Leadership Personality and Social Dis-integration in Somalia

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Authors’ contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. All authors designed the study, performed the analysis, wrote the protocol, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

ABSTRACT

The study seeks to explore the impact of leadership personalities of previous Somali political leaders on social integration. As Somalia now transit into post conflict reconstruction, there is the need to explore how previous flaws in leadership personalities resulted into social disintegration of the Somali society. To achieve this objective, qualitative interviews were held with 13 respondents across Somali elite in Mogadishu. Using the Big Five personality framework, the results revealed that previous Somali leadership personalities were deeply flawed due to colonial legacy and influence of clannism. In addition, fear of losing and retaining power at all cost instituted clannism as a means on obtaining and retaining political power, thereby compromising unity and social integration. The result also depicted that a significant number of Somali leaders were generally low in conscientiousness as a necessary leadership quality within the Big Five framework. The study maintains that the ongoing post-conflict reconstruction is unlikely to succeed unless leadership personality adapts properly to the prevailing situation of social integration. Moreover, the study recommends that leadership in Somalia should prioritize the restoration of social trust so that Somalia’s reconstruction process can succeed.
Keywords: Previous leadership personality; clan manipulation; social dis-integration; post-conflict reconstruction; Somalia.

1. INTRODUCTION

The partitioning of Africa into colonies placed the northern part of Somalia under British rule while the southern part became an Italian colony. Coincidentally in 1960, Somalia became an independent country with different colonial legacies. Such diversity implied that, the Somali post-colonial leaders must as a necessity unite and integrate the two parts under a unified system of governance. However, the impact of the divide and rule tactics implored by the colonial powers, left behind a society that is somewhat divided. Consequently, the social groupings and leadership personalities that emerged after independence were deeply based on clan identity, a phenomenon that was later exploited as means of political manipulation by subsequent post-colonial leaders [1, p. 64]. Furthermore, rather than strive towards unity and integration, the impact of colonial legacy and clannism tended to shape the leadership personality of Somali leaders. Thus, a significant part of post-colonial leadership in Somalia was characterized by failure to unite towards creating a social system that integrates the diverse parts of the Somali society. Such failure is evidently rooted in flawed personalities that were products of colonial legacies and clannism. Therefore, a context of war mongering created by colonial legacy and clannism can be seen as responsible for the collapse of the Somali 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 [2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9]. Interestingly, on one hand, recent studies have indicated the transition of Somalia into a post conflict stage, which implies the need for Somalia to go through the post conflict reconstruction stages. On 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 [10]. Thus, if social integration is to be successfully attained in Somalia, there is the need for a study on the contributing factors that led the disintegration of the society in Somalia. Importantly, the study focused on previous leadership personalities, divisive policies and why the civil war persisted. 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 [11]. Several other studies have considered Somalia as post-conflict country from various dimensions [12,13,14,15]. Therefore, understanding leadership personalities and practices that led the disintegration and destruction of Somalia can help present and future leaders in Somalia to avoid making similar mistakes and this aids the ongoing post-conflict reconstruction process in Somalia.

2. THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP PERSONALITY

Studies of leadership has extensively generated many discussions aimed at developing an analysis of criterion on what makes great leaders. Most findings conclude that the personality of a leader has a key role in determining performance. 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” [16, p.119]. However, understanding leadership personality requires more than defining the term. Most of previous researchers in the field of leadership have applied perspectives from the five-factor model to measure personality traits of leader’s in relation to performance. The Big Five framework refers to a hierarchical model of personality traits depicting five broad factors, representing personality at a comprehensive level of abstraction. The framework is conceived across two bipolar factors of Extraversion and Introversion with each summarizing several more specific sides of personality. These includes traits like sociability, which, in turn, subsume a large number of even more specific traits manifesting in features like, talkative, outgoing etc. The Big-Five framework suggests that most individual differences in human personality can be classified into five broad, empirically derived domains. Thus, the Big Five model can be used to analyze personality and to assemble actions related to specific traits like leadership responsibility among others. To be more explicit, the Big Five traits are: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion (or Introversion), Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability (or Neuroticism), often represented by the acronym OCEAN. As noted by [17, p.121].
“Conscientiousness describes socially prescribed impulse control that facilitates task- and goal-directed behavior, such as thinking before acting, delaying gratification, following norms and rules, and planning, organizing, and prioritizing tasks. [Emotional Stability describes even-temperedness and] contrasts... with negative emotionality, such as feeling anxious, nervous, sad, and tense... Openness to Experience (versus closed-mindedness) describes the breadth, depth, originality, and complexity of an individual’s mental and experiential life”.

