High-Quality Research Support (HQRS) Programme

THE ROLE OF TRIBALISM IN SOMALI POLITICS

The Case Study of Puntland

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1.0 RESEARCH CONTEXT

Somalia is located in the Horn of Africa, and has the longest coastline in Africa. Somali people have been divided in colonial times into five parts: Djibouti, Northern Frontier District (NFD), Ogadenia, British and Italian colonies. Only two of those territories united and formed the independent Somali Republic in 1960. It is bordered by the Gulf of Aden with Yemen in the north, Djibouti in the northwest, Kenya in the southwest, the Indian Ocean in the East and Ethiopia in the west.

Somalis are divided into clans and sub-clans. Clans play a major role in Somalia’s politics. Between the military coup of Siad Barre’s regime in 1969 until the collapse of the state in 1991, tribalism was not the dominant factor influencing politics as the government at the time ruled through dictatorship. However, with the political situation worsening, the state collapsed which was followed by wars and clan division which all revived tribalism.

The fall of the regime in 1991 greatly impacted the country. Since then the establishment of a proper government that would re-unite Somali people has proven to be a very difficult task until today. Somali civil war caused tribal grievances, mistrust between clans and the creation of different clan-based local administrations that cannot be under one umbrella. One region (Somaliland) declared independence from the rest of Somalia, while others established local administrations.

The clan-based opposition groups waged civil war, leading to massive internal displacement and refuges all over the world fleeing from the wars zone seeking better and peaceful lives elsewhere. As Sheikh has elaborated,

“The tribal grievances, the ugly violence and the bitterly contested episode of killing and counter-killings right after state collapse in 1991 have left a ‘dirty-mark’ of irretrievable pain both physically and emotionally in every Somali’s conscious mind.” (Sheikh 2015).
During this period of inter-clan conflict, many reconciliation peace conferences occurred. However, the practice of clan structure was the emphasis of the international community. As Abukar wrote,

“At the many peace conferences, the international community has emphasized the use of the clan structure to create political unity and resolve conflict in efforts to end the civil war. Clan elders and members of the political elite who lacked legitimacy were invited to these conferences in attempts to return safety and security to Somalia. The clan structure remains a major factor in current Somali Politics” (Abukar 2015, 41).

Somalia’s government has not yet been able to control all the country; in fact, it barely controls Mogadishu and its outskirts. However, this situation created a space for the traditional elders to play a significant role in solving conflicts between the clans. Tribal elders work closely to resolve the conflicts, disputes and crimes through customary law.

Puntland state is a region in north-eastern of Somalia. After the outbreak of the Somali civil war in 1991, traditional elders, political elites, intellectuals and civil society representatives came together for a conference over a period of three months, declaring Puntland’s territory to be an autonomous state in 1998. The participants who attended the conference were representing different tribes in Puntland. Comparatively, they viewed politics based on tribes as the best remedy for their disunity and lack of cohesion. In addition to that the founders of Puntland were envisioning a transition from tribal based politics to a democratic system. However, their endeavours toward the execution of a multipartite system have not been hitherto realised.

1.1 Research Overall Aim
The aim of this research is to examine the role of tribalism in the politics of Puntland (Somalia), which is ethnically, religiously, culturally and linguistically one of the most homogenous nations in the world. After the collapse of the central government in 1991, the tribal conflict between the Somalis has dramatically increased which brought political instability. The study will explore doable strategies or approaches to reduce the long lasting problem of tribalism in the politics of Puntland.
There is an ongoing debate about tribal politics in Somalia. Clan divisions in Somalia reach to the extent where there is mistrust between the society governed by one central government, and many states have emerged over the years. Tribal conflict takes the form of political differences, which result in disunity, weak government and humanitarian emergencies.

The key research question that will be asked in this paper is what are the effects of tribalism on Puntland politics? The research will have three specific objectives. The first one is to identify the effects of tribalism in Puntland politics. The second objective will be to explore doable solutions to reduce tribalism in Puntland politics. Finally, the third objective of this research is to collect viable information about the tribal politicization in Puntland.
2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the existing literature that is relevant for this study. It points out what other researchers did, how they contributed to our knowledge about the subject-matter and what are the research gaps that this research aims to fill.

