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Articles

Somali Women's Past Experiences and Present Realities

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Abstract

Since the collapse of the central government in the early 1991, the country experienced prolonged civil war and chaos which has taken almost two decades. Destruction of state structures accompanied by huge violation of human rights subjected to women and girls. The civil war same as it affects people negatively, it also positively transforms societies which is the case of Somali women who acquired new roles and responsibilities during the decades of war. On the other hand, in post-conflict settings new government structures are established with constitution being adopted. Social, political and economic transformation occurs within the post-conflict spaces. Based on this setting, this paper is aimed to examine the extent of human rights violations specifically subjected to women and girls. It also traces the role of Somali women played during the conflict particularly their role in taking part of peace building efforts of the country. The study further evaluates if any progress is being made in regard to women political participation in post-conflict period with analysis on the issues preventing women to fully participate in Somali politics.

Keywords: Somalia, Somali women, women rights, war experiences, women as victims, agents of change.

1. Introduction

Most of the literatures on women and war emphasize the negative aspect of war in terms of women. Analysis goes only to the devastating impact of war on women, children and young girls. It is true that during armed conflicts; women and girls are often described as the most targeted groups. Conflict related violence is widespread where rape is the most used weapon during the conflict. This negative aspect of conflict is specifically true in a country like Somalia which experienced decades of war and instability. At the beginning of 1991, the country entered a period of turmoil where everyone's life was in danger let alone women. However, during the decades of war, it is said women to have suffered more. The war left behind tragedies and human rights violations. However, there is just one and only story that has been told about Somalia; fragile state with tragedy, violation, destruction, rape and starvation. It carries no doubt the extent of impact and destruction can have a country which has been without any central and effective government for almost 20 years. The effect of the prolonged civil war had specifically on women stands as one of the main objectives of this article.

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However, what the paper is also arguing is that, despite negative war experiences and human rights violations, Somali women's capacity has changed and they received space to maneuver and organize themselves. It specifically argues that the conflict offered new opportunities, roles and responsibilities to women. The tragic events of the country had also witnessed the capacity of women who stood against the violence and the general state of impunity. Despite male dominance and bone patriarchy, women have played immense role in peacemaking efforts of the country. Therefore, this study takes in to account the two main leading and contesting status of women and war; victims of war and agents of change. The study is basically qualitative in nature which employs historical approach along indepth secondary analysis by utilizing existing and available data. Data sources include books, Journal articles, news, and reports from government, UN and NGO's.

2. Discussion and result

Traditionally Somali women's role just confined domestic affairs only; managing house hold chores, child rearing, and caring. Decision making at the household level and at the public was always in the hands of male. Although women have traditionally exercised certain decision making autonomy at the family level especially in the management of animal products like milk and ghee because this was perceived as women's issue and role. Generally women remained outside decision making spheres where only men are allowed to take part and attend clan meetings (Warsame, 2004). However, women's political activism can be referred back to the period of colonialism specifically 1943 to 1960 where women actively took part anti-colonial movements and that stands as a grass root for understanding women movements in Somalia.

Moreover, the postcolonial government contributed to the transformational change of women although they were not guaranteed political vacuum in the newly government, but the right of freedom of expression and voice preserved in the constitution as a basic right in 1961 by the republic government (Ingiriis, 2015). On the other hand the period after 1969 until the civil war has been described as women's golden era by some scholars. As soon as the military regime ascended the power, political and social changes occurred in Somalia (Ismail, 2013). This period was a period of transformations which had a profound impact on women. Under the scientific socialism, women got recognition in the political spaces. Although it was the benefit of the government, but Barre regime allowed women to organize themselves. It is claimed that women witnessed positive changes during the military regime. However, the military government collapsed in the early 1991. The country entered in to a period of hostility, chaos and instability. It became a totally different period for women during the decades of war. Many transformations have occurred to the lives of Somali people in general and in specific women. Departing from here, this paper is trying to present how women experienced the prolonged civil war; looking the extent of violation subjected to them and how their role changed going beyond the confinement of domestic affairs. Also, how these changes shaped their political participation today. The study will specifically focus if any improvement has been realized in regard to women political participation and the challenges that still hindering women to fully take part of the politics.

Civil war era: Women as victims of violence

The period of civil war was the most violent period throughout the history of Somalia. It is said 25,000 people to have killed in Mogadishu just four months of fighting between 1991 and 1992 (Accord Insight, 2013: 45). In addition, 1.5 Million Somalis left the country and became refugees in the neighboring countries like Kenya, Ethiopia Djibouti, Yemen and also Europe and North America while an estimate of 2 million people internally displaced (Inculsive Peace and Transition Initiative, 2018: 2). According to Gardner, the customary conventions and code of honor that Somalis used prior to the civil war to regulate conflict between clans and offer protection for women and children to ensure freeness from violence have been widely destroyed and violated during the war periods (CISP and International Alert, 2015: 10). Women and children faced unequal brunt of hardships during the prolonged civil war. The conflict disproportionately affected women. But this is not surprising as women occupied inferior and powerless position in the Somali society for a long time (Shire, 1993; Refworld, 1994). Although men and boys represent the majority of the people being killed in the war but the conflict hugely affected women and children. They were killed, raped, looted, forced to displace, abandoned and sexually dishonored. In addition, their husbands were killed leaving behind large number of widows and orphans. The bereavement and separation led large portion of women to displace within the country or become

refugees in other countries. Because of the pressures of the conflict further accompanied by poverty, despair and displacement, their marriage was destroyed leading to live alone without even tiny support from relatives. Women became the sole breadwinners of the family (Bryden, Steiner, 1998). In addition, they became the target group of rape, abduction, sexual slavery and clan-related revenge killings. The long armed conflict had also caused society's breakdown, forced displacement and family separation (CISP & International Alert 2015: 10). However, the tragedy forced women to turn heads of the families which is unaccustomed to the traditions of Somalis.