With regards to unity and social integration, the Big five framework can explain personality of leaders on one hand, based on traits of extraversion such as sociability, activity, assertiveness, and positive emotionality tend to be relevant to leadership personality’s ability to lead by example and influence followers towards positive results. Further, leaders that are Conscientious tend to be more socially oriented in styles that facilitates task- and goal-directed behavior in relation to their followers. In practice, these might include the ability for deeper reflections, appropriateness of actions, delaying gratification (more likely to less corrupt and most likely to be trusted), abiding by norms and rules, planning, organizing, and arranging tasks. Extraversion in leadership might politically result to more openness in policies and actions towards unity and social integration. On the other hand, the Big five framework explains how negative emotionality, anxiety, nervousness, sadness, close-mindedness results into flaws in personalities. Thus, leaders with negative traits might generally disunite their followers and creates contexts that are complex and dysfunctional to a given social system.

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. [18, p. 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 [19,20,21] 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

This study adopted qualitative method to explore the role of leadership personalities in the disintegration of the society in Somalia. The role of the researcher was that of an interviewer and analyser; in other words, the researcher collected the data through in-depth face to face interviews and took his time to analyses the phenomenon. Therefore, the study utilized face-to-face interview to ensure that questions in the interview guides were meaningful and easily understood by the respondents. The interviews were conducted between December 2017 and February 2018. And most respondents were located in the capital city of Somalia Mogadishu the respondent in the study comprise former and current Cabinet Ministers from different political groups, Academics, former and current Government Advisors, Clan Elders, Prominent Business Leaders and MP’s. For the purpose of this study, knowledgeable respondents were interviewed to explore the information needed and achieve the purpose of the study. Interview settings were convenient to members participating. A high sense of confidentiality was observed. The interviews were guided by semi-structured questions to explore the needed response. The methods of analysis for the data generated by this study involves the thematic analysis because thematic analysis offers an avenue for both interpretation and involvement of the researcher in the analysis [22].

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Leader’s Personality

Leadership Personality traits of a significant number of previous leaders in Somalia can be attributed to the influences of colonial social structure. The reason being that in less than a decade of post-colonial era, democratic governance was interrupted. This was evident in the depiction of intense predatory aggression by General Mohamed Siad Barre in his quest for power through a military coup in 1969. In relation to his leadership personality traits, Barre did two irresponsible acts, that places his personality high on the neuroticism personality trait score. First, he overthrew a legitimate and democratically elected government, thereby undermining the constitution. Second, he concentrated both political and military power to his clan, so as to prevent another military takeover by creating an alliance called MOD. The MOD comprises three sub-clans of Darod
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 norm of the society in Somalia. According to [23, p. 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.

When questioned about the relationship between personalities of previous leadership in Somalia and the current disintegration of the society in Somalia in an interview conducted on 23 January 2018 in Mogadishu, a former advisor to the then President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud administration [2012-2017] made the following comment:

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 Shamarke 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.

Similarly, another interview conducted on 7 February 2018 at his house in Mogadishu, a former interior minister blamed the personality of most post-colonial leaders but in particular President Barre for the disintegration and mistrust among the society made the following remarks:

It's obvious from the above accounts that the personality of previous leadership in Somalia was less characterized by with the personality trait of conscientiousness. Rather, corruption and power abuse rendered previous leaders ability 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 lawmaker body to money making tool that politicians used to enrich themselves [3].

