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Take Me Back to Hargeisa*

Musing on a journey of return

I had again that feeling, the need to travel to Hargeisa and Somaliland.

It had almost become natural for me, flying between Finland and Somalia. I had made ten flights to and from, beginning from my early training trips in the 1980s. With nine years of refugee life in Finland, things become confused and at times you think about your identity and to which home country you belong.

But wherever you live, you have a special affinity with your home town - where you were born and where your childhood memories lie like old prehistoric fossils, waiting for you to dig them up some day. To identify them on the spot, some with pleasure, some with longing pain.

I immediately made the decision to travel, and started the usual nerve wracking procedures, applying for visas and buying my ticket. I knew my route well and that made things a little easier. I prefer going through Djibouti, from where there are daily flights to Hargeisa, with the new air companies, Daallo Airlines, Puntavia and Air Djibouti. There are no direct international flights from Europe since the collapse of the Somali State. The name of Somali Airlines was long ago wiped out from the international air registers, and the other airlines which used to fly to Somalia have forgotten that they ever made these flights, or that they even owned offices in Mogadishu. The destruction of war leaves you in the dark and even your best friends and people who once had some interest in your home doubt if you ever existed.

On November 14, 1997, at 10 a.m., I was putting the last touches to my packing before departure. A taxi drove me to the airport, I went into the building, and my luggage was weighed and labelled; their destination: Djibouti.

My tension and nervousness calmed down. I walked back into the check-in hall and sat down on a seat near the wall to wait for some friends. They were to bring me some letters for their relatives and friends.

Finally they appeared through the entrance from the parking lots. We sat together for a while, and I was writing in my diary carefully to whom the letters were addressed, and also, for some, the whole message, too. Somalis call it *fariin*. Because of the oral culture, people usually prefer to send also an oral message. They also would like to meet the traveller and to brief him, so that they are sure that each *fariin* will be delivered as safely and completely as possible.

I wrote down my friends' last briefings, then they bid me farewell by saying the traditional prayers (*duco*) for a traveller (*jidku toobiye*):

May it be that your road goes straight and without setbacks

May it be that you get shadow from the glare of the sun

May all the people be a father and a mother to you

* One version of this text was first published in *Koor* magazine 1998(1). Ahmed Omar Askar has also published a collection of short stories, *Sharks and Soldiers* (Järvenpää, Finland 1992). For international distribution, please contact Haan Publishing, London.

With these words we shook hands and I proceeded to the emigration control. I presented my passport, a problematic document which no one respects, an Alien's Travel Document. Travel agencies get confused with it, and doubt whether it is worth selling the owner of it a ticket or not, and whether there are the proper visas for travelling abroad. At least you can manage in Europe, but in many developing countries, things can get out of hand and you could be sitting in an airport for hours, while the immigration officers are making their decision on whether to let you pass into their country, for which you already have a legal visa. You will be lucky if you ever return safe and sound.

I reached Djibouti the next day at 9 p.m. I was happy that it was not summer. Summer in Djibouti is just like having a *sauna*, sweating all your all minerals out, then confining yourself to an air conditioned room. If you are unlucky, the electricity fails, and you have a restless night in a dark and roasting concrete room.

November is warm but not very hot. It was raining all over the Horn of Africa, very unusual, flooding had even occurred over large areas of Somalia. Crocodiles, landmines and men were swimming in the same waters, a very dangerous combination.

I quickly fixed my flight connection to Hargeisa, booking it at Daallo Airlines which offers daily flights there. As I arrived at Djibouti Airport the next morning, the flights to the neighbouring cities were shown on a big board: Hargeisa, Dire Daoua, Addis Abeba, Bosaso, Mogadishu. Some of these available flights are managed outside international civil aviation regulations: no insurance, no guarantee of security. In Somalia, the common rule is that the owners of the air companies and the armed factions have a mutual understanding. The air agencies pay hard taxes to the faction groups. Once a flight landed at an airport that had new holders, winners in some fighting between two faction groups. The commander of the victorious part let the plane land just after the smoke of gunfight had cleared.

I boarded the plane and got the feeling that I was travelling on a truck. I reminded me of my trips to Mogadishu in the 1960s and 70s, on Toyota trucks. First, the truck is loaded, and when it is full, the passengers sit on top of the loads. The system now was the same, only now we were supposed to fly. I cannot mention the brand of the plane. It reminded me of the first DC3 of the Somali Airlines, but it was built in Russia. The seats looked worn out, without seat belts. Some of the passengers were without a seat and they had to sit on top of the cargo in front of us.

The old plane took off, roaring as if complaining about the burden of its load, grunting as it squeezed out a last effort of efficiency. It then moved on without much bumping or turbulences, like an old obedient horse. We flew over the Gollos mountains separating the Guban ('Burned') coast from the Ogo. The range continued eastwards in endless successions of peaks, slopes, ridges and valleys.