The conflict clearly had gendered aspects. Sexual violence against women and girls has been used as a psychological weapon for the intention to humiliate each other by dishonoring the wives, sisters and daughters of the opponent groups. The kind of act by the militias caused serious suffering for women including physical pain, mental problems and sometimes death. It further led dissolution of families due to cultural mentality that put much shame to the survivor instead to the perpetrator (Ingiriis, Hoehne, 2013: 318).

The extent of violation against women based on clan opposition was very high at the times of war. Rape was perceived as manhood attack against both the husband's clan and the birth clan of women. Therefore, the basic intention was to humiliate and denigrate all the men of women's clan (Refworld, 1994: 103). It was also reported raping young girls in front of the eyes of the parents. Sometimes taking the young girls and never returning to their parents (US Department of State, 1991, 1992; Refworld, 1994). As Muse through her writing on "war crimes against women and girls" (2004, p. 70), argues the worst scenario was the rape camps in Mogadishu in the early 1990s. Militias subjected repeated rape and other kinds of abuse to women by abducting and imprisoning them in to villas. Women and girls were the most targeted groups. This mainly occurred in terms of two issues; being member of any opposing factions or women from weak clan affiliations who had no or little clan protection. Further, According to the country reports on human rights practices (1992, 1993) around 3000 people died everyday due to the famine and starvation. It is said that the majority of them were women and children. As it is always the case for armed conflicts, Asha Haji says that women and children usually remained the first and the last victims of war. Although the war is not their desire neither their decision but they are the ones who suffer more. Somali women were killed, raped, physically tortured and forced to displace. In addition to the lost of loved ones, they also experienced mistrust from the clan system. As a result they were rejected by both their married clans and origin clans (The Nordic Africa Institute, 2007: 18).

Women also suffered serious health problems ranging from Anemia, protein deficiency, to gynecological problems caused by much stress and fear from war related atrocities. They were at greater risk of being killed, raped and sexually assaulted. The Absence of health facilities resulted difficulties on taking care of children particularly for women who remained and displaced within the country. Health facilities were totally destroyed and medical personnel's left the country. And whatever remained just limed on providing basic and primary health services to people (African Rights, 1993: 8-10). On the other hand, according to OECD, the civil war had also affected the civil liberty of women. The conflict resulted general loss in terms of mobility. This specifically influenced on women compared to men. Due to the fact the threat of rape had limited women's freedom of movement (2010, p. 263).

In the year 2011, the country characterized as the fifth worst and most dangerous place in the world to be a woman (TrustLaw, 2011, in Ismail, 2013). The conflict contributed the creation of large portion of displacement, most of them women who are vulnerable of violence. The conflict had also destroyed the systems of health and justice and has long remained unable to protect and assist victims of sexual violence. As United Nations reports stated (Muscati, 2014).

The extent of Rape in Refugee camps during the civil war: Refugee Women in Kenya

In addition to the inequality and gender discrimination that women usually suffer, armed conflict also adds burden of violence arising from the situations of war and access reduction to health which also results from the conflict, shortage of food and lack of resources for their survival and their children as well. Evidences show that, in armed conflict and emergency humanitarian settings, there is a widespread of violence particularly subjected to women and young girls. In the context of Somalia, Several thousands of Somalis left the country soon after the start of the conflict. They seek refuge in the neighboring countries more specifically Kenya. As soon as the war started,

camps were formed in the North Eastern part of Kenya to accommodate refugees from Somalia. Four main refugee camps were opened in Dadaab (Ifo), Liboi, Hagadera and dagahley.

The civil war claimed thousands of lives; some wounded both physically and mentally. As said around million Somalis fled the country to the neighboring states. From the start of war, 300,000 Somalis left the country crossing the hundred miles (800) of Somali-Kenya border. Nearly all refugee Somali people walked miles in order to reach the North-Eastern province of Kenya. According to UNHCR, 80 % of the refugees fled to Kenya were women and children including rape survivors. Even though they left the country to escape the danger, women were continuously experiencing violations. While crossing the borders, women continued to be subjected to rape and also other gender based violence both from Somali militias and the policemen of the neighboring countries especially Kenyan police. The atrocity and violence against women continued even in the refugee camps (UNHCR, 1993). More than hundred Somali refugee women were raped in a short period of one and half year. In between February and August in 1993, one hundred ninety two rape cases recorded by UNHCR. Four of these cases constituted rape against children and one against man. It is stated 107 out of the 192 rape cases occurred in refugee camps of Kenya while the rest of the 85 cases took place in Somali soil. Only in one month time, additional 42 cases were recorded the same year. This constitutes the cases recorded by UNHCR, while the actual cases might be higher than the reported cases. Further UNHCR states that women and girls were continuously attacked by unknown gunmen every time they go to the outskirts of the camp in order to collect firewood or herd animals. Nearly hundred cases committed by bandits. In addition, they were also vulnerable to the violence from the Kenyan police forces. Although it was less extent compared to those committed by bandits. The rape and sexual assault against Somali women and girls had no distinct age. Women and girls were equally raped and subjected to violence. Some women were gang raped by seven persons at one time while others raped several times. In addition, robbing, inhumane treatment and knifing and gunshot were also common in refugee camps (UNHCR, 1993). As quoted "in the nightmare continues" by the African Rights (1993), a refugee woman says "We ran away from the lion, but we only found hyena". Inside the refugee camps of Kenya, there was a shocking scale of violence against Somali women. The overall rape cases against refugee women were unknown until the intervention of UNHCR in 1993. However, Fowzia who was working with UNHCR as project coordinator for women victims of violence through her part of writing on "war crimes against women and girls" asserts that the number of women subjected to violence have passed hundreds and even near to thousands. Women had no ability to report due to the fear from the attackers. Some women claim that they can recognize the faces of the attackers but they were reluctant to speak and talk about the ordeals. They were raped inside their own home and sometimes with presence of their husbands while the children are locked inside a room or sometimes the act is done in front of them. Fowzia adds that grenades, bayonets, daggers, clubs, rifles and walking sticks has been used as a means to attack women and sometimes flashlights to blind them for night attacks. Young girls who had no previously sexual relations had greater risk of health problems or sometimes bleed to death. The attackers used razor blades and bayonets to infibulate them (2004, pp. 71-72). As a consequence of rape and the violations, women incurred both short term and long term health problems. They continued to have back and ribs pain as a result of beating. Further they experienced sleeplessness and shock. Among the long term physical affects miscarriage when pregnant women raped, uncontrolled urination, and hemorrhage (UNHCR, 1993). There was an apparent increase on the number of abuses committed by the Kenyan authorities which reach the highest level in 2009. So many rape cases occurred inside the various refugee camps of Kenya and continued even after a decade from the start of war. In just six days in March 2010, Human Rights Watch had interview with 102 refugee women. Almost half of the interviewees experienced sexual violence and abuse by the police of Kenya. The abuses include extorting money from the asylum seekers, detention and unlawfully arrest. However, their voices were not heard and their complaints ignored instead of investigation (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Given the fact that the Constitution of Kenya lays down key provisions of international human rights instruments in which the country constitutes part of it. The Kenyan constitution states that "each and everyone in Kenyan province including refugees and asylum seekers have the right of property protection, as well as to be free from arbitrary arrest and detention and also have the right to be free from all

