Original Research Article

Leadership Personality and Social Dis-integration in Somalia

The aim of this study is to analyze the contributing factors that generated the current social disintegration in Somalia. The study employed qualitative method to generate and analyze the data from both primary and secondary sources. 13 prominent respondents participated through in depth interviews and the findings of this study shows that previous leadership personalities and their manipulation of the clan system are to blame for the current disintegration of the society in Somalia, the study also finds that unless social integration situation improves, the ongoing post-conflict reconstruction efforts may not succeed. Moreover, the study recommends that leadership in Somalia should prioritize the restoration of social trust so that Somalia's reconstruction process can succeed.

1. INTRODUCTION

The northern part of Somalia was colonized by the British while the Italian colony took the southern part of Somalia. Luckily in 1960 Somali became an independent country and different colonial legacies meant post-colonial leaders had to unite and integrate the two parts under a unified system of governance since the legal system, taxation and even the language the north and south used to conduct their day to day government businesses was different (Ismail, 2010: 64). Colonial powers also left behind a society that is somewhat divided as a result of their divide and rule tactics because the social groupings that emerged after the independence were almost all based on clan identity and this was later exploited and manipulated by most post-colonial leaders in Somalia.

Most post-colonial leadership personalities in Somalia has been characterized by a failure which can be seen as responsible for the collapse of the social fabric. As posited by a large body of literature, the failure and collapse of the Somali state rest on two key factors: A history of bad leadership and a culture characterized by clannism (Lewis, 1961, 2002, 2008; Elmi & Barise, 2006; Elmi, 2010; Adam, 1995; Harper, 2012; Falisse, Bertone, Alonso-Garbayo, Martins, Salehi & Martineau, 2015). One the other hand, studies on leader's personality have documented the importance of leader's figure in the ability to have positive effect on social integration and nation building during post-conflict reconstruction (Rotberg, 2014). This article therefore discusses the contributing factors that led the disintegration of the society in Somalia, especially the article aims to focus previous leadership personalities and policies that divided the society and fueled the civil war. The article is relevant due to the fact that Somalia is recovering from the effects of the war and is experiencing a period of relative stability and nation Building (Gure, Dahir, Yusuf & Foster, 2016). Several other studies have considered Somalia as post- conflict country from various dimensions (Farah & Handa, 2015; Giustozzi, 2016; Moe, 2017; Turner & Houghton 2015). Therefore, understanding leadership personalities and practices that led the disintegration and destruction of Somalia can potentially aid the current post-conflict reconstruction process.

2. THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP PERSONALITY

Studies of leadership has extensively generated many discussions that aimed to group criteria's that make great leaders. Most findings conclude that leadership personality has a key role in determining how leaders perform. In his leadership experience study, Professor Richard Daft defines leadership personality as "the set of unseen characteristics and processes that underlie a relatively stable pattern of behavior in response to ideas, objects, or people in the environment," (Daft, 2003: 119). However understanding leadership personality requires more than defining the term and in this section we elaborate different leadership personalities that scholars combined. Most researchers in the field of leadership used the five factor model to measure leadership personality, the model was first conceptualized by (Tupes & Christal, 1961) and it includes Conscientiousness which means how responsible, persistent and achievement oriented leaders are. Agreeableness is another factor that reflects the leaders ability to work and cooperate with others while Extraversion reflects the ability of the leaders to get comfortable and work with new people while remaining assertive to his/her goals. Emotional stability concerns the leader's ability to accept criticism and remain clam, and the final factor is Openness to experience which reflects how imaginative and creative the leader is (Daft, 2003).

Most leaders may have one or two of the above factors that reflects their personalities. Therefore, leadership personality is an important factor that either aids or impedes leader's performance. Hogan et al., (1996: 473) argues that "it is not what a person does, but how he or she does it (e.g., calmly, creatively, attentively, etc.) that determines effective performance" in other words, Hogan's assessment and several other studies (Mount & Barrick, 1998; Ployhart, Lim, & Chan, 2001; Smither, London, & Richmond, 2005) associate good leadership personality with effectiveness and better outcomes while bad leadership personality leads to bad outcomes, and it's this reason why this study aims to look how previous leadership personalities and their policies contributed to the disintegration of the Somali society.