These days, the Gollos range has become the Amazon of Somaliland for the mineral prospectors, who collect two types of valuable stones. I wonder how long it will take before the greed of man devours the beauty and natural habitats of these mountains, they are so far the only area of environmental preservation of Somaliland. The mineral prospectors are today only local men, who use a very simple technique, but let us see when the foreign companies come with their caterpillars and huge drilling machines.

The plane crossed the Gollos mountains and proceeded over the more flat and hilly Ogo. The rains were very generous although it was the time of one of the dry seasons of the year. We could see many water catchments below us. We flew over the main towns in the area, Borama, Gebiley and Arabsiyo. This is an important farming district and the farms were extending from Borama to Hargeisa, fenced in with acacia branches. The landscape looked

more wooded than before. The forest has got some natural conservation during the civil war. With the displacement of the people, the trees have had time to breath and to grow - the misfortune of one group is a benefit for another.

The plane was now flying over Hargeisa which looked quite different compared to the same air view of the early 1990s. The residential part of the city was destroyed during the civil war, to the extent that it was known as 'the city without roofs'. The favourite blue and green paint of Hargeisa was giving a beautiful air to the ruins, as if they were thousands of swimming pools.

The rebuilding has had its successes, the new roofs were glittering in the sun light and their reflections were coming like signals of a huge beam of light. The city is not only being rebuilt, but growing fast, too. New buildings keep coming up at the outskirts.

Our plane made a U-turn over the hills of Naaso Hablood ('Girls' Breasts') and started descending. The mere sight of Hargeisa town rose our feelings and our longing. I was humming all the poems and songs that belonged to my situation. I chose first an Italian song:

*Paese mio che stai sulla collina, sulla collina, sulla collina
Paese mio ti lascio, a non di ritornare*

Then that one by Mohamed Mooge:

Perhaps you are not aware of it
But you were born in Hargeisa
You were fed with fresh *dhay* milk
And it was hard to satisfy your appetite
Between the Hargeisa Tog and the Naaso Hablood

At the airport, meeting with family members made the longing and feelings even more intense. One elderly man was in tears, his daughter was waiting under the wing of the plane. She hugged him and no words were exchanged, only the moans and sighs of the joy and pain of reunion. The father arrived from Britain and he had not seen his daughter for many years.

I cannot even find tears from my exited eyes - a tear would have been a relief - so I have to turn to poems and songs, once more, for company. This time the song that suited the situation best was a song from an Egyptian documentary, 'Take me back to Cairo', as I twisted it to my own need:

Take me back to Hargeisa
I must go back to Hargeisa.....

— o — O — o —

Mohamed Ahmed Ali 'Cali-Goox'

Gunaanad*

Xalay gelindhexaadkii
markii ay garruudkiyo
jiifsadeen gurboodkii
inta aan go'aygii
isku soo gamaamaday
yaan gudub u jiifsaday.
Nimuu gamas mudan yahay
ma galliimanaayee
giddigii habeenkii
marna maan gabaabiyin,
hadba waxan gaboodkiyo
marba gees u jeestaba,
gabayoox nin yaalloo
garbadduuban baanee,
gamaanyadii i haysiyo
iga guurtay luladii.
Waxan gaasabbixiyaba
hayn waayay gogoshii,
sidi uu gadgoddo aar
gucun iyo shabeel iyo
giddi habardugaag iyo
goodaaddo iyo halaq,
inta bahal gurguurtee
guggumuhu u weyn yahay,
intay i guud yimaadeen
miciyaha i geliyeen
igu goolibbaadheen.

Sidii aan itaal gabay
meelna aanan gaadhaynin
cadho igu gadhoodhiyo
gaadooddo iyo ciil
garwaaxeed sigaygii
gowsaha ma riiqoo

gabayooxi mays dhigay.
Sida hooyo gacalo ah,
gabakay ku curatiyo
gayax madiya haysoo
gayigoon dhan ugu jecel,
gurigii dhexdiisii
galab ay xambaartoo
gaasabbixi is leedahay,
intuu garuddambayskii
guudkeeda saarraa
guntintii u furatoo
uu u go'ay xanjeerkii,
markuu gaadhay sibiidhkii
garka iyo wadnuhu go'ay,
geeridana guddoonsaday.

'Ba'ay oo gunaanaday!
'Goblamayeey!' intay tidhi
guudkiisa ay timi,
hadba gees u rogatoo
ku galgalatay meydki
nafna aanay gelin karin,
sidan ahay geddeedii
gadhka lowga geeyoo
laadlaadshay goroddii.