forms of inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment". However, Kenya which opened its gates to the Somali refugees since the start of war had failed to protect women from violation.

On the other hand, women did not only face physical and emotional difficulties as a consequence of the rape subjected to them. Also, the physical and the psychological trauma accompanied by strong cultural stigma which is attached to rape incidents. Women often meet family rejection in specific and community rejection in general (Muse, 2004: 75). However, rape consequences vary according to the background of the victim. In case of unmarried women beside the rejection, finding a husband becomes disintegrated. As a young girl who is 16 years old raped claims "people just see me and treat me like prostitute, all I want is just to disappear from this world and being buried alive because it is the only solution for my grievance". By the same token, an older woman who is raped becomes also shattered in the eyes of the community (El bushra, 2004: 79-80).

Women as agents of change

The civil war state exposed the life of everyone in a danger. However, it is true that the civil war adversely affects/affected people especially women but it is also true that it positively transforms women's capacity which is the case of Somali women. The opportunity that the war opened for women is something worth mentioning. The civil war era became the first time that women got chance to exercise authority and to serve as the agents of change and peace apart from the colonization period in which they had taken part. The civil war witnessed the capacity of Somali women. They were not only the victims of the war but also peace-makers. From the start of war, women become stuck to earn money in order to manage the life of their families and their basic needs. However, this later shifted in to addressing the root causes of their difficulties and their continuous suffering. Starting from the grassroots, they became peace advocates, educators and human rights protectors. Their movement gradually started to move upward. Women acquired trust from the community and among themselves. As a result, they gained access and built communication with community leaders (Timmons, 2004: 2).

Traditionally women's involvement in conflict resolution and peace building was minimal. They performed indirect role in forging peace between the hostile parties (Warsame, 2004: 43). However the civil war positively transformed women's capacity from an invisible to more visible role. Women once they got aware on the situation that their people befallen, they turned as peace promoters and keen to conclude the fighting. Many women have taken part the war against the dictatorship regime in 1980s. They acquired respect in taking part of the struggle. Some women took advantage of the respect they gained in participation of the movement against Barre. They demanded concessions from warlords and militias. That led several women to come up with the initiative to establish civil society organizations while others became active leading members of the CSO's. This further made possible women to engage in peace building (Jama, 2010: 62). During the years of conflict, women managed to form active and overwhelming national and international networks with other women's social and humanitarian organizations both inside and outside the country. According to them empowerment and equality of gender had been a source for justice and democracy. However, women turned as crucial peace builders during the long lasted civil war. The war opened up new opportunities and responsibilities when the country was just described as a failed state. They take more active role in organizing themselves and their community at large. Although they were often excluded from formal peace efforts but they actively and visibly participated in the processes of peace making, leadership and state-reinstating. Practitioners of gender development figured out that war enables redefinition of social relations by rearranging, readopting and reinforcing patriarchal ideologies that exist at the community level. However it does not fundamentally alter those ideologies. In this respect, the position of women and men carry in the process of making peace emerges in a different way. Each faces separate experience and relationship which is based upon the type of gender. As the war raged between the opposing clans, many women acted as peace envoy or messenger between the rival clans. With this engagement as messengers enabled them to get the chance of positively taking part armed conflicts that normally results from men with power and authority over resources (Ingiriis, 2012). Women employed different strategies including acting as messengers in order to foster peace. It is been noted that some strategies that women employed were more traditional while others were more innovative and modern. Playing the role of messengers between the warring clans was among the tools they used. However, that was driven from the patrilineal descent and clan exogamy. In the Somali society, normally woman is a member of her own clan and also relates to that of the husband.

Therefore, whenever the two groups are in conflict women usually find a way and create line of communication between the opposing clans. That either prevents or ends the conflict (Kapteijns, 1993). This method is only effective if the conflicting parties have the mentality that women, children and elderly do not deserve the sword. Otherwise it places at greater risk for women messengers when the parties know no boundaries. However as previously noted, in Somali society, only men have the means to make peace. Women have been excluded from decision making forums and negotiations but their position within the clan structure made the possibility to bridge clan divisions and to always act as first channel for conflict resolutions. They have been active for convincing elders and clan leaders to intervene the conflict (Jama, 2010: 62).