3. METHODOLOGY

The method used to collect and analyze the data in this is study is qualitative and derived from two sources, primary and secondary data. The primary data is generated through in-depth interviews from knowledgeable sources, respondents that contributed in this study includes former and current Cabinet Ministers from different political groups, Academics and former and current Government Advisors, Clan Elders, Prominent Business Leaders and MP's. Sources obtained from different books and journals is also used as a secondary data.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Leader's Personality

Personality of some previous leaders in Somalia can be attributed to the current social structure because after only nine years of democracy General Mohamed Siad Barre aggressively seized the power through military coup in 1969, Barre did two irresponsible acts, first he overthrow the legitimate and democratically elected government, undermining the constitution and second he concentrated the political and military power to his clan to prevent another military takeover by creating an alliance called MOD which comprises three sub-clans of Darod namely Marehan, Ogaden and Dhulbahante (Lewis, 2005:226).

The MOD alliance had promoted clan supremacy that undermined the cohesion of the society because members of the alliance had enjoyed a privilege life while the rest of the society was struggling. President Barre demonstrated clan favoritism while oppressing anyone who opposed his injustice (Makhubela, 2010). His alliance had benefited from the state exclusionary policies and this planted the seeds of social mistrust and division. Although the MOD alliance had benefited some Darod sub-clans, it did not benefit the entire Darod family, in fact, Barre mistreated and oppressed some Darod sub-clans who he perceived to be a threat to his regime.

Barre had a personality that has zero tolerance for any form of opposition and demonstrated this by executing military and religious figures in 1972 and 1975 respectively. Apart from his clan favoritism, Barre created social animosity for his regime when he executed and imprisoned religious ulama for opposing unpopular regime policies that contradicted the teaching of Islam and the social norms. According to Lewis, (2005:219) Somalis are deeply attached to their Islamic faith and Barre's politically motivated intervention in the religious affairs has negatively affected his already damaged popularity in the society.
Some of the Academic respondents that participated in this study has expressed their opinions on the issues of leadership personality and its role in contributing the social mistrust and the disintegration:

The personality of previous leadership particularly Barre can be characterized by widespread corruption, political and economic favoritism and I think this has contributed to the social mistrust because a large portion of the society felt that they were treated unfairly since Barre distributed the national resources unevenly while oppressing his political opponents. The leadership style of previous leaders was based on defensive and manipulative personalities and this divided the society and weaken the state institutions. Barre was not alone in the corrupt activities in fact, President Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke is considered by many historians in Somalia to be the first politician who bribed MPs to secure their votes in the election of 60s. So i think their personality and their policies have in the past contributed to the disintegration of the society and destroyed the country. Therefore, to succeed the ongoing post-conflict reconstruction in Somalia, leadership must prioritize to re-integrate the society first.

Similar views were expressed by clan elders that witnessed the actions of pervious leadership which led the fragmentation of the society:

The personality of president Barre could explain why such a homogenous society disintegrated because after seizing the power through force, Barre started to favor his clan and oppress the rest of the society, he then started to pressure any section of the society he though could pose a threat to his regime, when rebel groups started to take up arms, Barre refused to leave peacefully to avoid total collapse, instead, Barre armed his loyalist and his clan members to defend his failing regime leaving a dis-integrated society behind, so I think he is to be blamed for the current social situation in Somalia and without restoring social trust, any reconstruction process will likely to fail due to the disunity of the society.

It's obvious from the above accounts that the personality of previous leadership in Somalia was characterized by corruption and power abuse. Previous leaders also failed to prioritize the establishment of inclusive institutions that are transparent, accountable and distribute resources evenly in the society, in fact, several studies have noted that shortly after independence, political leaders in Somalia started to bribe MPs to win their votes and this transformed the nature of the assembly from lawmaking body to money making tool that politicians used to enrich themselves (Lewis, 2002).