Gambalaali bay baxay
garabdaarki bay yimi,
'gabay' buuna igu yidhi,
anna waan guluulucay.

Galiyadan i haysiyo
hadda waxa i gigayaa,
maaha geeri igu timi,

* In this poem, composed on October 13, 1995 in Djibouti, Cali-Goox expresses his thoughts and feelings concerning the suffering and destruction of his people that he has witnessed. The word *gunaanad* means 'to recite the Qor'an to a dying person', and by extension, 'to summarize, conclude'. Cali-Goox read his poem at the closing session of the congress. For a selection of Cali Goox's poems, including *Gunaanad*, see Maxamed Axmed Cali "Cali-Goox" (1999). *Damal (Maansooyinkii Cali-Goox)*. Helsinki: Soof Publications.

maaha gabadh aan caashaqay
gacanta igu saydhoo
i gubayso xanaftii,
mana aha gamuun iyo
garangoorri igu mudan.
Bal malee waxay galay!
Waxay gubaya falanqee!
Garaadkaaga faallay!
Galtibixi ujeeddada!
Inta aydin gees kale
iga geynin sheekada
aan sii gurguriyee,
waanigii gadoodayoo
gabayooxa jiifaye
markii ay gardhaladkiyo
xiddigihii gabaabeen,
godka madaxa geliyeen
waagiina galac yidhi,
intaan gudub u boodoo
gogoshii ka toosaan
jeedaashey goonyaha.
Geyigaygi hooyiyo
mise waa gabaahiir,
waa gaatir iyo oon
waana galangal iyo dhaxan,
waa gantoob dabayl badan,
waa gabyre laga qaxay,
gabxo weeye lwy dhigay.
Waxan roobku go'i jirin,
gufaaciyo gudgudihii,
cirku galalacdhii daa,
gugu waa u jiilaal,
gedmiwaa habeenkii
gudbinwaa dharaartii,
gadiidkii wax qabanwaa
gudcurkaa u maalina.

Ceelashii aan gudhi jirin
ma gaadhaan wadaamuhu,
durduradii aan go'i jirin
is gufeeye ilihii,
geedihiiyo ugbaadkii,
gargaradiyo duxiddii
waa gubad sidiisii,
giddi waa nabaadguur,
waana wada gelgelimeys.

Guunyada la maalaa
sidi garayadii bay

gurataa quruuruxa,
qudhacdiyo galoolkaba
guntaa laga jaraayoo
xididdadaa la gooyaa,
dal kalayna geeyaan
noloshayna gadayaan.
Intaan gebi ahaantii
qunyar gacalo eegaan,
giddigay jidhiidhico
guudkayga saaqdoo
ilmo gabax ka siiyoo
gacmo madxa saaroo
haynwaayay goobtii,
gowraha lugeeyoo
gudbey oo habeensaday,
gadaf baa i soo xidhay.

Goonyahaygii baan deyey,
mise goob dagaal iyo
waa guluf colaaleed,
godob baa hortayda ah,
gashi baa i daba yaal.
Gantaalaa hareeraha
iga soo gabaabiyey
gacaladii i haysiyo
muxibbadii i geysayba
igu noqotay gaadeer
gaafmeeray keligay.

Sidaan u galoollaa,
mid i goobayaa yimi,
qori uu ku gaadhnaa
intuu gudub iskaga rogay
keebkii fartii geli,
wadnahayga guud saar.
Waxan idhi 'gabbaanyahaw!
Geeri waa sugaayoo
goolaadin maayee
naftu way gabxarartaye,
inta aanad iga goyn,
waxaan geystey ii sheeg?'
Gaafeysey oo yidhi,
'gubadkiyo qabiilkiyo
gobolkaad u dhalatay
godob naga dhexaysaa,
galabtana adduun baa
gacantayda soo galay,
anna waa ku gubayaa'.
Waxan idhi 'gabbaanyahaw!

Intaadan i gaasirin,
inuu gaadaddaadiyo
garbahaaga ma ogtahay,
guud saaranyahay malag?
Khayr waxaad gabooodiyo,
shar waxaad gurgurisiyo
hadba waxaad galladatiyo
waxaad geysata uun qora.
Adduunyadan in guuriyo
maalmo geeddi lagu yahay,
Aakhirana gurigii
laynnoo gurguriyoo
gubad waarayay tahay.
Ma ogtahay gabbaanyahaw!
Inaad gacankudhiigliyo
aad tahay naftiis gabe,
Aakhirana gogosha
inay tahay godnaareed.'

Waxaan uga golleyahay,
taydoo aan gelin iyo
Guullahaa i bixiyoo
ii gargaaray mooyee
haddaan maalintii go'o,
waxaan geystey may jirin.