A second more important method women employed was peace demonstrations, demanding peace through chanting slogans that women need not war but peace. At the demonstrations women also used very traditional method of composing their specific poetry (Buraanbur) to promote peace. Reciting that kind of poetry, sometimes helped women to transmit their messages which made militiamen to accept the message and end the hostility (Ingiriis, Hoehne, 2013: 321).

Further, women have also played an active role on mobilizing resources for the purpose of financing peace meetings and demobilization. While Somali men emphasized only realizing political settlements with the mentality that peace will ensue. But women had greater and comprehensive vision of peace than men which includes sustainable livelihood, education, and reconciliation. Women realized that the struggle of peace and women rights is inextricably linked.

Notable Women who break the chain

There are few women who inspired other fellow Somali women. Among the popular women is **Marriam Hussein Awreeye** who dedicated her life advocating human rights in Somalia. Marriam is the widow of previous human rights lawyer (Ismail Jimale Osoble). She established human rights center in Mogadishu and given the name of her late husband (Ismail Jimale Center for human rights). The center was founded soon after the collapse of the central government to record human rights violations of the country with the hope once the country recovers the perpetrators could be brought to justice. Also **Dr. Hawa Abdi**, a notable female philanthropist and her two daughters risked their life to assist women and children for more than the two decades of war. She became the only women doctor at a time when women were given neither the right to be seen or heard. When the civil war broke out she decided to stay and to not leave the country (Ingiriis, Hoehne, 2013: 321). During the hostilities, **Dr. Hawa** built 400 bed hospitals using her own money. Once upon time she woke up while the war going outside her home. One of the fighters asked her why she is running the hospital knowing that she is a woman and old. Mama Hawa stood against him and replied asking what he has done to his people other than destroying them. She further added that she will not leave the hospital even if it costs death and she is ready to die with her people with dignity (Wallace, 2011). Dr. Hawa was strong enough and has done many things along with her two daughters. She had given care to the sick and wounded people often for free. Mama Hawa saved thousands of Somali people mostly women and children. Due to her prominent role in the field of gynecology, Dr Hawa nominated for the Noble Peace Prize in the year 2012. On the other hand, several other Somali women lost their lives in the middle of assisting their people during the years of war. A community leaders like **Starlin Abdi Arush, Mana Abdirahman Suldaan** who ran an orphanage center and Swiss relief worker Verena Karrer dedicated their lives enhancing the status of women and children in the southern part of Somalia especially Merca. In 2002 Starlin and Karren was killed (Ingiriis, Hoehne, 2013: 321). Starlin actively participated peace negotiations and fighting against tribalism of the country. Her efforts range from negotiating with warlords, setting up hospitals, chairing Somali Olympic committee to aid worker. Among her remarkable job for saving the country was her involvement in 1993 for the negotiation on ending the stand-off between the warlord Mohamed Farah Aided and the American peacekeepers who perceived Aided as the cause of all evil. However Starlin was killed at early age of 45 by unknown gunman. Her fiancé expressing her love to the country says that saving people was her first priority and she put even above her own future (Astill, 2002).

On the other hand, **Asha Haji** is also among the active Somali women. She is women rights activist and hugely lobbied women's participation in peace processes. Asha is also the founder of Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) which was established in 1992 (Global Peace Builders,

2020). When Somali women was excluded from the various peace process, Asha initiated the notion of *sixth clan** in order to draw attention the importance of women's involvement in to the peace process. Asha is peace and women rights activist. She strongly advocated women's participation in conflict resolution and also campaigned against the traditional cultural practices (FGM) (The Elders, 2014).

The struggle of women (Political participation perspective)

It was 1991 January when the international community officially announced end of the military regime led by Mohamed Siad Barre. The country as a whole witnessed political chaos and instability. According to different sources, Somali women became not only the victims of war. Indeed the war disproportionately made them suffer from the continuous use of violence particularly rape which constitutes the most employed weapon of war. Nevertheless, they also turned active participants in peace building activities. As Nakaya (Nakaya, 2003: 466-467) in her analysis on "women and gender equality in peace processes in Somalia and Guatemala" argues that the movement of Somali women is a product of humanitarian crisis caused by the prolonged civil war. Women played role even taking care of the combatants by providing shelter and medical treatments. As part of the attempts to restore peace, Somali women contributed also increasing the level of education by restoring destroyed schools. As mentioned, Somalis are patrilineal in nature based on clan exogamy. Following this point, Nakaya states that women do not only belong to her father's clan but also to that of the husband because of their children. So they form close ties with their father's and husband's clan. That made possible to act as an agent for the cross-clan dialogues. Hence, several NGO's led by women has been established in order to strength dialogues on peace-making. However it's stated that 1998 meeting on National Reconciliation in Addis Ababa was the first time formulized Somali women's participation in formal peace processes. The meeting brought the establishment of Transitional National Council (TNC) that required the presence of woman for each of the three delegation members from each of the eighteen Somali regions. But the inclusion of women in TNC was just based on clan associations. Although it failed but there were no measures intended to improve the status of women.

