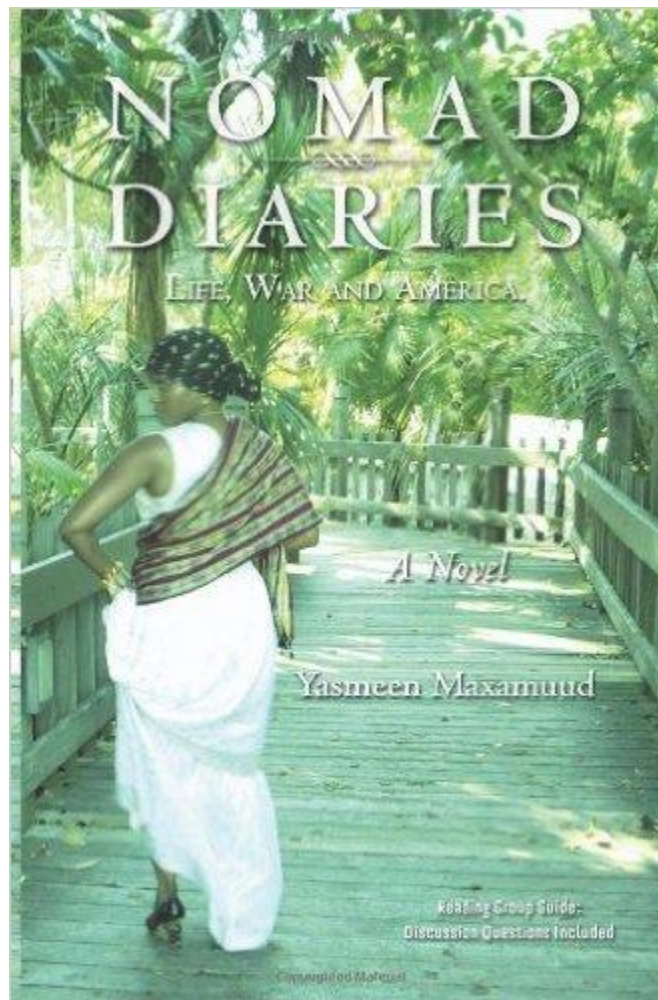


**The Horrors of Rape in *Nomad Diaries: Life, War, And America*
by Yasmeeen Maxamuud**

**Mansour Mohammed Ali Faraj, Ph.D. Scholar
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Abstract

Unfortunately, rape has become the most unreported atrocious crime that the Somali women face in the Somali Civil War, and for this reason, Maxamuud takes on the responsibility

to address and tackle this issue as she brilliantly creates space for the victims of rape and gives them a voice to articulate their suffering and pain resulting from the catastrophe of rape. Through the portrayal of such an experience, the novel attempts to increase the public awareness among people about rape as a crime of war committed against women. What follows is an endeavor to investigate the horrors of rape through the eyes of one of the female characters, Henna Gedi, and her shattered existence since she was gang-raped at the age of fourteen in Somalia, then her existence in both the refugee camps in Kenya and in America. Through tracing Henna's testimony, her accounts with explicit representation of sexual trauma, and its effects on her life, this paper attempts to examine rape as a tool used for the violation of human values and destruction of an individual's identity, a suitable approach for genocidal war.

Key Words: genocidal war, rape, trauma, pain, shame, guilt



Yasmeen Maxamuud

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Introduction

Through a wide reading on women's issues, it is obvious that the rights of women are violated everywhere and every time. Not only are their rights of freedom, independence, property, equality with men through ensuring their equal access to, and equal chance in holding positions in both political and public life, and equal opportunities in education, health care and employment, but also their identities and their personhood are violated. And this is the most pervasive violation of rights of women in the world today because of widespread crimes of

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gender-based violent acts that include murder, rape, sexual abuse and harassment, forced marriage, forced prostitution, and forced pregnancy.

These issues have become the hottest debated topics to investigate, explore and depict in all mass media, history, sociology, and feminist works. Everyone represents such issues from his or her own perspective without the full knowledge of the suffering, pain, and trauma that women experience all over the world. What they try to do is just to reveal what they watch, read, or listen about atrocities on women in the time of peace and conflict, and represent it in the form of facts and figures. Therefore, they do not cover the victim's real experience which they try to tackle. As Somali proverb says “‘*Colka ninka soo arkay iyo kan loogo warama si ugama wada cararaan*. It can be translated as “the one who experiences conflict and the one who hears about it will have different fears”. (Gardner and El Bushra : 21)

For example, the woman's experience of rape has been one of the worst experiences, which an outsider cannot catch a hold of it, with all of its real trauma. Though rape has become a crime occurring every day, it goes unreported because the victims, in the words of Ann Burton “fear that their families will blame them, communities will reject them or simply because they feel ashamed to talk about it” (Esipisu). In fact, rape has become an unspeakable atrocity that is too horrible to utter loudly as Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery*, points out that “To speak about experiences in sexual or domestic life [is] to invite public humiliation, ridicule, and disbelief”. (Herman: 28) Copelon further makes this point clear by saying:

