

Sexual Abuse, Somali Sisters, and the Secretes of AMISOM (SASMO)

By Faisal A. Roble
Sept 17, 2014

Yesterday was a time of a relative peace, where Beerlula was both beautiful and honorable; today, she is cursed because she is at the cusp of being raped and bestially abused by men from afar. If Hadrawi eloquently portrayed Beerlula's beauty, Mahmoud Tukale exposed her distant fears that one day she may be condemned to be at the disposal of a "man from afar." Regrettably, she is today "looma ooyaan," or, a member for whom "the bell does not toll." The rest of us are in a stage of what Somalis call "sasmo," or bewilderment.

In a well-crafted report titled, "The Power These Men Have Over us:" Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by African Union Forces in Somalia," Human Rights Watch unreservedly washed Somalia's dirty linin in public. The September 8, 2014 Rights' report summaries painful incidents of rampant sex abuses, rape and pervert sexual activities committed by AMISOM soldiers against teenage Somali girls as well as adult women.



"This 71-page report documents the sexual exploitation and abuse of Somali women and girls on two AMISOM bases in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, since 2013. The AU soldiers, relying on Somali intermediaries, have used a range of tactics, including humanitarian aid, to coerce vulnerable women and girls into sexual activity. They have also raped or otherwise sexually assaulted women who were seeking medical assistance or water at AMISOM bases. Human Rights Watch interviewed 21 women and girls who described being raped or sexually exploited by Ugandan or Burundian military personnel serving with the AU forces."

The Rights' report comes at the tail end of a steady deterioration of Somali women's honor. Since 1970s, Somali artists have verbalized both the beauty and the apocalypse befalling the relationship women had with their counterparts, thus giving way to their current vulnerable social position. Whereas men presided over the destruction of their nation, Somali women lost protection, and some of them succumbed to an abhorrent slavery – that is sexual slavery in the hands of AMISOM soldiers.

From Respected Beauty Queen to Sexually Abused Subjects

The acentric British explorer, Sir Richard Burton of England, the first European to enter Harar from the East, praised both the beauty and the well-mannered Somali women. On his way to Harar in 1858, he was hosted by Garad Adan's Court and his wife, Garada (queen) Doobiro Doodi. Sir Burton was marveled at the queen's elegance, full stature, and the distinguished royalty like reception she gave him.

One hundred years later, a former British game hunter in East Africa in the 1940s once shared his observations about the beauty and regal nature of Somali woman. With much enthusiasm, he reported that when Somali woman basks in peace time, in which she thrives more than any other social group, to witness “her lanky walks,” and the balanced movement of her body parts one side at a time is truly scenic. The throwing of her arms sideways (laafyo tuurka), the twisting of her narrow waist line (dhex yar), and her gaze over her shoulders with her long neck (luqunteeda dheer), is as majestic as that of lion's leisurely walk.

Many songs describe similar attributes observed by that British hunter. My own choice of near-perfect words that describe the way a fearless Somali beauty queen walks in the narrow streets of her peaceful neighborhood is thus (I used these lines in honor of the late Saado Ali):

*Markay socoto talaabada, miisanka logu daray.
Dadku waxay yidhaahdaan, may daarin ciidee.
Daa-uus la moodyey.*

It translates into English this way:

*When she strolls elegantly,
and measurably moves one leg at a time;
People affirm with certainty,*

*that she did not touch the ground
but, only lightly pats the top soil like a peacock does.*

As urbanism quickly spread throughout Somali speaking regions in the 1970s, the culture of dating the opposite sex (friendship with the other sex) became the norm in this entirely Muslim society. Songs of love that adored Somali women filled the airwaves in our urban milieu.

In celebrating Somali women's beauty and grace, Hadaraawi's timely song, Baladwayn, hit in earnest Mogadishu's store fronts, soon to reach all corners of Somali regions. Baladwayn song marked the epitome of words of praise and homage for Somali women as personified by Beerlula:

Somali Version	English Translation
Timo boqonta joogoo, baal goray la moodoo Baarkana casaankii, bidix midig is gaadho Bul cad lagu sideeyo, badh ku seexanayso Barkanaysa qaaroo, huwanaysa baaloo Igu beertay lahashoo, u buseelay maan baran. Saaw goor barqa aho, bishu ay siddeed tahay Aniga iyo Beerlula, isku maanan soo bixin.	Beerlula was mesmerizing; her hair so long that almost it touched her waist, When spread, it comfortably covers her face from left to right, the thickness of it could form a pillow or a futon for comfort, Encountering Beerlula on that fateful noon of the 8 th day of the month marked a moment of instant love

However, fate had its own plans for Hadrawi; nothing substantive took place between him and Beerlula. Not knowing that this would be the first and last time to encounter her, the two departed company for good at the order of a hasty and injudicious driver. His prayers that some unforeseen mishap would happen to the lorry so that he could stay in Baladwayn for one more day remained a pipedream.