In Somalia’s politics, tribalism plays a significant role. Its clan politics system is based on the 4.5 power sharing formula in which four major clans (Dir, Darod, Hawiye and Rahanweyn) take equal representation, while the clans who fall outside of the major ones are considered “others” or minority clans. In reference of this, Hansen reported:

“To further complicate the matter, the 2000 Arta Peace Conference in Djibouti for the first time introduced the 4.5 clan formula that assigns equal representation for what it considers the four ‘major clans’ (Darod, Dir, Hawiya, Digil and Mirifle) and assigns half of the share of one major clan to what it calls ‘others’” (Hassen 2017, 3).

Somali people are deeply divided over the formula of 4.5 in power sharing. While a portion of the society sees it as a solution, others regarded it as an illegitimate formula which does not treat all clans equally but only favors a few politicians who use tribalism to further their agendas, and either stay in power, or come to power. Moreover, they use tribalism as a weapon to further their personal agenda, as Hassen writes,

“The rational question to ask is ‘who is there for Somalia’s national interest when all are after their clan interest?’ Someone would argue that personal interest comes first for the so called Somali politicians and the clan interest is used as smokescreen to conceal their vested interest. But still the question stands ‘who is there for the nation?’” (Hassen 2017, 7).

Somali politicians create social crises by taking advantage of the clans, while advancing their individual agendas, rather than the public interest. The present situation which the country is in may not change unless the politicians come up with a sense of patriotism and put national interests ahead of their private or clan interests.
Tribal-based politics brought a silly situation, whereby well-qualified and loyal leaders fail to have the chance to lead the country because of 4.5 clan-based formula. For instance, two leaders who belong to the same tribe cannot occupy the top position in the government. However, the result of this situation is that many prominent leaders automatically give up their candidacy.

In Somalia, there is a tribal struggle over power. The competition over tribal politics and clan-based interests has been in existence for a very long time. In the earliest form, it was a struggle over grazing and water in rural areas. Nevertheless, tribalism and its competition, gradually developed from rural to urban. Lewis described the nature of the division and competition: “The reason for division or unity depended on interest, as perceived, at different points in time, e.g. competition over grazing or water or commercial control of towns” (Lewis 2008).

After the fall of central government in 1991, there was a new dissatisfaction and greediness for power and political dominance. Conference after conference became the norm. In a reference to this Warsan and Abdulaziz highlighted:

“Conflict in Somalia is characterized by complex and competing personal and clan interests. Reconciliation conferences have failed to address real grievances and have instead been vehicles for furthering these interests. As the number of factions grew in the 1990s, convening a new conference became a goal in itself, rather than consolidating what had already been agreed upon” (Warsan and Abdulaziz 2010, 1).

Tribal politicization affected the country and created political chaos for years. Social disorder and lawlessness in the country also impacted the wider public in an extremely negative way. Having considered all the studies, the researcher is able to contribute and fill existing gap in knowledge concerning tribal politics in Puntland. Some of the past reviews highlighted tribal politicization and suggested that four (4.5) is the only way forward for Somalis to help them form a government. This study will fill the geographical gap which exists since no previous studies have been done specifically on the effect of tribal politics in Puntland. The study will also propose a way forward that can move the country out of the current standstill.
3.0 METHODOLOGY

This chapter will present the methods that were used during the research to gather and analyse data for the study. The study applied qualitative methods because of the nature of the topic. Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted to collect data from respondents to gather relevant information on this matter. The study employed a descriptive research design.

3.1 Data Collection Methods

Qualitative data was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KII) which were conducted in Garowe from July 19th - 23th 2017. KII were used because they are flexible and because the available time didn’t allow the use of other methods such as for example Focus Group Discussions (FGD).

