

Mohammed Osman Kajerai

—translation from Arabic by Charles Cantalupo
and Ghirmai Negash

Wind and Fire

Victims claim my country as their mother,
Free of humiliation and betrayal
And sacred, yet broken and bleeding—
They greet her with poems, love and flowers.

As my blood fertilizes the land,
A mirage of hope gleams on the horizon
Bearing martyrs, martyrs and more martyrs,
But no greater glory or victory. Understand?

No more prison, chains, beatings and bleeding
Thanks to the gun giving me the courage
To fight with blazing fire and raging wind
And win, embracing the dawn to fight again.

You thugs, invaders, mercenaries—
I'll never stop revenging my land.
Struggle and determination
Define my being Eritrean.

The front fighting for my liberation
Pulses through the veins and heart of my song
Unfurling the flag for my martyr's body
To rest and fly in glory forever.

—

We unfurl on a hopeless horizon.
We protect you amidst dark days and darker nights.
Your glory in battle and your children
In the struggle and revolution, we provide.

MOHAMMED OSMAN KAJERAI (192?-2003) was a leading poet and intellectual figure in Eritrea, Sudan and the Arab world. He lived and worked in the Sudan for most of his life. Returning to Eritrea after its independence, he worked briefly in Asmara as a teacher and journalist. "Wind and Fire" is from *Teramin As Sawyriya* (1984), published by the Association of Eritrean Teachers.

Solomon Tsehaye

—translation from *Tigrinya* by Charles Cantalupo
and Ghirmai Negash

The Tithe of War

I struggled in battle,
Won the war
And earned a rest.
My bones ploughed
The ground of peace.

It flowered and multiplied—
Watered with my sweat,
Fed with my flesh
And sweetened by my marrow.
The harvest was good.

Now I could sleep, content
With a blanket of earth,
Bushes for friends,
A mattress of dust
And a pillow of stones,

Except my spirit groans
When I hear you crying,
As you ululate and sing,
And when I see you crying
As you dance so proud.

I hear you, mother,
And I see your loved ones

Like a little wheat remaining
 In the gleaned fields,
 Or like a few raw seeds

When there's nothing left to eat.
 Constantly hearing you cry
 And seeing you in pain,
 They think, *should we have survived?*
 How will they go on?

Who gives a tithe
 And asks for it back?
 Mother, I paid it,
 For you and all our freedom
 Not to cry but live.

Poet, critic and author of Eritrea's national anthem, **SOLOMON TSYHAYE** (1956) has served as Director of the Cultural Affairs Bureau in Eritrea's Ministry of Education. "The Tithe of War" is from his book, *Sabel* (1994). He is completing a book on Eritrea's oral poets.

Penn State University professor **CHARLES CANTALUPO** is the author of the book of poems, *Light the Lights* (Red Sea Press, 2004), three books of translations of Eritrean poetry, and books on Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Thomas Hobbes. He has written and directed the new documentary, *Against All Odds: African Languages and Literatures into the 21st Century*.

GHIRMAI NEGASH is assistant director of the Institute for the African Child, African Studies Program, Ohio University, where he teaches African literature and African languages. Founder-chair of the Dept. of Eritrean Languages and Literature of the University of Asmara, Eritrea (2001-2005), he is the author of *A History of Tigrinya Literature in Eritrea. The Oral and the Written 1895-1991* (Leiden, 1999).