Women are terrified, at best, reluctant to come forward and charge rape. Admitting rape in a sexist society is a public dishonoring and has consequences for the ability to continue or build relationships with one's community and with male partner...To charge rape is to risk retaliation and death, a risk heightened by war and by knowing and being known to the rapist. To charge rape usually is to risk being raped again- figuratively at least - by the law enforcers. (Kaufman and Williams : 46)

Moreover, according to Heaven Crawley, the violent acts committed against women have “typically been considered outside the realm of international law” as such violent acts are “considered within the private sphere, and not the public sphere; international law has not adequately addressed these women's needs for protection”. (Kaufman and Williams : 48) Thus, though both national and international laws began to address and recognize rape as a crime of

war, such international agreements and national courts failed to provide protection to the aggrieved because, “the effectiveness of such tribunals and international law to take action is limited by effective implementation and enforcement by the international community”. (Kaufman and Williams : 46) “As a result, rape has reached epidemic proportions and run “virtually no risk of investigation let alone prosecution and punishment”. (AFRICA-ASIA: Gender-based Violence: A Silent, Vicious Epidemic)

The failure of the international community results in putting women “into a position of having to take action by working together to publicize the situation,” (Kaufman and Williams : 46) and of being the representatives whose role is to “lead, coordinate, and advocate for efforts to end conflict-related sexual violence” (Vogelstein) against women and children in order to increase the awareness of the need to implement the international resolutions that should have considered sexual violence against women, not as cultural, but as criminal, and not as a woman’s issue, but as a human rights issue. Therefore, they gathered together and originated what is called ‘consciousness – raising’ group that aims at empowering women to breach and overcome the barriers of privacy, denial, and shame, to support one another, and to take collective action. It is also aimed at increasing levels of public awareness.

Moreover, due to such a failure and powerlessness to intervene, represent and end rape, it falls to the tenets of literature to be the umbrella under which such violations are to be addressed, represented and publicized. It is literature that offers a sole means for an explicit representation for rape, in which a woman’s voice can be heard, her feelings can be felt, and her experience of trauma, pain and suffering can be shared. Indeed, it is literature through which one freely can investigate women’s perspectives on rape, explore and examine their psychological trauma.

In *Nomad Diaries: Life, War, And America*, Yasmeeen Maxamuud, the Somali novelist, takes on the responsibility to address and tackle the horrors of rape that Somali women face during and after the Civil War. She brilliantly creates space for the victims and gives them a voice to articulate their sufferings and pain resulting from the catastrophe of rape. Through such experiences, the novel tries to increase public awareness towards rape as a crime of war committed against women.

What follows is an endeavour to investigate the horrors of rape through the voice of one of the female characters, Henna Gedi. Henna belongs to an elite family. She is the daughter of Cartan, the Foreign Minister of Somalia. The novel captures her shattered existence since she was gang-raped at the age of fourteen in Somalia, then her existence in both the refugee camps in Kenya and in her resettlement in America.

Due to the fact that the understanding of the experiences of Somali women who were raped during Civil War has been largely unexplored, the current paper attempts to examine rape as a tool of violation and destruction of individual identity and a suitable approach for genocidal war.

Rape: Definition and Function

In most societies, especially the Eastern ones, a woman's chastity is considered more valuable than her life itself; it is chastity that defines what a woman is. It is "the veracity of honor". (Maxamuud : 65) This is to say that "the identity of the proper woman is thus distilled to her sexual honor, which provides a woman with self-esteem and standing in a society". (Wingfield and Bucur : 210) To put it differently, by losing her virginity, not only does a woman lose her honor, but she also violates the most important cultural code that is the basis of family honor, especially the honor of men "whose masculinity is reflected in its control of female sexuality". (Cohen-Mor : 33) When a woman is raped, she is seen a dishonorable person who deserves not only to be physically punished, but to be also killed in the name of honor. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, for example, Othello, as an eastern moor, suffers a Hegelian conflict, a conflict between two rights, love and honor. He loves Desdemona strongly. However, misled by Iago through using her handkerchief as proof that Desdemona deceived him through her love affair with Cassio, Othello kills her only to avenge his honor as he believes that she has brought dishonor to him. Thus, the greatest dishonor that ruins a man results from the sexual misconduct of his wife, sister, daughter, or even mother.

Rape is the most tragic catastrophe women and girls hear about and fear from. It is also the most important topic they are warned about. In most of the societies, especially the Eastern ones, the fear of being raped is instilled on girls from an early age. In this sense, rape "haunts the lives of women on a daily basis: it is the stranger approaching on the street; the violent husband or partner at home". (Niarchos : 270) In fear of becoming victims of rape, they are "instructed to

shield [their] purity”, (Maxamuud : 65) to control their sexuality and keep their virginity safe. They are also taught and socially conditioned to be wary of being raped as Catherine N. Niarchos confirms that:

We learn to adjust from an early age: from fairy tales to the classics, we are conditioned to the fact that we are vulnerable to attack at any time because of our gender. We arrange our lives accordingly; rape is an effective means of social control. (Niarchos : 270)