Lewis's assessment demonstrates the intent of most post-colonial leaders in Somalia was never to establish a democratic state that promotes inclusivity and public participation, respects human rights and due process, similar assessment were made by Castagno's (1964) study that concludes most educated Somalis after independence knew the incompetency and the inabilities of the Somali Youth League in 1960s to move the country forward, however, the educated elite in Somalia prioritized securing prominent government posts rather than informing the public and presenting an alternative system that would move the country in the right direction. Castagno's study illustrates the personalities of previous political class and how self-interest overshadowed the common good of the country and this over the years had destroyed the social fabric and later created a fragmented society.

Throughout the interviews, it is evident that personal traits of previous Somali leaders was shaped by the desire to remain in power and this resulted in personal rule and the promotion of authoritarianism. Due to the authoritarian traits in most of previous Somali leaders, there was mismanagement of resources and injustice through successive regimes. Personal traits of leaders might therefore largely perceive as responsible for the onset of social dis-integration of the Somali society. Specifically, the social disintegration phenomenon was evident in the leadership trait of president Barre, whose behavior grossly undermined the cohesion of Somali society.

The reasons given were that Barre promoted a patron-client networking with clans which he manipulated to control the polity. The result was rivalry among the clans who scrambled for positions, and in turn created an environment of insecurity rendering the society in deep divisions. Similarly, respondents expressed that, like many leaders in Somalia, the rise and fall of Mohammed Siad Barre (1969 – 1991) can be attributed to personality flaws.

President Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke's Personality trait was also perceived to have contributed to the corruption, nepotism, clan loyalty and patronage in the country. His personality trait resulted in personal rule where the Somali political system was transformed into a series of relations linking previous rulers closer to patrons, associates, clients, supporters and rivals who constitute the system, while the rest of the public was ignored to the margins. This gave the Somali polity a structure that is ultimately dependent on person's rather than social institutions that hold the society together. Therefore, changes in ruling elites resulted into changes in this web of persons. For example, the clans that are weak in one regime, became stronger in another depending on how the leadership chose to share and allocate resources and positions. As noted by Jackson and Rosberg (1982) the different personal characteristics, belief sets, or ambitions of most previous leaders in Somalia display similar features of behavior towards leadership failure.

4.2 Clan Manipulation

The leadership in the early years of the Somali independence politicized and manipulated the clan system, for instance, politicians compete the influence of their clan elders to secure their support hoping to represent their clan in the government. Politicians would then promote the influence of their clans by emphasizing how crucial their support is for the regime (Samatar, 2002). This process aimed to make the clan look relevant and powerful in the political arena and previous leaders tolerated and endorsed this corrupt practice since it allow them to easily manipulate and secure the support their clans by only buying the influence of view corrupt clan elders, this shows how previous leaders in Somalia instead of seeking the support of the wider society opted to promote clan based politics and manipulated their clan lineage to try and gain political power.

Unfortunately clan manipulation and corruption had negatively affected the effectiveness of pervious leaders and their regimes because the opponents of previous leaders had also mastered to mobilize and manipulate their clans, for example whenever a politician fails to secure government posts that he/she is after, they would mobilize their clans to oppose the regime and attack the character of their opponents, in his study of Somali polity, Castagno wrote "as soon as a leader gains national stature and prominence, his clan affiliation is exploited by his competitors, within and outside his political party, in order to reduce his appeal" (Castagno, 1964).

Previous leadership manipulation led the dis-integration of the society since leaders weaponized the clan system and portrayed the clans of their opponents as an enemy, this further complicated the country's unity because different leaders created different alliances that torn the society apart. A prominent historian who advised pervious governments had articulated how pervious leader's clan manipulation had affected the cohesion of the society:

Previous leaders used clan politics to manipulate the society, they divided the society based on their clans, and they then favored some clans over the others by rewarding them with high government positions while neglecting the rest of the society to ensure their regime survival, as a result, a lot of people in the country felt that they don't have an equal representation in the government and their concerns were purposefully ignored, the MOD alliance during Barre's military regime reveals the extent to which pervious leaders used clan based politics to undermine the unity of the society and weaken any resistance that threatens their rule and this has contributed to the mistrust in the society which later fueled the fragmentation of the society and the civil war that followed. It's crucial therefore to start healing the society's ills and restore trust and cooperation so that the country can recover from the ills of previous leadership and this task awaits the current and future leader's commitment and dedication.