Another Beerlula, in the name of Iman, travels with love to the cold country, invading America with her stunning beauty. That too was 1970s. In an unprecedented way, Iman redefined what Black beauty should be - from the mixed-race based beauty that Jane Kennedy represented to Iman's ebony color. Thus, the Somali beauty queen opened doors for Campbell, Noemi, Waris, Tyra Banks and a host of African girls.

At radio Mogadishu and elsewhere songs of desire for and fantasy about the beautiful Somali women, continued. Yet, she never feared rape, or violent sex; just desire and mere lust:

*Iyadoo doog dhax jiiftoo, daawanaysa ubaxoo;
Shaw raaxo dhamacdo, durba garayskii furatoo;
Siidaysay timihii,
Aan is idhii madaysaa mise, mise waa dugsiisaa*

When loosely translated, it reads as such:

*At a rare moment of relaxation, whence she was laying on her back
Looking at and admiring the flower in her hand;
She showed her readiness by letting her hair down
Loosening her shirt and blouse, unafraid,
I, for one, longed for her lips, whilst aware that was only a mere daydreaming,*

That was then, when peace and societal tranquility were the norm and not the exception. We were contented with admiring our honorable Somali women; rape was not even in our daily vernacular, despite some corrupt elites during Barre's last days and moryan militia victimizing women in Mogadishu (see [Yasmeen's](#) excellent account on this issue).

Letting Beerlula Down

Following years of dictatorship, unemployment among the youth and a prolonged civil war from the 1980s through present time, Somali men neglected their counterparts. The men unceremoniously concocted tribal wars, national robbery, political conflict, ultimately perpetuating famine. Those men who can afford deserted the country in the millions to become slave laborers in the Middle East and elsewhere. Others carried their guns to senselessly kill each other. The early warning of the impending breakdown of Somalia's social contract was verbalized by women through artists in the late 1970s; they cried out loud, imploring their men to mend fences with them and protect the nation.

The impending disarticulation of the two sexes was captured by Mahmoud Tukale's play: "*Doob Qalanjadiis Gabay ma da lagu khasaaraa,*" (*Does an entire generation that forfeited its women a wasted generation?*). When this play was shown at the Somali National Theater, it rudely awakened the few conscious Somalis, but largely fell on deaf ears. By mid 1980s, Somali women were singing louder about the next apocalypse, the possibility of melting down of the cohesion of man-woman relationship in Somalia:

*Quruxda yaan u leenahay
Qalabka yaan u sidanaa
Mar hadaydaan wax na la qaban
Ma rag qaarad kale Jirabuu
Noo qoray Ilaahay.*

*For whom are we carrying our beauty?
Who shall possess the endowments God gave us?
If you failed to team up with us,
Are, therefore, here for other men from afar continents?
Is that how God intended for our fate...?*

The current sex scandals, sex abuses and bestiality of AMISOM soldier in Somali towns such as Mogadishu, Baladway, home to Beerlula, and Baydhabo, are taking place in a context where men from afar have finally arrived! They arrived with the intent to destroy Somalia, starting with its women.

Somali Woman as a Venerable Prey

With Somali men nowhere to be found, where some are refugees, others busy with looting whatever is left of the now infamous Somali carcass, women became disposable to African soldiers from afar (rag qaaradkale ka yimid). How? AMISOM soldiers in some instances pay for sex with under age Somali girls. Other times, they use the trappings of life such as food, medicine and sweets for the little ones. But the most potent way is raping teenagers and adult women at will.

For almost quarter of a century, Somalis in general and Somali women in particular did not have protection by a sovereign nation. The Human Rights Watch report is the iceberg of pervasive severe sexual acts that constitute nothing less than crimes against humanity.

The sites where reported rape activities, often against Somali teenage girls, took place are within a walking distance of the Presidential palace and from the building of the parliament. Since 2012, politicians in Mogadishu knew well beyond doubt that Somali girls regularly give sex (oral and other sexual pleasures) to AMISOM soldiers and their generals. They also knew that rapes were taking place in all over the regions where AMISOM soldiers are deployed.

The question is how much, not whether, the President, his Prime Minister as well as the President of the parliament, knew of these rape incidents and the thriving sex trade

between Somali girls and AMISOM soldiers. Local press in and around Mogadishu has been, according to reliable sources, silenced.



