

## Hidayah: Pearl of Djibouti



<http://www.aquanaute.com/subphoto/index.html>

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

*“Je vais être prudente. Mais dans tous les cas,  
cela fera mal, mais la douleur est comme la faim,  
elle finit par passer.”*

*“I will be careful. But in all cases, this will hurt.  
However this pain is like the pain of starvation,  
at the end, it disappears.”*

*(F. Nwapa. Efuru p.13, 1966)*

Safar 1423, April 2002

Sunni Waqf books

By Soumy Ana

<http://www.ummah.net/islam/taqwapalace>

## INTRODUCTION:

The subject of female mistreatment in the Islamic societies is the favorite subject for those who try to harm our beautiful religion, Islam.

In Islam, females and males are protected against harm and abuses. However, some local traditions in specific countries mix pagan traditions with Islamic religious obligations. In these countries, it is sometimes hard to distinguish what is Islam and what is not.

Excision or infibulation is one of them.

### Is female circumcision part of Islam?

While the exact origin of female circumcision is not known, it preceded Christianity and Islam. The most radical form of female circumcision (infibulation) is known as the Pharaonic Procedure.

No mention of female circumcision is to be found in the Qur'an either directly or indirectly. There is no known ahadeeth which requires female circumcision. Some argued, however, that one ahadeeth, while not requiring female circumcision, appears to accept it: "Circumcision is a commendable act for men (Sunnah) and is an honorable thing for women (Makromah)." (Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Da'ifah by al-Albani, no. 1935. **There is some debate as to the authenticity of this hadith**)

A Hadeeth report that Prophet Muhammad (swas) passed by a woman performing circumcision on a young girl. He instructed the woman by saying:

*"Cut off only the foreskin (outer fold of skin over the clitoris; the prepuce) but do not cut off deeply (i.e. the clitoris itself), for this is brighter for the face (of the girl) and more favorable with the husband."* (Reported by Abu Dawud in al-Sunan, Kitab al-

Adab; **he said this hadith is da'if**, i.e. weak).

So, if the clitoris is large, then part of it should be removed, otherwise it should be left alone. It is permissible in that case.

While the Prophet (swas) did not explicitly ban this practice, his words project a great deal of sensitivity to the instinctive needs of females and their matrimonial happiness and legitimate enjoyment.

If Islam requires adherents of both genders to be chaste, chastity and virtue are not contingent on "cutting off" part of any sensitive and crucial human organ. Rather, they are contingent on spiritual and moral values of the person and the supporting virtuous environments.

## TYPES OF CIRCUMCISION

- a) Removal of the hood (or prepuce) of the clitoris. This procedure is, to some degree, analogous to male circumcision since no part of the sexual organ is cut off. It is only the foreskin, or outer fold of the skin, which is cut off. It is not harmful and it is also called "sunnah circumcision."
- b) Removal of the entire clitoris (clitorectomy) along with part of the labia minora, which is sutured together leaving an opening. This is a form of mutilation.

- c) Removal of the entire clitoris, labia minora and medial part of the labia majora, with both sides of the female organ stitched together leaving a small opening. This is called the Pharaonic procedure; it is a mutilation.

It is obvious that the second and third violate a known rule in Shari'ah prohibiting the cutting off of any part of the human body except for unavoidable reasons (e.g. medical treatment, trimming nails or hair, or for male circumcision).

Nothing justifies genital mutilation. In fact, no mutilation is allowed by Islam even in the battlefield.

It is painful, traumatic and often performed in an unhygienic setting leading to infection and other problems including bleeding, scars, painful intercourse, difficulty to achieve sexual fulfillment which may lead to pain, reducing chances of pregnancy, causing infertility in some instances, chronic pelvic infection, urinary tract infection, psychological problems and unhappy husbands. [Stewart, Rosemary, "Female Circumcision: Implications for North American Nurses," in *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing*, vol. 35, no.4, 1997, pp. 36-37.]

Some countries have already passed laws to prohibit female circumcision but it is still practiced because of group pressure. In order to fight against abuses, a starting point is to begin by educating people without adding to the bag of prejudices.

I believe our role as Muslim writers is to speak up against abuses while defending what was revealed to us by Allaah.

May AllahTa'aalaha guide us in this task.  
Ameen.

See also <http://www.jannah.org/genderequity/index.html>

Gender equity in Islam by **BASIC PRINCIPLES** by Jamal Badawi, Ph.D.