However, it was only 2000s when Somali women started to formally and directly challenge men throughout the different political structures; local council, regional and national parliaments and national cabinet (Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative, 2018: 2). Due to realization on the calamity and the difficulties that the community befallen, women never hesitated to actively contribute community transformations and inspired to end the fighting. Nevertheless, being based on clan exogamy made women's identity to split in to two; between her original clan; the father's clan and the one with the husband which to some extent enabled them to act as a channel between the clans as mentioned above. However, this diminished due to mistrust from both parties to women's loyalty. However, women's efforts in terms of social and humanitarian aspect had gradually developed expanding from the ground levels to local structures, regional and national levels. Women's success in the aspect of humanitarian as well as peace issues laid the foundation for the National Peace conference of Arta in the year 2000. That became the fourteenth attempt as thirteen previously peace attempts failed. However, once the president of Djibouti called reconciliation and peace conference during the Security Council meeting in September 1999, there were only sixty intellectuals among them five women including Aisha Haji Elmi; co-founder of sixth clan. They campaigned women to participate as independent and equal partners. With the support of Ismael Omar Guelleh, president of Djibouti, women were accepted to stand their own not as observers (El Bushra, Gardner, 2003: 193). Nonetheless, the thirteen peace reconciliation attempt again failed. This is followed by the 14th conference. It became the first time where hundred women became among the estimated 2000 to 3000 Somalis selected for the representation of clan affiliations. The selected hundred women from the five Somali clans started to cooperate and work with each other with the hope to bring women issues to the table. However, they realized that peace accords based on traditional clan structures and clan-based power sharing would not give women consideration in decision making structures. As a result women sought to establish new identity for women in politics. During the conference in Arta, around 92 women

* There is five major clan in Somalia so this refers to the women's clan. It is an initiative that women came with during one of the peace building meetings for the purpose of securing women seats in the political spaces.

agreed to break the chain based on clan allegiance. They agreed to vote as a single bloc and that was where the idea of “*Sixth clan*” emerged (Summons, 2004: 18). This new term which refers to the clan of women officially emerged during the Arta peace conference of 2000s and also entered in to the discussions of gender and politics in Somalia during that period. Women lobbied across the whole major clan leaders to persuade women to take part of the conference as sixth clan and separate unit. They actively engaged persuasion of clan leaders and challenged to think beyond clan boundaries (Ingiriis, Hoehne, 2013: 324). Through the words of Asha Haji Elmi during the conference of “Arab women on economic and political issues” held in Dhakar on May 1, 2005 explains how the sixth clan emerged said that:

“The sixth clan was born out of the frustration. Within our society, although we are victims of conflict we had no voice for the national solution. In a patriarchal society such as ours, women have no right to represent their clan, nor any responsibility for protecting the clan. A group of us had the idea to form our own clan, in addition to the five pre-existing clans. The sixth clan gave us the first political entry point for women as equal partners in decision making. The women elected me to be their leader. We went to the negotiation table with the five clan leaders. We put women’s interest into the peace process... we engendered the language. Instead of merely referring to men, the language (government documents) now says he or she”.

The sixth clan coalition lobbied women representation and as a result 10 % allocated for women representing 25 seats, five from each and every of the five major clans. According to Summons (2004, p. 19) during the conference 70 % of coalition members voted as a single bloc that enabled the formation of national charter which regulates reservation of 25 seats for women out of the 245 parliament member of Transitional National Government (TNG). In addition, the charter also contributed guaranteeing the human rights of children and also women and minorities. Starting from the early 2000s, Somali women became engaged in to the politics of country as this was the first time women in south central Somalia entered in to the national politics after the collapse of the central government. As already mentioned, 25 seats were given to the women in the newly formed Transitional Government in Arta, Djibouti. As Ingiriis and Hoehne (2013) claim, prominent women also acquired extra seats. TNG had also the first female minister throughout the history of Somalia. The Arta conference of 2000 has been described as one of the most inclusive conference (Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative, 2018). Certainly, Sixth clan has been the first organized political movement funded and purely led by women inspired to seek the rights of women in general and their representation at all levels of making decisions in the government. However, despite it is success on realization women quota in the Transitional National Government women continued to face political barriers. They continued to be denied as a platform (sixth clan) and as an independent group in the subsequent peace conferences of 2002-2004 and 2008-2009 in Kenya and Djibouti respectively. Yet women participated in the conferences as part of their clans (Ingiriis, Hoehne, 2013: 324). However, the Arta conference followed by the peace talks in Kenya, Nairobi which concluded on January 2004. The Nairobi gathering produced the agreement to establish new parliament and new government that will replace the TNG. The new agreement called the appointment of 275 parliament members from each of the clan with reservation of 12 % quota for women delegates. Summons (2004: 20) states that the Sixth Clan Coalition (SCC) achieved a milestone in the conference as the co-founder and the chair of SCC signed peace agreement becoming the first Somali women to sign an agreement. In theory, 12 % quota was allocated for women but in reality the situation was different for the newly established Transitional Federal Government (TFG) that replaced the TNG. Only half of the 33 seats (12 %) taken by women and only one woman appointed for minister position. Nevertheless, another TFG was established roughly after four years in Djibouti. As a reality on the ground, women were supposed to acquire the 12 % already allocated for them even though the enlargement of the parliament comprising 550 parliamentarians. Again, same as the previous government, women held half of the seats. However, the TFG of 2009–2012 had several women ministers.