Different

Cartoons based in the West gauging public sentiment about AMISOM's Sexual Abuses in Somalia

On the other end, AMISOM's Djibouti born public relations officer, Mr. Hamud, an uninitiated soft-spoken soldier, was quick to flatly refute all incidents of abuses put forth by Human Rights Watch, notwithstanding sound findings that took thousands of FTE put together by abled attorneys and forensic experts. On the same day AMISOM's spokesman denied Rights' allegations, a lackluster President Hassan meekly expressed his mere concerns over Rights' allegations.

Rape as a Weapon of Humiliation

Rape, which is a form of violent and involuntary "sex", is one of the worst crimes one can commit against humanity. Rape is not sex. It is a powerful weapon to humiliate women and their families; its purpose is to make someone, often helpless female, feel dirty and less than.

The severity of the crimes contained in the Rights' report is only next to a mass murder. The raping of Aziza, age 17, Qamar, age 15, Deka, young, Girl 12 of Biodhabo city, age 12 is no lesser of a crime than crimes against humanity. As Kathy Migrigo writes, no story conveys gorier picture about the rape of Somali girls than that of "Girl 12:"

'A girl wasp working on her parents' farm on the edge of town when she was raped by a Ugandan soldier. "She wore a *sako* [long robe] and jeans under it," her mother said. "After tearing the jeans, he raped her. He cut her vagina. He wounded

her very badly. We don't know if he made that cut with the knife or just with himself." Somali soldiers nearby intervened. ([Wardheernews](#))

A cousin to Biodhabo girl, age 12, expressed how devastating the impact of raping of a young girl in the Somali society is. "The rape... became the source of destruction of our family," she said. For sure, the damage to the life of the young girl is irreversible.

Other girls were raped in hidden places where no one saw, except the rapists; in other instances, a known general coerced a teenage girl to have sex with him for \$10 – money probably donated in the form of AMISOM salaries by USA and/or EU. This is again a reminder that Western dollars are as dangers as the bullet that kills innocent civilians.

Also culpable contributors, if not potential witnesses, to this horrific national disgrace are the leaders of Mogadishu. These leaders allegedly looked the other way when they fully knew that famine stricken young Somali girls, young mothers with their infants on their heaps, regularly line up in front of Ugandan and Burundian bases for the sole purpose of giving sex in exchange for food or medicine needed for their households.



The proverbial bestial sex common among some African soldiers serving overseas is now being loaded down unto Somali girls and women. It is also Orwellian that some of the AMISOM soldiers who are indicted in the Rights' report had served in the past in the conflict-ridden country of the Democratic Republic of Congo, committing similar crimes against that country's girls and women.

President Hassan Sheikh could have done what the former dictator, Mingisutu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia, had done for his existential reasons. After the 1978 Ethio-Somali war, Ethiopia had to curtail any potential raping of Somali women by their Cuban benefactors. To their credit, the first rule of engagement given to Cubans by Ethiopians was to "not touch or even get closer to Somali/Muslim women."

When Cuban generals probed, "how to differentiate between Somalis and non-Somalis," they were told to look at the dress code. "Somali women wear "Dirac," long dresses," the Cubans were informed. After the word of the Somali "Dirac," becoming the most reliable shield against unwanted sexual solicitations towards Somali women, spread across ethnic and religious divides, millions of Ethiopians in the East gravitated towards

that simple dress. Because of that brief protection, today “Dirac” widely used beyond the confines of Somali region.

In its zeal to host foreign soldiers, Somalia should have had rules of engagement and jurisdictional arrangements. Both of these instruments don’t exist in Somalia, thus practically leaving Somali women vulnerable to be raped, or sexually abused by AMISOM soldiers.

In a sense, Somali women are at the behest of men from afar, as was predicted by our own song writer, Mahmoud Tukale, quarter of a century ago. As has been said elsewhere in a different context, Somali woman is “too far from Allah” and “too close” to the bestiality of AMISOM soldiers

All African soldiers in Somalia are not necessarily bad. But, AMISOM’s aggressive denial of the findings of the Rights’ report should not be taken lightly. Mogadishu has lately become an infamous home for torpedoing credible allegations, including murders, embezzlement, challenges to looted properties, and fleecing of post-civil war Somalia. As such, I am profoundly afraid the final verdict of this latest saga would leave Somali women in the cold. In Somalia, no one is accountable for any crime, past or present.

I suspect the national uproar over our girls will quickly fade away to the oblivion, and the victims would join the unenviable ranks of what Somalis call “looma ooyaan,” otherwise known as those for whom “the bell does not toll,” a cursed class the nation has in plenty.

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