Her name was Hidayah. She came from Djibouti. Djibouti, the Horn of Africa, the horn that called the *dhow*s from Arabia, the part of Africa directly touched by Islam, 35 km (25 miles) across the straits from Saudi Arabia and Yemen.



<http://us-africa.tripod.com/djibouti.html>  
Photo courtesy ©2002: Tourist Office

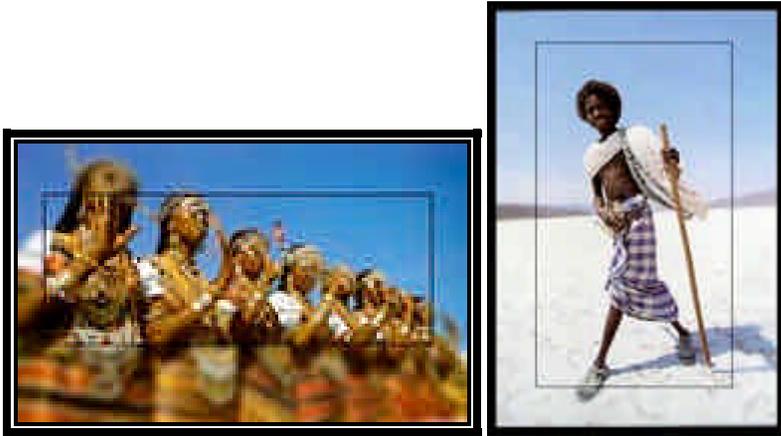
Djibouti is built almost entirely on a volcanic desert, bordered to the southeast by Somalia, to the southwest by Ethiopia and to the north by Eritrea.

Djibouti lies as a jewel along the azure waters of the Red Sea sweeping over the reef. The country is a pick into the sea where the Afars and the Issas live in rivalry.

There a man is admired when he can control his anger in all circumstances. There the laws of the tribe predominate and there is little room for individuality. People as far as from India traded there more than 1,000 years before the white conquest and the slavery plague they brought with them. They crossed from country to country with for only master the time that passes from night to day and the two unique seasons: dry and wet.

In the turquoise waters of the Red Sea, the octopus can change colors faster than a chameleon. Its skin changes its bright shades like the traditional woman changes her vibrant *shalma*, a gauze-thin brightly colored length of fabric. But like the beautiful black woman of East Africa, the animal's jets of ink do not prevent it from being a very popular meal. I always saw Hidayah as the symbol of the Muslim woman in the Horn of Africa so pure in her soul and in her will to struggle while her body is being mutilated and her spirits exhausted. Hidayah looked as enchanting as the coral reef with her almost European facial traits, her white teeth striking among a line of

velvet lips, her broad eyes as shy and soft as a gazelle's gaze and her pace as calm and appeasing as the trot of the camel.



©2002: Tourist Office

<http://us-africa.tripod.com/djibouti.html>  
Photo courtesy ©2002: Tourist Office

Hidayah often draped herself in very fine veils that revealed the slenderness of her body without actually defining it. I used to see her in the library as she sat a few inches from me. Her triangular face tilted slightly to the side and her long eyelashes lifting only when I moved around the room yet too shy to address me.

Hidayah and I would for many years become great friends and true sisters in *deen*, but we did not meet in this room of the library; we met a few years later. It is then that I promised her this story.

O strange is life! I dreamt of my friend the Djiboutian so often, hoping that one day I would gather the courage to talk to her and just utter a few words she would understand: "Peace be upon you, my sister. I love you for the sake of Allah and I dream of your friendship." But everyday for two years we met in the archive room among the books of the library and we remained for each other a cover of a book that we both dreamt to open. How life can be simple and sometimes so complicated! Maybe there is a time for each moment in life because this moment we met was one of the best times in my life. It was also a time of discoveries, of unexpected discoveries. How many times did I dream of the day we would talk? And I dreamt of Djibouti and of the stream of water touching its borders as I dreamt of a lost acquaintance. How would have I known? I had never dreamt of what I would discover after flopping a few pages of her life! What terrible

truths laid there for ninety five percent of the women who lived in Djibouti. I had no idea.

One day Hidayah would confess to me:

“There were those women who started to be our witnesses. They started to speak about excision openly. They used such a cruel language; we were all ashamed of them. We thought about how rude they were to speak the truth but we had forgotten that this truth would set our sisters free.