Women political participation (from the year 2012 to the present)

The establishment of permanent Somali state came after long years of Transitional Governments. On August 20 2012, the first international recognized central government was established in Mogadishu with parliamentarians of 275 being formed within the same month including 38 women (Legal Action Worldwide, 2014: 2). According to Legal Action Wide (LAW) the established government repeatedly committed realizing gender equality and empowering Somali women. In 2013,

the government led by Hassan Sheik adopted a New Deal Compact. Several commitments of the compact clearly emphasize women rights issues by seeking to address gender inequalities on the ground (Legal Action Worldwide, 2014: 5). However women continued to experience gender imbalances and several other challenges in enjoying their rights and attaining equal access to assets and services. Although, representation of women in the parliament and the cabinet marked as an improvement compared to the transitional periods, but women's representation still remained very low. For instance, in the strong parliament of 275 persons, women were only 37 representing (14 %) thus making them minority. While the ten person cabinet, women were only two despite the agreements and the principles of Garowe II which provides women 30 % representation of all political institutions (UNDP, 2012a). In spite of the low representation of women, Hassan Sheik government became the first government ever to appoint women as a Deputy Prime Minister as well as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The two appointed women were Fosiyo Yusuf Haji Adan who has been given the highest position ever and Maryam Qasim the Ministry of Development and Social Services which comprised around five ministries combined together. Moreover, three other women have been part of 20 Deputy Ministers (Dini, 2013). However, women were not content the representation given to them by the first republic government after the civil war. In an interview with Amina carried by Shukria Dini (2013) highlights that the government did not give proper representation to women, appointing deputy prime minister for women does not mean it will bring more attention to women issues said Amina. However, as usual the electoral process of the elections of 2012 had been in the hands of TFG and the UN who further gave the responsibility 135 clan leaders for the purpose of appointing Parliament members. Even though the elders alerted to ensure the inclusion of women in the government particularly the parliament but there were no any specific measures and mechanisms intended to enforce the issue. According to UNDP report, as of 2012, the Gender Inequality Index for Somalia has been 0.776 which placed the country the fourth highest position at the global level (UNDP, 2012b).

In 2014, the Federal government appointed new cabinet increasing the ministerial portfolio from 10 to 25. This significantly lowered women's presence in the cabinet taking the proportion from 20 % to 10 % in 2014 but this not altered the number of women in the parliament (UNDP, 2014: 7). However, things changed slowly as the country turned its way in to federal system in 2012. There were many efforts and attempts to secure the position of women in the political space. Civil society organizations with the support of international community pushed the problem that women experienced in the 2012 elections. Among the attempts was realizing gender quota and mitigating the power and influence of clan leaders in the Somali elections. In the National Leadership Forum, a minimum of 30 % quota of women at all government levels reiterated. For the 2016 election new electoral model have been adopted where 14025 delegates were in charge to vote parliamentary members. Unfortunately, clan leader's influence were still there as the delegates appointed by them. However, women acquired near the allocated quota. the current government led by Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo, women hold 24 % moving from 14 % which has been marked as a milestone for Somali women (Concar, 2017).

In the national elections of 2016, 66 women have been elected to the Lower House out of the 275 total members while 13 women acquired seats in the Upper house of a total 54 seats. Moreover, the appointed cabinet of 27 positions women was given 6 positions being Ministry of Ports and Marine Transport and also the Ministry of Commerce and Industry which represent first period to be given to women (Samatar, 2019: 182). However, recently the president has appointed a new Prime Minister which replaced the former Prime Minister (Khaire) who served as the country's PM since the national election of 2016. The new PM, who was appointed on September 18 this year, announced a month later on his appointment new cabinet ministers composed of 26 ministers and deputy minister. Women represent four out of the 26 new ministers appointed (Dhaysane, 2020). Women's position in the cabinet lowered from six to four. As mentioned above, the government of Khaire; the predecessor of the current PM, women held six prominent positions from the total 27 ministerial posts.

Furthermore, the elections at the federal states like Puntland which took place in 2018 (parliamentary elections) only one woman was selected from the total contested female which were 16. By the same token, in Somaliland 82 parliament members in the lower house only one represents women while there is no women in the upper house (Affi, 2020). On the other hand, Galmudug state women hold 6.7 % for the elected 89 members while South West state in the recent elections women acquired 17 % (16 out of the 95 Mps) which is the most highest compared to other states (Hiiraan Online, 2020).

Barriers to women Political Participation

For decades Somali women have experienced marginalization from decision making and leadership activities. Yet they represent 49.3 % which is almost half of the population with the fact, just few women being part of higher ranks in the formal political positions. Nevertheless, this is not only limited to the central government. At the federal level for instance, Puntland and the self declared state Somaliland which experienced relative peace have not yet realized better representation of women in the parliament (Abdi, 2016). Current figures suggest that women representation in the parliament close to 25 % in spite of the 30 % quota formally allocated for women though this marks as an achievement compared to the 14 % in 2012 but still women make low percentage. Further, Somalia still employs old electoral model which contributes the marginalization of women as it's in the hand of traditional male leaders where the selection of initial candidates is required from them. As Stephanie Carver (2017) states women who run for political positions within male dominated system face challenges; first, women are already outside the customary decision making processes and this leaves little space to vie and declare themselves as political candidates. Second, there is lack of legal mechanism and even policies intended to ensure the 30 % compliance. Knowing that, the provisional constitution designates only women political participation. There is no specific measure in regard to the implementation and enforcement of the quota system by the traditional leaders. As former Minister of MoWHRD Zahra Mohamed Ali asserts "all that women have is a promise that the quota will be filled. They have no one to hold accountable if they are overlooked". In one case or another, female politicians are ignored in the political spaces. For example, the 2016 election in HirShabelle region female politicians were left behind as a result of the objection for the seats reserved for women from the federal indirect electoral implementation team. Women participation in politics is human rights issue as well as justice issue. As Dr. Shukria Dini in her article on women in the government of Somalia stresses that the politics of Somalia not only remained contested but also male-dominated where the system of 4.5 used to select men. It is a politics where male allows male to represent the nation and Somalis as a whole (2013).

The challenges that women meet are made up of a complex set of factors embedded with culture, religion and traditions. They face multiple challenges including economic, socio-cultural, and security-related obstacles. The advancement of women is significantly influence by culture; which is mainly referred to the values, norms, and beliefs of a particular people. The patriarchal nature of Somalis limits the opportunities of women especially in the political spheres. Taking in to account that patriarchal system deems women subordination with the mind that they are incompatible and unsuitable for political positions. This ideology places women in a less hierarchical space.