It seems difficult to define rape because of the various varied contexts in which rape functions. Basically, according to the American law, rape can be defined as “an act of enforced intercourse by a man of a woman without her consent”. (Hubbard : 6) It is solely defined as an act that is forced, manipulated, or coerced on women by men. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, it is defined as “the act or crime, committed by a man, of forcing a woman to have sexual intercourse with him against her will, especially by means of threats or violence; the abduction of a woman, usually for the purpose of sexual violation”. (Milionis : 2) According to The Explanatory Note of the Rome Statute, rape refers to the rapist’s invasion of the woman’s body by a sexual intercourse that results in the penetration of the rapist’s sexual organ, penis, into the victim’s anus or vagina. (No Hiding Place: Politically Motivated Rape of Women in Zimbabwe : 5)

It is worth noting that regardless of her consent or willingness, a woman can be easily raped when she is “impaired, intoxicated, drugged, underage, mentally challenged, unconscious, or asleep”. For instance, little young girls can be seduced, and then, be raped by men. In Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the Southern, African - American Marguerite, of eight years old, for example, is seduced and raped by her mother’s boyfriend, Mr. Freeman. Similarly, Bone, in Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina*, is also physically and sexually raped since the age of five by her stepfather, Daddy Glen.

In this kind of rape, rape is motivated by the rapists’ sexual desires. While for the rapist, committing rape is such a pleasant sex, for the victims, it is nothing but an act of violence and violation. As Ann J. Cahill states, “we may perhaps aver that by the act of rape itself, the assailant has had sex with the victim, but the victim has not had sex with the assailant”. (140) According to Jocelyne Scutt, rape is generally relevant to sex; however, it is not based on

sexuality warmly linked with loving, caring, consideration that is seen in consensual sex, love affairs, for instance. In the act of the rapist, it is the sex act that is basically committed with power and violence. So Scutt concludes that rape is “a manifestation of power, aggression, violence and brutality specifically directed *through* sex. It is not ‘not sex’”. (Jordan : 15 - 16) Moreover, according to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), it is not about sex, but an act of torture aimed at “intimidation, degradation, humiliation, discrimination, punishment, control, or destruction of a person”. (Carey : 72) Judith Herman also states that rape leads to psychological destruction and ruin of the woman’s life. Herman further, highlights:

The essential element of rape is the physical, psychological, and moral violation of the person. Violation is, in fact, a synonym for rape. The purpose of the rape is to terrorize, dominate, and humiliate his victim to render her utterly helpless. Thus rape, by its nature, is intentionally designed to produce psychological trauma. (Herman: 57)

To be raped is, therefore, to be personally and psychologically violated, humiliated, dominated, and destroyed. Rape, then, constructs male’s domination and female’s subordination. According to Superson, it is believed that it is natural for a woman to be raped. From the male’s perspective, she is an object to be enjoyed and used for his profit. Thus, it validates that a female is “for men: to be used, dominated, and treated as objects” (Superson : 191) with a purely sexual function. As a result, it is best understood as a violation and a denial of the woman’s personhood and utter subjectivity. As Carolyn M. Shafer and Marilyn Frye point out that when being raped, the woman is violated at the center of her personal domain, the traits and properties that make one a person. It translates her into “a being who is in someone’s domain with no control of her own domain”. (Don E. Marietta : 119) For the rapist, the woman is a “mere object who [is] there to be used whenever the rapist feels the need to do so”. (Hampton : 135) Jean Hampton further indicates that, “it is the expressive content of the action - both of its commission and results - representing the rapist as master and the victim as inferior object”. (Hampton : 135).

On the other hand, rape can also be motivated by resentment, enmity, and revenge oriented not only toward the victim, but toward her family and community as a whole. Such a kind of rape increasingly takes place in the armed conflicts and wars. Unlike the rape taking place in peace, rape, in wartime, or conflict, is not an act of accident resulting from the fact that a victim finds herself in the wrong place at the wrong time, but a skillfully and deliberately

organized act committed against women to gain goals that have nothing to do with sexuality. In short, it is a strategic and systematic weapon of war intended to terrorize, humiliate, and destroy a community and to sustain power through the destruction of its females.

To put it differently, in patriarchal societies where male's honor and pride depends on the woman's sexual virtue, according to Human Rights Watch, rape becomes more and more successful "to translate an attack against one woman into an attack against an entire community or ethnic group". (Shanks and Schull) According to Berman et al., the females' bodies "become a battlefield where men communicate their rage to other men, because women's bodies have been the implicit political battlefields all along". (Kurytnik : 159) In this sense, the strategic function the rape serves is to demoralize and dominate the community of the enemy through sexual domination and controlling the enemy's females, and that is a clear message to signify the weakness, inadequacy, and powerlessness of men, who are unable to protect their women from rape. This is to say that when women are gang-raped in public, in front of their families, neighbors, villagers, the rape is considered a direct attack against their male relatives.

