
some feeling of compassion?
Of all the boys around me,
I chose one for myself.
I burned with love for him;
Alas, I thought that he loved me.

But he treated me like something he bought,
his mare.
When darkness fell he attacked me,
as if I had stolen from him.
I did not anticipate a struggle.
But he wrestled me and fought;
He handled me roughly,
as if I were an enemy.

No one can enjoy hurt and pain.
Even of the gazelles of Daymo
you can sense that they respond to each other
as they go about.
If one partner is not aroused,
the other misses what is beautiful.

When the time has come to give birth,
I bend over and weep in frustration and rage
at my scarred and tearing flesh,
stretched ever tighter.

Why did this injustice have to befall me alone?
You have marred what God created.
Why do you keep hurting my body?
It would be better to have died.

Sometimes an old culture is compelled to change its path.
Let the sun set on it;
Follow a pathfinding pioneer
who leads in new directions.

Sewing up girls is a notion whose time has passed.
You have let yourselves be chained,
by the fears of some jealous old man.
Surely, my fate is in the hands of unenlightened people
who lack understanding.

Why do they circumcise me?
There were people who had not received the true religion
 who knew better than to do what you do.
They could never bring themselves to mutilate their children,
 whose beauty does not leave them,
While you hamstring little girls and scar their bodies.

God never said to do that;
No such thing did He say in the Qur'an.
The prophet, of fragrant memory,
 never spoke of such a thing in council.
Nor did Bukhari disseminate so much as an abridgment of it;
 it is not in books.

Was not the offense for which the tyrant Nabrud was brought low,
 and the oppression of the Pharaohs overthrown forever,
 the crime of having time and time again destroyed virgin girls?
Have you then no fear for the wrath of God?
Do you think you can escape the just retribution of the innocent?

Let me not prolong a charge that can be short.

"In the extremity of war," it is said,
 "even laughter is some support."

I wait now for help:
 From the prescriptions of physicians
 From the verses of poets
 From the reasoning of grey-headed intellectuals
 From the pens of writers
 From the neverending compassion of mothers,
 the virtuous ones who tire not.

Let time decide.