However, it is perceived that clannism as the most important barrier in regard to women's political involvement. A research study report indicates that clan leaders identify women as weak in nature compared to their male counterparts. They are regarded as less intelligent to represent the clan. In addition with the cultural norms which do not give permission women to seek political positions, clan leaders who are responsible for the political representation degrade women's efforts as they rarely allow women to hold key positions in the government (AMISOM, 2016: 9). Clan plays an important role in Somali politics. It gives priority to the interests of men while women within their own clan are behaved as a second class and given inferior status. The clan system contributes to the marginalization of women. Women and men are not entitled the same rights. The right to hold positions and represent the clan is only defined as the right of men. Through the words of Shukria Dini (2012), "Clan leaders often tell any woman who is running for a political position whether a parliamentarian member or any other political post that the seats assigned to each clan is just too few to give seats to them. Women with cross-clan marriages particularly meet additional challenges when aspiring and contesting a Member in the Parliament where these women are told to search support and nomination from the clan in which they have married into – which is really a deliberate strategy to marginalize as well as deny women access to seats". In addition, Dini also states that women with cross-clan marriages meet additional barriers as they do not receive seats both from their natal clan and the clan of husband. However, according to the research of Dr. Lewa and Mohamud on "Factors Affecting Women Political Leadership in Benadir Region" revealed that women who win leadership positions are those who break the chain and overcome the challenges posed by clannism through establishing strong connections with progressive male leaders both within and outside the political system and in addition with the advancement of status at the community level (2019, p. 114). In Somalia, instead of universal suffrage,

the electoral system of Somalia is based on clan structure; members' selection of both upper and lower houses of the parliament is in the hands of clan leaders. As a result the representation of women strongly depends on the willingness of those male leaders (Madigan, 2017). Formally, women are excluded from decision making spheres and clan meetings. Knowing that, the politics of the country is based on balancing of power which is between clans and their sub divisions. This lowers women's chance to actively take part in the politics. As a result, the political disadvantage of women in the clan composition can be directly mirrored in formal political spaces as the clan decides individual rights on gaining candidacy (Park, 2017: 14).

However, according to a research carried by EARF (2017, p. 14) shows that clannism represents as the major challenge to women's involvement in politics and leadership positions. There is strong perception in the Somali community that women can not represent the clan interest. Clan leaders exercise significant power and are involved in every political process. In an extreme case, Somali clan system poses enormous threat to women seeking political power. One female MP in Mogadishu expressing the difficulties she faced says:

"I was competing against a very powerful man as well as a few young women. It was very tough and I faced a lot of intimidation via text message and phone calls telling me that I should step down my candidacy or face the consequences".

In addition, the findings of (Mohamed et al., 2018; Samantar, 2019) the clan-based political system favors male and undermines women's political participation. The favoritism is based on the fact the patriarchal nature of Somalis and clan power sharing arrangements which deprives the political rights of Somali women.

On the other hand financial resource play essential role on acquiring political positions. Politics is highly commercialized nowadays where politicians allocate funds for political posts. In every part of the world whether developed or developing, politicians provide money in order to succeed for their political campaigns. According to an Empirical study conducted by Sendukas (2010) indicates that women in order to effectively take part in politics require considerable amount of financial resources for their political campaigns. This is in line with the fact that many women lack adequate financial resources to realize political positions. Several other studies showed that women face financial barriers which challenge their success in political spaces. It is been argued that unlike men, Somali women do not have full access to opportunities; education, employment and productive assets which hinders their presence in the political scenes. Certainly, their lack of equal access to opportunities as male counterparts inevitably enables absence of women from decision making spheres which demands having financial muscle. This is further fueled by the socially ingrained prejudices against women which present scenarios that further remove financing and endorsing women for their political ambitions (Abdi, 2016). Income generation is difficult for women in Somalia due to their limited education. In addition many women do not own property or business; they therefore have limited purchasing power compared to men and that explicitly shows that they are economically disadvantaged (AMISOM, 2016: 16). As mentioned, political campaigns demand extensive financial resources which women cannot handle for some reasons. One reason is that, their level of economy based on that, their involvement in the politics tends to be low. According to Samatar and Mohamed, women candidates receive support neither from the government nor from their clan. Their research asserts men are more likely to get financial support from the clan, business groups and political leaders if they stand for political positions while women are ignored (2019: 185). Further, there is a cultural stigma attached to women participation in political affairs. The idea of male superiority is universal although it differs across culture. The society ascribed roles puts women in a hierarch where female sex characterized as less value than male sex. As such, it is normal for men to seek political power while women are supposed to be submissive to men. Any attempt of women to find political power is unwelcomed to the society (Yassin, Mohamud, 2015: 126). This is why many have the mentality that politics is meant only for men while women's role is limited on domestic task and taking care of children. According to Madigan (2017) Dahaba Ahmed who is running for MP for the upcoming 2021 elections addressing the hurdles she is already experiencing said during an event conducted in Mogadishu *"being a woman I am facing so many obstacles and challenges including mainly social pressures and also absence of awareness in the general community about women's capability. Society at large and even families believe that only men can do a better job and are stronger positioned to take up political posts, and that the sole role of women is just related to*

domestic affairs and to stay at home". Women in Somalia continuously experience challenges which limit their political participation. Nevertheless, their challenge goes beyond from vying political office, but also once elected they often find difficult to effectively perform their duties and actively participate in key political and legislative processes (National Democratic Institute, 2017). The socio-economic and cultural constraints that Somali women often meet also fueled by insecurity issues which further blocks women from running in to power. According to a research conducted by AMISOM in regard to Somali women political involvement public life found out that women who run for political office are in greater risk of being killed or threatened which may come from the opponents contesting the same political post and further adds that the killings carry by militia or political opponents (2016, p. 17).