Rape is also seen as an approach of genocide. It is used as an instrument of genocide because of its effectiveness in destroying not only the victim's family, but also "that aspect of the group as a whole that is more than the sum of its individual parts ... the substance and glue of community that lives on when individual members die". (MacKinnon : 225) Genocidal rape is defined as:

a systematically organized military tactic of terror and genocide. Used to (1) generate fear in the subdued population, (2) humiliate the population (both men and women), (3) derogation of women (spoilage of identity), (4) create a cohort of mixed-ethnic children to maintain the humiliation /spoilage/ domination. Such a use of sexual assault is an orchestrated tactic of warfare. (Mullins and Rothe : 21)

The genocidal rape is used to impregnate women to produce ethnically cleansed children. They are recognized as children of the enemy and subjected to stigma, maternal rejection, statelessness, and abandonment. Such a pregnancy is used as "a form of ethnic cleansing, because the woman is forced to bear a child that has been "ethnically cleansed" by the blood of the rapist". (Shanks and Schull) MacKinnon gives a complete description of the genocidal rape:

This is ethnic rape as an official policy of war in a genocidal campaign for political control . . . It is specifically rape under orders. This is not rape out of control. It is rape under control. It is also rape unto death, rape as massacre, rape to kill and to make the victim wish they were dead. It is rape as an instrument of forced exile, rape to make you leave your home and never want to go back. It is rape to be seen and heard and watched and told to others: rape as spectacle. It is rape to drive a wedge through a community, to shatter a society, to destroy a people. It is rape as genocide. (MacKinnon : 187)

Situation in Somalia

In Somalia, where the conflict was defined by the clan-based division, rape became an effective tool to advance the goal of ethnic cleansing there. It was the worst means the warring factions used; rapists tended to target female members of opposing factions. The militiamen “had violated mothers, wives, grandmothers, and pregnant women, indiscriminately”. (Maxamuud : 69) For them, “it was the women’s bodies which provided perfect vehicles for revenge”. (Maxamuud : 69) During the conflict, women were raped in front of their husbands, children and relatives. According to UNHCR reports, about sixteen women were raped over the body of their dead husband, child, sibling or other relative. Almost in all the attacks, women were raped by more than one rapist. Sometimes as many as ten men took turns in a gang-rape. Others were abducted, imprisoned in apartments where they were subjected to rape multiple times and gang-rape.

After fleeing the violence, women were in danger of being gang-raped in the refugee camps, where they became more and more vulnerable, especially “those who leave the camps in search of fuel with which to cook - predominantly women and girls - are at risk of being attack” (Kaufman and Williams : 47) as it is stated that “more than 80 percent of the rapes occurred when women left in search of water, firewood or grass for animal fodder”. (Kaufman and Williams : 47) The number of Somali refugee women who were raped in Kenyan camps before 1993 was not known, but it was likely to have been in the high hundreds or even thousands. Between February to August 1993, about 192 victims of rape were interviewed in the Kenyan refugee camps as it is stated that:

Just over 100 incidents had occurred after the refugees had crossed into Kenya, while 85 had occurred in Somali territory. The age-span of the victims was from four years old to 56. In August 1993 alone 42 additional cases of rape were reported. All of these occurred in the camps in the North Eastern Province, in the Dadaab area. (Gardner and El Bushra : 71)

Fowzia Musse, in ‘War Crimes Against Women and Girls’, deals with Somali women victims of rape in Kenyan camps through interviewing some of these victims. Among these interviewers were Maryam and Hibaq. Maryam was 38 years old, from of the Marehan clan. In the hut at Ifo camp, she was raped by six of the nine unknown attackers. In the interview, she tells her painful story:

They came into the house with guns and knives and told us to give them our money. We didn’t know them. . . We were so scared, we gave them everything. Then they began to beat me. They beat me for hours and then six men raped me. After the rape I was in so much pain I could not walk. (Gardner and El Bushra : 74)

Hibaq, a 40-year-old woman, was another old one who was gang raped by three strange assailants in at Liboi camp in March 1993. While sleeping with her family, she was:

dragged me out of the house and then searched the house for money. They couldn’t find any so they dragged me back inside and began beating me...‘They slapped me on my ears and even now I can’t hear in one ear. No one came to help me. They were too scared. Then all three raped me in my own house while my children were there. One of them held a gun at my throat while the other raped me and then they changed places. For one hour they raped me and then they went to another house. (Gardner and El Bushra : 74 - 75)

Asalim’s story is another evidence. She was a 20-year-old Ogadeni woman. When sleeping with her husband two unknown men entered their house, intimidating them and taking all of their possessions in the hut. She explains:

They took me to the bush outside the camp. I was so scared that no sound was coming from my mouth. They asked me what clan I was and then told me to remove my clothes. Both men raped me – each twice. (Gardner and El Bushra : 74)

Yasmeen Maxammuud also sheds light on what the women faced in Kenyan camps. Shirwac, as a keen observer, witnessed the depression and horror the Somali women refugees faced in the camp there. For instance, Sulekha, his favorite Eeddo (fraternal aunt) was victimized with great brutality that caused her death. When she was gathering “wood from Dhuxul Cad”

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(Maxamuud : 170) and a “very homely looking man attacked her with great cruelty”. (Maxamuud : 170) After many efforts, he captured her with the help of other man who “wrestled her to the ground”. (Maxamuud : 170) This cruel man “salivated with excitement as he violently tore her clothes off, revealing her willowy, and shivering frame. He violated her with the speed only much practice can bring”. (Maxamuud : 170) Other assailants, in Shirwac’s words:

.....caught up with the homely man and took turns. Three men had raped her when her wide-open eyes fogged with death, her unrelenting body went stiff, and a trickle of body discharge, escaped from her screaming jaws. She had ducked similar death before. They finally took her the way she had prayed not to go. (Maxamuud : 171)

Henna as a Victim of a Genocidal Rape

In *Nomad Diaries: Life, War, And America*, Yasmeeen Maxamuud invites us to witness the atrocities perpetrated against women in Somalia and the personal violation of Henna, a 14- year old girl, is a testimony to it. Henna, being innocent and unalarmed at the adverse situation during the Civil War in 1990, was gang-raped by her own fellow Somali men. The novel effectively portrays the brutalization of rape that scares her mind, soul and body for ever through tracing three separate moments of her identity disruption: the moment of the conflict and her being forced to leave her home to escape persecution; the moment of encampment in Kenya; and the moment of refuge in the United States. These three moments showcase a painful portrayal of Henna; a journey full of misery, pain, despair, depression, shame, alienation, and deep psychological trauma.

Somalia is a patriarchal society where “*women are considered the upholders of the honour of the family and it is their behaviour which becomes the mark of family honour*” (Shipway : 47). It is, therefore, mothers’ “responsibly to keep these girls in line” (Maxamuud : 222). Since her childhood, a girl is “instructed to shield her purity... No other topic was as important as her j purity” (Maxamuud : 65). In such a society, the family pride and honor strongly depended on the girl’s sexual purity as the narrator confirms that “*Keep your purity and your honor your family*” (Maxamuud : 65). For a Somali family, such honor is the only true treasure family possesses. It is the honor that makes her “*male relatives [...] walk tall, knowing [she is] a pure girl*” (Maxamuud

: 65). It also allows “some mothers to walk tall while others slouched in embarrassment because of their daughters”. (Maxamuud : 222)

Moreover, as it is emphasized in the text that in the Somali society, a woman is valued for the bride-wealth, payment called ‘*gabaati*’, she will bring to her family. In her comparison between an American women with Somali ones, Nadifo, in her conversation with Amy, highlights that the value of a pure woman is through her *gabaati*, dowry, for her family as she points out that men do not like those who have lost their chastity in adultery or rape:

“He touch you, another man touch you, then no money for you when marry.”
...“Yes, when girl pure, no man touch. Money do a lot. But when girl go with this and that one, no money for her family and everybody say she no good”.
(Maxamuud : 161 - 162)

Thus, when being raped, women are stripped “not only of their economic assets (food, clothing, jewelry, money and household furnishings) ... but also of their political assets, which are their virtue and their reputation”. (Gardner and El Bushra : 80) Hence, one of the consequences of rape is that a girl’s social status is shattered in the eyes of the community when she loses her honour. She also becomes rejected by suitors. It is reputation that makes “revered families [...] compete for [their] purity”. (Maxamuud : 65) “Good reputation,” for Nadifo, “means great marriage proposals and prosperity for a family”. (Maxamuud : 222)

These cultural norms have their negative impact on women and girls. Indeed, in the civil war, Somalia became a living hell for women as they were subjected to gender-based violence, as Dorothy Q. Thomas and Regan E. Ralph, in ‘Rape in War: Challenging the Tradition of Impunity’, argue that in a patriarchal society where a family puts a great importance on the woman’s honor and becomes stigmatized when its woman’s honor is violated by rape, the rape seems to be more and more an effective tool to achieve the goal of destroying the victim and her family as it is stated that, during the time of armed conflicts, the armed men, by rape, “can succeed in translating the attack upon an individual woman into an assault upon her community”. (Hubbard : 2)

In the novel under the study, due to Cartan’s ties to Barre’s corrupt and brutal regime, not only did the parents, become the victims of the new social and political order resulting from a tortuous civil war, but their daughter, Henna, was also targeted by the attackers. In the attack

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against his mansion, while some of the attackers were killing men with their Guns and AK-47, others were looking for Henna through whom they intended to use their manhood as a weapon to cause a permanent impact on Cartan's family and clan. This became apparent through the attackers' leader's conversation with Nadifo. When she offered herself in place of her daughter by saying, "Take me, please!" Nadifo screamed. "She is innocent! Don't destroy her life"! (Maxamuud : 61) The leader, Mahad, ensures her that she was useless as a married woman while her pure "daughter is enough to teach [her] whole clan lesson"! (Maxamuud : 61)

In spite of all Nadifo's appeals, Henna was brought and came under the mercy of men who never show any sense of mercy or humanity. She was but a "captured prey" (Herman : 42) captured by wild wolves. She was terrorized and gang-raped by all of them. Liban Culusow, whose appalling hands appear everywhere on her body, was the first to attack her. Then, one by one they raped her, emptying their hatred into her. (Maxamuud : 64) Her predators made her powerless, helpless, and hopeless. For her, neither resistance nor escape was possible, her system of self-defense became overwhelmed and disorganized. In her overwhelming sense of helplessness, she adopted a position of complete surrender as Herman, further explains:

When a person is completely powerless, and any form of resistance is futile, she may go into a state of surrender. The system of self-defense shuts down entirely. The helpless person escapes from her situation not by action in the real world but rather by altering her state of consciousness. Analogous states are observed in animals, who sometimes "freeze" when they are attacked. These are the responses of captured prey toward a predator, or of a defeated contestant in battle. (Herman : 31)

From the beginning, Henna, bounded by helplessness and paralyzed by fear, lacking her family's protection, showed no response. She coped with her trauma by covering "her eyes with palms that trembled, refusing to recognize their presence, hiding in a darkness she hoped would remain". (Maxamuud : 61) During the attack, she looked like a rabbit, surrendering to her predators. She became frozen in silence, and totally destroyed as the narrator notes:

With the first, pain ripped through Henna, but by the time others had finished taking their turns she felt nothing. Her tears gave way to silence. The growingravaged her....they chose to violate her. She did not plead with them. She kept the pleas for herself. In the midst of it all, she wanted to keep some dignity for herself, something besides the confusion and revulsion, something besides the hurt. (Maxamuud : 64)

Thus, Henna was gang-raped by a number of men in front of her family and neighbors. In this situation as Folnegovic - Smalc states, “when gang rapes take place in large numbers, they represent a systematic attempt to break and annihilate the political and military enemy”. (Hubbard : 31) This is to say that she was raped not out of sexual desire, but out of hatred and revenge. Her rape was a genocidal one intended for ethnic cleansing as the narrator affirms that these armed men raped Henna because they:

wanted to destroy their enemies through her body. They wanted to permanently mark her, impregnate her with a hateful reminder, a vendetta. Her body would become a causality of war, a pillage of virtues, and a place to hold an enemy child until birth. (Maxamuud : 64)

Here, it is worth mentioning that Henna was not attacked by strange assailants. Her attackers were well-known to her and her family. They were friends, neighbors, and respected elders. Their leader, who now stood in the middle of their living room, ordering their deaths, is well-known to all of them. His name was Mahad, the brother of Henna’s best friend, Intisar. He was, furthermore, Geelle’s best friend. According to the narration, it was just six hours Mahad and other assailants had celebrated with the family in Geelle’s wedding, “eating and dancing into the wee hours of the morning [...] Hideously giddy, he busied himself snapping photos, dancing and greeting guests at the wedding”. (Maxamuud : 34)

Now, he was ordering his men to destroy Henna’s beauty that his mother, Khadija, had helped create for her. How ironical was it! While the mother patted lipstick onto Henna’s cute lips in order to make her skin vibrant, her son now damaged it. While she tried to bring Henna happiness, her son brought her only destruction and pain that would change her life forever. He as well as his heartless men succeeded to create a torturous moment in Henna’s life; a moment of transformation from joy to misery, from delight to darkness, from happiness to sadness, and from acceptance to rejection. It was the moment that she could not forget all her life. “I swear we will make you remember this moment for years to come!”, as one of her perpetrators ensures her, “You will not forget us. Our sons will be in your bellies, we will multiple through you - your men are cowards who cannot protect you”! (Maxamuud : 64) With these words, she was left “in a pool of blood, naked, shivering and frail”. (Maxamuud : 64) Nothing could console her or clothe her shaky unclothed body. Like any victim of rape, she desired nothing, but death. Only death could console her soul and mind as her pain was not only physical, but emotional. She lost

the most significant jewel she “had grown up safeguarding”; (Maxamuud : 65) her dignity and purity that she could not get back, were violently taken away from her.

Her psychological trauma did end after she fled Somalia. However, it just began to color her life with a feeling of “intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation”. (Herman : 24) She suffered from what is called: ‘self injury’, embodied in her feelings of guilt, shame, isolation, anxiety, despair and humiliation. As the structure of her own self and identity was totally shattered and damaged, her faith in herself in relation to her community was destroyed, and the confidence in herself was lost, too. Immediately after being attacked, she felt “the change was astounding”. (Maxamuud : 66) The narration further describes her psycho:

Her eyes buzzed with the chaos in the room-the immense debt she owed her family for losing her purity. Violence, guilt, weakness and pain clamored in her head. The tearing of the skin, the loud obnoxious hilarity, the casual conversations, the sobs, the moans, the loathing and the stench, each left anguish in its wake. (Maxamuud : 66)

As a traumatized person, she was no longer Henna, the beautiful girl with a beautiful smile, who was beautifully dancing in Geelle’s wedding a few hours before the attack. She became another person, miserable, distressed, and guilty. She lost her sense of self. Her body, which had once “been admired, loved, and cared for” (Maxamuud : 72) and considered “as a special prize” (Maxamuud : 72) for the whole family, was now invaded, injured, and defiled to the extent that she was no longer able to recognize her ankles or arms as she states: “If cracked mirror reveals my face, I turn my head quickly. I am no longer able to recognize myself”. (Maxamuud : 71) Her beauty that her mother once “admired to the point of embarrassment” has become “nothing but a vessel of shame”. (Maxamuud : 72) Such a loss of self is further testified by another rape victim, Nancy Ziegenmayer: “The person that I was on the morning of November 19, 1988, was taken from me and my family. I will never be the same for the rest of my life”. (Herman : 41)