Similar views were expressed by businessman who was also a former official of the Union of Islamic Courts in Somalia:

The main concern of pervious leadership was to remain in power and use any tactic that prolongs their regimes longevity, what they failed to understand was creating clan based alliances would alienate majority of the people in the country and could lead to social mistrust and fragmentation that could trigger clan conflicts, unfortunately their recklessness and clan manipulation tactics had cost the country's unity and today, Somalis do not trust one another simply because of the legacy of previous leaders and in my opinion, I think it's possible to restore social cohesion and trust, however, it requires time, resources and patient from current and future leaders.

The view of most respondents illustrates that, leaders in Somalia manipulated the clan system to reach their short term political goals. Most post-colonial leaders used the clan system to either win an election, prevent coups or oppress their opponents, president Barre for example promoted several generals from his Marehan sub clan to lead the military, he also ensure the domination of the MOD alliance in the civil servant and other sensitive government positions to make sure his regime was coup proof (Ingiriis, 2016:174.).

The failure of previous leaders to treat all citizens equally is widely documented by many scholars. Shortly after he took over the country through bloodless coup, President Barre vowed to establish a system that erases clannism, corruption and promised to create a just system that leads to prosperity and benefits all citizens equally, however the evidence shows otherwise and corruption, clannism and human rights violation became the norm.

In the 80s Barre completely centralized the power to his sub-clan of Marehan and even appointed some of his immediate family members to top government posts (Ingiriis, 2016: 190-191). These actions had produced clan grievances that breed hatred and division that later turn into an active civil war, therefore it's a well-documented history that policies and actions of previous leaders are to blame for the destruction of social fabric and this poses an obvious challenge to possibilities of social cohesion in today's Somalia.

The inference made from the above interviews indicates Personal rule as one of the dimensions of leadership failure in Somali political history. This sheds light on a significant factor that combined to form the genesis to social disintegration. Other factors related to this include among others patronage and clientelism, factionalism, succession crises and coups. A common method that previous leaders apply in personal politics is a type of behaviour involving coercion, violence and conspiracy. All these are personal traits of previous leaders mentioned by different respondents. The consequence of this style of leadership is the current post conflict society that obtains in Somalia with deep polarization in the social environment in addition to political insecurity that prevails.

Another factor that shapes the behaviour of previous leaders is the fact that they live in a constant fear of plots, coups or successions. As a result of this insecure environment, infightings between rulers and factions create a vacuum of effective ruling and induce leadership failure. Consequently, the authoritarian rulers become tyrants, and this weakens the state structure by imposing abusive and unrestrained policies. The results remain a socially disintegrated society stemming from personal rule (Anderson & Beresford, 2016).

Further, it was evident that previous Somali leaders were influenced by the potential dangers of losing power, which encouraged such leaders to manipulate factional conflicts within clans by sustaining them in rivalry so as to implement personalized policies. However, such policies led to disunion within the populace, and consequently the disintegration of society. At the end, present Leaders found themselves faced with diverse factions that must be reunited and reintegrated into a nation that functions for all Somalis (Elphick, 2015).

Finally, previous leadership failure resulted in a context characterized by the growth of violence and, flawed institutions, deteriorating infrastructure, and most importantly, declining social cohesion. Therefore, it can be argued that, Somalia has witnessed state failure due to leadership flaws. The consequence of which is evident in the current social disintegration of Somali society.

5. CONCLUSION

Most respondents in this article agree on the notion that the Somali social dis-integration phenomenon is the result of previous leadership personalities which manifested as issues of political marginalization, economic inequality, corruption, electoral fraud; unemployment, social injustice, alienation and poverty. The finding of the article also stresses the need to improve the social integration situation through restoration of democratic institutions and restructuring the public administration in the country to ensure that the national resources are judiciously allocated to sectors that can speed up the improvement in the living conditions of the people. This is perceived as the surest way of re-integrating the social system. Furthermore, the analysis of the article shows that there is a need for new political leaders that should devise an inclusive style of leadership in order to absorb the huge population of the unemployed youths. Moreover, findings of the study points to the need for economic diversification towards allocating a significant percentage of the country's resources to employment generation to ensure massive promotion of productivity, create employment opportunities and to address the deepening poverty and despair.

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