We just looked at the way they behaved and how much it was against local customs. We saw the taboos mocked.

See, the Afars say that the one who masters the words can play with them; the one who ignores the rhetoric is played by words: *yab yaa-digui, yabal digrah, yab mayaa-diguil yab duigra*.

But in a sense we were all wrong. Much has been done since.

In Africa, the fight against excision continues at all levels: political, artistic, and literary. La Duperie in Burkina-Faso is a film that caused the chefs of the Yatenga province to unite

against the practice. In Mali, the excision practitioners officially stopped their activities in 1996. Most African countries are officially against the excision after the creation of International conferences on the subject. And many more awareness programs have started. We now feel grateful even if we disapproved the means.”

I asked Hidayah how she felt about the mutilations performed on women in her country. Was it an Islamic tradition?

Hidayah looked at me with very grave eyes and for a moment I thought I had crossed a line. But she took my hand feverishly and declared:

“No, it is not an Islamic tradition. There is a light circumcision that is recommended for both men and women which is not harmful, but in my country it is something different. People have taken an old practice and said it was the circumcision permitted by Islam!

The West has taken denounced this practice as Islamic while it is not Islamic and Islam does not permit mutilation whatever its form and whatever the circumstances!

As a result, we lost our dignity as African women. Westerners now see us as sexual oddities and even aggressed us in the streets, here, in Europe, calling us Barbarians. We want nothing to do with them. We are Muslims and we love our position as Muslim women; we do not want to encourage all the feminist western movements when we have our own freedom. We refused to be westernized. It was our own affairs. Why tell our problems to the world?

I also do not feel anger against them. I am aware that they are right; we must fight this pagan tradition and remove it from our customs. We must replace falsehood with the truth.

The German Constitution *says Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar*, i.e., man's dignity is invulnerable. While we lost ours; they gained theirs. Nobody knew the secret wound of the African woman until Westerners started to buy back their humanity by helping us eradicate what they said was Barbarian as if circumcision did not exist in their own land!"

I looked at Hidayah with astonishment.

"What do you mean? Has excision been practiced in Europe too?"

"Yes. A number of European doctors have treated hysteria, migraines and epilepsy by clitoridectomy but history has retained only the name of the nineteenth century gynecologist Isaac Baker Brown. He had studied works dating from the antiquity as a model.

No, excision is not part of our Islam even if it is still practiced in the Horn of Africa. Some people say that the question of the sexual satisfaction in Islam is not important. Procreation is not only the goal; it takes two people to make a world. My husband suffers as much from this than I do. This has affected not only me but it has also affected my husband psychologically. Last year he almost divorced me. But we are both in the same boat. He has helped me as much as he could and I have helped him. Most women just remember that only their children count each time it hurts; they will never have a normal life if they cannot find the support of their spouse."

When I met Hidayah, she felt very strong about it. She added:

“You have to tell your readers about this. No matter how deep is our shame, it is not right to hide it and permit such unnecessary tortures. Our prophet (swas) did not practice it on his daughters and if he allowed it, it was just a symbolic cut that has nothing to do with what Djibouti practices. Still, some men and women of Africa, whether they are Muslims, Christians or Jews still think excision is compulsory. Yes, to cite only an example, the Christians from Egypt and the Jews from Ethiopia used to practice excision until recently. In Islamic countries, it is performed only very locally; most Muslims condemn it.

Some people say that it is purification, that if a child grows up without being excised she is impure and will give birth to a defiled offspring. So many false tales circulate about the benefits of circumcision in women. This has originated about 6,000 years before Christ. Egypt, Ethiopia, Syria and Persia all have been practicing it since the Neolithic. They hoped to keep females chaste this way while they had probably been more successful instilling more faith and feelings of modesty in people.

I do not blame our families who think it is a religious duty; they have been brought up in ignorance, but it is still an act of utter violence that violates the human rights everywhere in the world since the immigrants practice it wherever they go. Our whole emotional life is affected by it but with the help of Allaah we can surmount it.

In our country it is performed on girls between seven and twelve. The clitoris in its entirety is removed, then each big lip around it is cut, leaving a large wound only closed by thorns. The flesh heals in a pack when it heals, leaving an aperture the dimension of a finger. Of course, menstruation is made difficult because not all the blood is evacuated from the body, causing us pain. Urination is also complicated. Thus, infections are common as well as infertility.”