Having been consumed by her inner pain, Henna lost her efficacy to sustain life and regain the sense of continuity of self. Her physical pain of both the rape and the pregnancy were never felt as she no longer possessed the ability to feel it. Since those dirty men delivered her to an early death, she was not physically but spiritually dead. She became an empty shell, barely existing, not knowing how to resume the normal course of her life since she lived a life-in-

death! This is to say that when losing her chastity, she almost lost her life. Thus, at the moment of her trauma, her sense of life filled with happiness, enjoyment, hopes, and dreams, was stopped, her feeling of belonging was lost, and her view of life together with trust in the world around her was totally destroyed. Hence, she also felt socially dead as Herman affirms that “When trust is lost, traumatized people feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living”. (Herman : 37) To show how the trauma disrupts a victim’s bonds with others, Herman quotes a rape victim’s description:

There’s no way to describe what was going on inside me. I was losing control and I’d never been so terrified and helpless in my life. I felt as if my whole world had been kicked out from under me and I had been left to drift alone in the darkness.
(Herman : 40)

A rape victim, according to Herman, goes on to be in dire need of her family’s assistance and support in her struggle to overcome her shame and to arrive at a fair assessment of her conduct, to avoid these traumatizing sequences of the rape and to rebuild self-esteem and renew self-respect. A supportive response from other people may mitigate the negative effects of the attack, while a hostile or negative response may compound the damage and aggravate the traumatic syndrome.

From the moment of her tragedy, Henna tried to cry for her mother so as to gain her support and sympathy. However, her cry was not answered and that increased her feeling of being abandoned, encountering her trauma alone as a scapegoat living at the margin of the community. Nadifo, seeing her daughter in the hands of the hardened men, showed no sign of awareness about her daughter’s destruction. However, her mind was fully aware of the severe consequences this would have on the entire family. She busied herself only with the trauma of the family’s dishonor.

Furthermore, during the encampment in the camps in both Fadhi Xun and in Kenya, she experienced shame, guilt, and marginalization, particularly when she became pregnant. These issues were exacerbated by her family’s cruel and hostile attitude. Since she realized that she became pregnant, she never found any sympathizer who might help her relieve her soul of its trauma. Instead, she received only stares of hate and blame. As such a pregnancy of a child of the enemy was seen as a horrendous shame, they began stigmatizing and hating her, treating her as

guilty. They continuously blamed her for bringing shame on the family. Her mother, for example, began to talk differently as she was stooped with shame as she repeatedly reminded her daughter, “In six more months you [would] shame the family further, people [would] whisper about us once again”. (Maxamuud : 68) Thus, instead of helping Henna, her mother talked about family shame from the entire ordeal and added burden and worry to the sickness Henna felt. Here, Henna was left displaced: “No one ever acknowledged [her] pain. No one ask(ed) how [she was]. How painful it was. It [was] as if people forgot the attack and now remember only the disgrace”. (Maxamuud : 72)

Even during her labor, they seemed so cruel. Her aunt, Qorsho, attacked her with her cruel, rough hands, inflicting more pain. Everyone was no longer aware of her pain; even the mother, instead of sharing Henna’s pain, her “stares and scrutiny were as unbearable as the pain”. (Maxamuud : 75) Indeed, Henna felt appalled by their cruelty, mentally paralyzed by their hostile response to her trauma. Here, she wondered “How [could] they think of disgrace and honor when my entire life was in danger of slipping through their hateful hands? Their only objective was to preserve appearance”. (Maxamuud : 76)

In addition, due to the pressure of the cultural norms that reinforced male members of Cartan’s clan and family and the fear of the gossip, in the camp, which might damage the reputation, they also victimized Henna through imprisoning her in a small shack till her labor. They believed that the family’s honor and their own masculinity were on the line. And since they “lost the war once, they were not about to lose it again with Henna’s disgrace”. (Maxamuud : 69) As a result, she was alienated, not allowed to be in touch with or even to talk to anyone in the camp, even her family, who she met only at meal times.

Her feelings of shame and guilt were also aggravated by the moral judgment of others. In the Somali culture, it is the unmarried woman or girl that should bear the burden of rape. A raped girl is seen as dishonored, regardless of the cruelty of the rapist and the victim’s innocence and weakness. People can recount and mourn only their tragedies, their loss of wealth, and their loss of lives, but not the issue of genocidal rape, as whatever they recount, the girl is dishonorable when she is raped; they do not show any sympathy for the dishonored females as if they “forgot the attack and now remember only the disgrace”. (Maxamuud : 72) In the other words, in the

ethnic cleansing of 1990, all Somali females of different ages and social status, mothers, wives, grandmothers, and pregnant women, were all indiscriminately violated by the militia. Yet, “it was the adolescent victims who were blamed, shamed for not fighting harder. The stomachs of pregnant women were gutted to eliminate future enemies, yet it was the girls who did not show firm resistance”. (Maxamuud : 69)

Henna was gang raped because of the lack of her family’s protection. It was out of her hands as she repeatedly affirmed that “it is not my fault. No, it is not my fault”! (Maxamuud : 72) However, she felt disrespected in the eyes of others. She became anxious and afraid that people, especially, elderly women, would gossip about her, only to defile her reputation. Therefore, she:

.....grew suspicious of any congregation she saw around her. She assumed all conversations were about her, to disparage, and lament her situation. She grew away of any hushed talk. Any misplaced glance confirmed her worst fears. (Maxamuud : 69)

While Henna failed to gain fairness, relief, and hope from her mother as well as others, it was only her father, who had handled it better. He was willing to recognize her innocence. Henna, in more details, explained her father’s supportive response and its impact on her:

Each of his merciful glances fills me with hope. The injustice of the violence against me is ever present in his eyes. He makes me feel safe. He assures me that I am not at fault, that he was to blame for it all. His silence nurses my wounds. (Maxamuud : 71)

In America, moreover, Henna expected that such an awful life would be changed. However, her life, in Minneapolis, was again marked by extreme shame, guilt, and insecurity as “she felt judged, despised, and underappreciated”. (Maxamuud : 77) Her misery was also resulted from her mother’s stubbornness and relentlessness that hindered any relationship between them. Therefore, to escape her home and overcome the feelings of alienation, she wanted to move to the campus at the University of Minneapolis. However, her parents rejected her request. In this case, she had no choice but to go on living in her parents’ apartment as if she were living in a jail.

In such an unfriendly environment, Henna had crafted an atmosphere for herself to dodge life existing in her home; she spent most of her time in reading literary books. It was through her literary experience, she tried to heal her wounds. As the narrator points out that:

She found the romance books so profound. It was as though the words pounced from the pages directly into her soul. She dreamed of an existence similar to the women in these books. Their lives appeared perfect, and they lived every woman's dream. She inhaled the fabricated lines and carefully orchestrated scenes of each engrossing tale. (Maxamuud : 79 - 80)

Her dream was to live fully and be accepted regardless of her past. Fortunately, her dream came true through her relationship with an American man, named Braine, her senior at the college. She defied her family traditions and religion and married him. For her, Brain was the most suitable husband as she described him, "as generous, handsome, kind, and fun". (Maxamuud : 249) With him, she had found bliss, acceptance, and safety. The narrator further describes him as:

.... attentive and romantic, playful and ambitious. She was whole in his presence. He never made her feel inadequate or imperfect. When her past was painful, he offered open arms and a listening ear, constantly reminding her that he loved her. (Maxamuud : 250)

Unfortunately, Henna's dream did not last forever. It began evaporating because of her husband's obsession with the Somali community in Devon Woods, a suburb of Los Angeles, which became a bit excessive for her. She did not want him to associate with them because of her past. According to her, her people "had a way of outing people's business without permission". (Maxamuud : 262) Therefore, she "felt vulnerable, considering her past. She always approached the community with caution, knowing full well she did not want them to pass judgment on her". (Maxamuud : 262) For this reason, "She avoided ceremonies which forced images she had fought hard to forget. She often wondered if her attackers were present in the same room". (Maxamuud : 263)

As a result, she ran away from her life with her American husband, and moved to New York. Her journey to New York was a journey to her final destiny, her death. In New York, she married Naif al Ali, a prince from Khuzamayah Saqr Island. Unlike Braine, Naif was aloof and abusive. His treatment of her was marked by force and violence as he began to beat her

regularly. As a result, it was unbearable for her to continue, and, therefore, she decided to leave and return to Minneapolis.

Her decision to return to her family was an indication that she had realized that her miserable life was due to her running away from her destructive past as the narrator points out that, “Tired of running, she was ready to embrace her past, and erase the illusion that had become her present”. (Maxamuud : 369) She was courageous enough to face the challenges and create normalcy. However, such a decision was nonsense. When her husband knew of her decision to leave, he saw her as a disobedient wife, and He shot her dead, and fled the country.

Conclusion

Yasmeen Maxamuud successfully offers an explicit representation of the crime of rape that the Somali women faced during the Civil War in 1990. Henna’s traumatic experience is a testimony to how the Somali militia used rape as an approach of genocide war using it to violate and destroy their enemy through the bodies of females. In war, rape functions as an instrument for male humiliation and defeat. Henna’s male relatives are wounded in their masculinity as they have not been able to protect their honour. Through rape as a strategic and systematic weapon of war, the rapists motivated by enmity and revenge intent to impregnate Henna in order to destroy their enemies through her body. In the patriarchal society, such “a stray implantation” (Maxamuud : 71) will be a hateful reminder of the loss of honour of the family in the future.

Through Henna’s voice, Maxamuud emphasizes that the traumatic impact of rape should be understood on the individual level rather than on its applying to the family. In this case, Henna’s emotional and physical destruction in the course of her life is not only due to her being gang-raped, but also to the silence and the negative attitudes of her family and society toward her as a dishonored woman. Lacking family support in her trauma, Henna is unable to heal her wounds; her life is severely marked by loss of dignity and self esteem, shame, and guilt. Even after leaving Somalia for America, she cannot forget her past. Fearing the past that would engulf her, she becomes alienated from her community, moving from place to place to run away from her destructive past. She realizes she has to go back to the same Minneapolis community to survive, but her cruel husband puts an end to her final flight. Rape of any kind, is not something

a woman can easily release herself from without some serious, sympathetic understanding and help!

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