Of relevance to the above findings is Lewis’s assessment which demonstrates the inner motivation of most post-colonial leaders in...
Somalia as anti-democratic, since they have failed to establish a democratic state that promotes inclusivity and public participation, respects human rights and due process. Similar assessment was made by [25] which concludes most educated Somalis after independence knew the incompetency and the inability 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 moves 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 were 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 disease-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 responses from the interviews were consistent 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 neuroticism personality flaws.

The responses from interviews also revealed that 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 as patrons, associates, clients, supporters and rivals. Under this regime the society was segmented into core allies that are closer to the power corridors, and the rest of the public who were 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 [26] 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

In the early years of the Somali independence the clan system was politicized and manipulated. For instance, politicians compete for influence within their various clans by securing the support of clan elders. By getting the support of the seniors, they were able to represent their clan in the government. Consequently, most politicians promoted clan politics above national politics. Gradually clans became relevant in the political arena and eventually became most powerful and even the basis for power in Somali politics. With the influence of clans emphasized as crucial for political power, clans became the basis of every Somali regime [27]. Despite evident disastrous impact of placing the clan system as most relevant and powerful political institutions, previous leaders tolerated and openly endorsed this corrupt practice.

The reason being that, the clan system allows easy manipulation for securing the support clans through buying the influence of 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. This behavior is consistent with findings that inauthentic or ineffective leaders do not engage a broad spectrum of perspectives in their decision making process and as such are prone to make unethical and immoral decisions [28,29,30].

From the above analysis, clan manipulation and corruption has been transmitted as a continuous process to subsequent Somali leaders over the years. Thus, Somalia has been under leadership personalities that seem to be a continuation of either Barre or Sharmarke. Such process had negatively affected the quality of previous leadership, where regimes have mastered how 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” [25].

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. During an interview conducted on 3 January 2018 in Mogadishu with a Member of Parliament and Minister of state for Finance discussed how leaders in Somalia manipulated their clans and how those strategies led the civil war and social disunity in Somalia:

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 previous 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 a prominent businessman and clan elder who knows how clans operate in Somalia:

The main concern of previous 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.

From the above two accounts, the views 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 ensures the domination of the MOD alliance in the civil servant and other sensitive government positions to make sure his regime was coup proof [31, p. 174]. Such leadership personality traits is consistent with low conscientiousness which makes Barre’s style, to be flighty, impetuous, and impulsive among Somali post-colonial leaders.

The above accounts further revealed the failure of previous leaders in being fair to all citizens on basis of equality. As 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 social equality. However, the evidence shows otherwise. Rather, corruption, clannism and human rights violation became the norm during his regime. For example, in the 80s Barre completely centralized power to his sub-clan of Marehan and even appointed some of his immediate family members to top government posts [31, p. 191]. These actions resulted in clan grievances, hatred and division which later turn into an active civil war. Therefore, as it has been well-documented in history, 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 [32].

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 [33].

Finally, Consistent with most findings on the big five framework, Somali leadership personalities were shaped by a context created by colonial legacies and clannism. As such, previous leadership personality traits among Somali leaders was continuum of failure which resulted in a context characterized by the growth of violence and, flawed institutions. Further, the deteriorating infrastructure, and most importantly, declining social cohesion was the most severe impact that leadership personality had on Somali society. Therefore, it can be argued that, Somalia has witnessed state failure due to leadership flaws arising from low conscientiousness evident across a significant number of Somali leaders. 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 shows the need to improve the social integration situation through restoration of democratic institutions and restructuring the public administration in the country to ensure that 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 also demonstrates 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. It highly recommended that leadership personality of current Somali leadership should mark a radical departure from low conscientiousness evident across a significant number of Somali leaders, to a more adaptive style characterized by being thorough, efficient, reliable, diligent, organized, reliable, and friendly and persevere to realize national goals in spite of obstacles.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

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