Due to the collapse of the central government in 1991. The country witnessed prolonged civil war and chaos which has been going almost two decades where the conflict torn the country apart and hugely affected the economy and the people as well. During these periods, Somali people as a whole have experienced violations which endangered almost every member of the society, leaving no mercy to anyone. Women and children were the most vulnerable among society. They continuously suffered sexual harassment, rape, and all other kinds of Gender-Based Violence. This occurred both in Somali territories and in refugee camps of the neighboring countries especially Kenya. Being one of the worlds starkest and the most neglected tragedy, resulted thousands of people to be under the thrall and the mercy of warlords for decades. The country became one of the worst countries in regard to human rights. Rape which was the most violence subjected to women have been used as a weapon of war. During the war, women lost everything including the little protection they received in the past. Armed conflict hugely affected women and became the most vulnerable group and the targeted ones in the society. Based on the findings, women and young girls have long been the victims of sexual violence. Both women who left the country and the women who remained inside mostly experienced violence. But the extent of violence that refugee women experienced is much frustrating. In search of safe place, women sought refuge in the neighbouring country; Kenya where the Kenyan government established camps for the purpose of hosting Somali refugees. Unfortunately, the terror that women met while trying to escape the war broke in their country was just miserable. Neither their way to the camps nor inside the camp became safe heaven to them.

In addition to the violations, women turned to be the bread-winners of the family as the war left them without husband, brother and even a father. The war contributed changing the gender roles of the sexes. Traditionally, men were the sole family providers and it was uncommon in the society a female head but the conflict led women to gain great responsibility over themselves and their families due to the loss of the husband and family members.

However, apart from the negative effect of war, conflict redefines social relations. It positively transforms women's capacity. Although it does not change conservative and backward ideologies but conflict creates space. Based on the analysis, since the country witnessed social, political and economical changes, this also influenced gender-based roles and responsibilities. In the traditional Somali society there was strong defined roles and responsibilities where the society determines the kind of position and status given to the individual member. However the war to some extent contributed changing those strict defined roles. Women assumed new roles and responsibilities where they turned crucial peace-builders. Their role got beyond the confinement of household chores and private issues.

On the other hand, due to a complex set of factors including culture, clannism and economic condition, Somali women not allowed access to decision making spheres and were often excluded from leadership positions. Considering the fact that strict gender roles exist in the community, but this is not stopped women from contributing to the country's peacemaking efforts. They were active in peacemaking and peace building of the country. Absence of government led women to bear the burden. Women became active contributors where they contributed the country in terms of peace promotion, human rights advocacy and many developmental issues.

Moreover, unlike pre-civil war, women particularly realized considerable advances in the political arena without even support from the male. With the fact, that women had no representation in the politics of Somalia back then in 1960. Even coming the revolutionary period where women had limited rights and representation. The first time when women break the chain was the year 2000. Women's political status improved as they hardly tried their voices to be heard and respect their rights.

The transitional governments established in Arta, Djibouti and Kenya respectively, women got representation in the parliament though it was tiny proportion compared to the male. They additionally gained ministerial positions. This gradually increased with the time; initially the representation of women was very low only 12 % was given to women. This is followed by 14 % representation in the parliament, then 25 % representation and number of female ministers which is the current government. However, yet to be achieved the 30 % quota of women. According to a recent event in which women adopted Somali women's charter states that women advocating for a 50 % representation. However, it is worth mentioning, that the electoral system is still in the hands of male traditional leaders. Knowing their favour of men above women to entrust clan political positions. Nevertheless, one can argue that, the little progress of women political representation resulted from the civilization of Somali politics after the war engulfed the country. However, the little improvement of women's political status does not generally mean that Somali women's rights also improved. There is no enough empowerment of women as the country is not part of main human rights treaties which actually protect and promote women rights like for instance CEDAW. However, there are other laws, policies and programs intended to promote women issues.

The research also discovered that the major challenge that women face in regard to participation of politics is the clan system which long remained and still remaining the backbone of Somali politics. Same as other parts of the world, the government adopted quota system of women representation in decision-making spheres. However, the quota lacks institutionalization. There are no measures and mechanisms intended for the achievement the allocated percentage for women. This indicates the quota system that the government adopted is yet to be realized. One contributing factor is that, the electoral system, the country still employing old electoral model where clan leaders have played and still playing influential role in Somali politics and governance. Even in the last national election of 2016 where it seemed clan influence reduced but played the same role. Clan system hugely marginalizes women in one way another. Throughout the history of Somalia, clan elders never easily accepted woman to represent the clan as they strongly believe that the politics is for men only. Generally, a woman is perceived as less capable and weak who cannot be entrusted any clan position. In addition, women also face financial problems in their attempt to run for political office.

3. Conclusion

This paper is destined to assess the experiences of women during the prolonged civil war; human rights violations against women and young girls, women's role in fostering peace and as well as how these experiences shaped women's status today specifically their political participation given the fact Somali women's less independence before the civil war as the power usually rested upon the hands of male. The study has taken in to account the two main leading and contesting status of women and war; victims of war and agents of change. Both the argument is true for the case of Somali women who experienced huge violation of human rights and at the same time never gave up the hope of transformation. Many women employed their power and capacity to organize themselves and courageously stand against the violence threatening their life as a women and their community as well. Despite negative war experiences and human rights violations, Somali women's capacity has changed. The conflict offered new opportunities, roles and responsibilities to Somali women. Despite male dominance and bone patriarchy, women have played immense role in peacemaking efforts of the country. However, based on the above argument, women have been both victims of war and at the same time victors and that crisis can be understood not just breakdown and devastation but also as an opportunity.

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