Geyigeeygii hooyow!
Weligey gar eexaad,
guudkaaga kuma naqin.
Weligey intaan gudin
iyo qaatay garabsaar
geed kaama aan jirin.
Bilicdaada gaarka ah
Rabbi kugu gadaamiyo
inta geedlab kaa baxa
ma gamuumin weligey,
laanna kaamaan goyn.

Soomaali guudeey!
Geyigeenna oo idil,
gaar maanigaa u leh?
Giddi waa u simannee
keligay galiilyadu,
miyey ila gudboon tahay?
guri ilo dugsoon iyo
godka iyo xabaashiyo
hadduu gogol idiin yahay,
aad garawsan weydaan,
Alla sow gariiree,

Waaq idin la gooyee!
Garashada ka caydhow,
waa guhaanka ugu weyn,
gefka aad samaysaan,
goormaad ogaataan?
Sidee baad ku garataan?
Mise maba garawdaan?

*Afartaas gunaanaday,
galtibbixiyey oo naqay,
guntay oo garawsaday,
gudbey oo 'ka soco' idhi.*

Guulloow Allahayow!
Nafta kii i geliyow!
Giddigeed addunyada,
Gaaliyo Islaamkaba
kan qudhaan garaystee,
iga gacan sarreeyow!
Gole waxaan ka ahay mudan,
geed waxaan ka ahay boqor,
geesi waxaan ka ahay sharaf,
garna waxaan u ahay yigil,
waxaan ahay gabyaa weyn,
guulguulka ma aqaan,
gunno kuma balweeyoo
ma gumeeyo maansada.
Galladaha adduunyada
gobannimaan u jecelahay,
haddii ay gasiin tahay
gaajaan ka door biday,
gunnimaan u necebahay,
haddii ay gudboon tahay,
geeridaan ka doorsaday.

Soomaali gebigeed
ganatiyo dabley iyo
galtixumaha mooyee,
inta kalese guud iyo
gaarba waan u jecelahay.
Salaaddii aan gaadhaba,
'Rabbiyow galliimiyo
midnimada guddoonsii',
baan ku gabaggabeeyaa.
Haddaan garawsho heli laa,
wax un baan gurgurin laa,
garab wax igu siiyoo
ila guula maan helin.
Goobtaan istaagba

Word Art in Practice

gabbal iyo galaal iyo
gawl baan ka leeyahay,
goonaan socaayoo
dadka wayga garataa,
galtay ii maleeyaan
aan garan wixii jira,
gabbal miduu u dumayoo
gam'ay bay i moodaan.
Dhaaxaanse goohaye
guddiyey maruun baad
i garawsan doontaan.

Waqtigaa abaal gala,
waajibaadka uma gudo,
markuu samihii gabay baa
nabsigii garwaaqsaday,
gondihiisa nabad taal
gaanka aan arkaynee
isagoon garkiisiyo
quluubtiisa aan gelin
niyaddana guddoonsiin
maskaxdana garawsiin,
ninka gebi ka deyyayee
weyddiistay gobol kale,
Alla garasho daranaa!
Galoofaan marayn iyo
geel aan hali ka dhiiqayn,
ninka gaawahaw sida
gaanaha is yidhi 'maal',
Alla garasho daranaa!
Kuwa gaanana maantee
soo baray gumeysigu
galti aan waxba ogayn
sida loogu ganacsado,
adduunyadana gogoshiyo
dermadaadu waa godob,
Aakhirana godkaagiyo
garbkaagu waa naar.
Ama gibil madoobow
ama goxol mariidow

ama gooddi caalwaa
ama ciil la goroflee
ama ceeb la golobley,
Wallee garasha daranow,
Waa kuu gargaarli'i!

*Afartaas gunaanaday,
galtibbixiyey oo naqay,
guntay oo garawsaday,
gudbey oo 'ka soco' idhi.*

Guruud iyo nin weynow!
Guxushaaga taliyow!
Kan gobaad falaayiyo,
goobaarayaashow!
Inta guudadlaydiyo,
gabdhaha soo koraayow!
Gidirkiyo haweenkow!
Gayaxiyo carruurtow!
Gulgulaadilaacshiyo,
Gadhmadeobayaashow!
Guddoonkiyo Boqorkow!
Garaadkiyo Suldaankow!
Gadhle iyo wadaadow!
Guddidii waxbarataay!
Kaan gaagaxaynee,
garashiyo aqoonlow!
Gargey waxgaradow!
Inta gole ka baantiyo,
gadhwaadeenayaashow!
Gacalkiyo dadkaygow!
Dalka miyaan ka guurraa?
Dab miyeynu gelinaa?
Sidaa maysla garateen?
Waa gabaabsi noloshii
dabaggoosi weeyee,
gar waa loo Islaamee,
mays gebagebaynaa?

— o — O — o —