I looked at Hidayah with new eyes. I did not understand why she thought she was losing her dignity while in fact she was gaining it. I felt a deep feeling of admiration for her courage and the simplicity with which she explained the fact did not make me uncomfortable. On the contrary, it helped our hearts to get closer. Hidayah looked down as she spoke and I looked

down too, feeling empty of words and incapable of finding anything that would help her through this. I thought about how Allaah tested us, each one of us, in a different manner. I thought about what my father had said to me one day: ‘There is a time to eat white soft bread and there is a time to eat black rock-like bread.’ In other words we all go through things we cannot escape and we have to grow from it. I did not envy Hidayah as I used to envy her for the beauty of her soul, but I admired her for the way she had built her life on top of her hurts. We should never envy anyone because we do not know what lies behind the veils, and their trials are not our trials.

She added in her melodious and bird songs voice:

“I tried to prevent them from doing it to my little sister. This year, I was too late. My father said ‘I know you told me it is not Islam, but what man would have wanted her? I had to permit it.’ I wanted to tell him that nowadays things had changed but how do you fight against prejudices?

My mother did not discuss it; she was one of the relatives who held her daughter screaming back on the operating table. I

wanted to make her understand how wrong this was. I wanted to tell her how my labor had been an agony, how frightened I was to die because the baby could not pass through me. I wanted to remind her how her husband had entered her with the use of a little knife and how he probably had kept the wound bloody for a week or so until it started to heal.

I wanted to shake her, to make her aware that she could now go to jail from one year to a lifetime because of what she had done to her daughters. Of course we kept all of this hidden from the authorities and I tried to comfort my sister who was still in shock and ripped off a part of her womanliness for life.”

As I listened to Hidayah, tears began to swell in my eyes; it suddenly stroke me that there would be no going back for an additional two million of women this year and the year after.

I did not know this about her when I was watching for her to come to the library many years before, asking myself if this was the day I would sum up the courage to talk to her at last.

With her I opened more books that I hoped for. Such a small country in the middle of nowhere that was known only by

Arabian sailors as they stopped for shelter and water at Ambouli or Doralé.

As I turned the pages of a touristic encyclopedia, I gathered more information about the land but almost nothing about the people and customs. What an exotic image for such a crude world!



<http://www.aquanaute.com/subphoto/index.html>

Now that I have learned about Hidayah' ordeals, I cannot see Djibouti with the same eyes. Yet the beauty is still there, reforming each time there is a storm or the strong currents

destroy its coral reef. Everything there reforms on the skeleton of life and could not exist without it, like its grove at the feet of the sea. Along the beach a single coral reef is said to support as many as three thousands different species of sea creatures. Shoals of bright blue damselfish, striped or dotted butterfly fishes, all crunching coral noisily. Sea anemones waving, sea fans, sponges, urchins revealed the unusual beauty of coral polyps, small animals that looked like vases of flowers.



<http://www.aquanaute.com/subphoto/index.html>

Leaving behind the reef, the rain forest of the sea, the sunlight bathed the coast constantly making it look like red amber.

Along its bank passed from time to time the colorful toilettes of the nomads and flocks of emaciated sheep.



<http://www.aquanaute.com/subphoto/index.html>

I was indeed amazed by the richness of the sea and the fact that its bottom looked like a carpet of flowers with diving birds growing in it. It was enchanting to me who had never left my country. As my future friend bowed on her ongoing thesis, I peered at the gold necklace that cast yellow shadows on her face like the reflections of the water on skin. I looked at it

waving on the floor as a light among shadows. And this is how I often perceived this woman of Djibouti, as a light among the books that was real but actually unreal.

I stayed amazed at her beauty, her calmness and her purity like the waves of the ocean on seashore. We were in our early twenties and I had just reverted to Islam. We had the same age but I was just born again when she was older, way older, actually many centuries older.

And life is so surprising that when I had given hope on my dream to see her again, I met her one day for real. She wrote to me from overseas. We had joined our duas and none had been lost. What definitely had to happen finally had crossed the sea.

And she could have said to me:

*“Dadka dunida jooga oo dhan Nebi Aadan iyo Xaawaa wada dhalay,” “All men are sons of Adam and Eve”.*

*Somali Proverb.*