3.2 Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted face-to-face with interviewees using a semi-structured list of questions. This kind of interview gave the researcher the possibility to ask follow up questions and request clarification if any information seemed incomplete or ambiguous. Ten KII were conducted and the participants included the following: two politicians, two representatives of women’s groups, one traditional leader, one religious leader, two government officials and two scholars. These interviewees were targeted because of their social, cultural and political involvement.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in research are critical. How it is handled greatly impacts the integrity and reliability of the research project. One of the most important ethical issues the researcher considered was to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Furthermore, the researcher also followed ethical standards and appropriate guidelines in order to avoid misconduct.
3.4 Limitations and Further Research

Due to financial constraints and the short time available for the research, the researcher confined the scope of the study to Puntland. Features of tribal politics in Puntland are similar to the rest of Somalia such as administrative structure, clan politics and so on. However, conclusions based on the basis of the Puntland’s case study are not entirely generalized for the rest of Somalia. To build a complete picture about the effect of tribal politics on the rest of the country, further research is needed.
4.0 The Effects of Tribalism on Puntland’s Politics

4.1 Lack of Good Governance
Somalia is a victim of a high level of bad governance and the state of Puntland is not an exception. The research participants highlighted that there is poor governance in the government system. They stress that officials put their self-interests and personal agendas before the public interest. Therefore, the state remains underdeveloped. This also creates poor accountability and transparency in governance and important service delivery. The interviewed scholar explained that: “it is a common knowledge that the tribalism badly affected our entire system of governance, most government offices are incapacitated or barely working because of poor personnel”\(^1\).

4.2 Lack of Capable Officials
Another critical element is the lack of knowledgeable and skilled staff. Officials in the government are unlikely to have the potential capabilities to serve in a manner that contributes to the long-term development prospects and enhances good governance. However, tribalism brought poor leaders who used tribalism as a weapon to be in office. The politician respondent stated that: “Tribal politics affected the country, you will find out that wrong people are in offices of the government, and to be frank this system made it easier for a lot of undeserved leaders to come to offices.”\(^2\)

4.3 Poor Social Integration
Tribal politics resulted in poor integration between the communities. One easily finds out that people are not connected very well. Inter-clan conflicts and war between states or tribes in Somalia/Puntland brought a disconnection in terms of economics and movement in one district to another. In Puntland, for example, there is a social disconnection in certain places because of the inter-clan based conflicts which meant that tribes do not intermingle. This occurs mostly in villages and bush areas, where pastoralists who have some kind of tribal vendetta cannot move freely beyond their boundaries.

\(^1\)Interview with the scholar 19/07/2017
\(^2\)Interview with the politician 20/07/2017
"poor social integration between tribes exists in Puntland, it is not only as a result of tribal politicization, but in some cases you'll find out some political alienations and enmities against politically dominant tribes which plays a significant role in poor social integration"

4.4 Corruption and Misuse of Power
Tribal politics has brought corruption that has affected almost every office in the government. Laws and guidelines to fight corruption are in place to curb corruption activities, but they have not been enacted. For instance, officials in the government are placed above the law because the stronger immunity and lack of law enforcement attracts corruption and misuse of power to public offices. The interviewed scholar, said: “corruption is vast in Puntland, and as you can see almost every official in the government is corrupt.”

The participants agreed that corruption is a significant problem in Puntland. A number of them highlighted that they have never seen a corrupt official in the government brought before justice, which makes them above the law. That is one reason that corruption and misuse of power are thriving in Puntland.

4.5 Political Instability
Instability has engulfed Somalia at large. Puntland in particular is also included. The participants agreed that tribal politics brought grievances and political crises which results in political instability in the region. Since Puntland adopted tribal politics, some tribes feel they are being politically dominated or not happy with the power sharing which results in political instability, mostly by their regions or district. The religious leader respondent said that: “because of poor transparency and lack of good governance, political instability has become the major social ill plaguing the peace”

4.6 Personal Agenda
Government officials mostly have the tendency to remain in power, and the easiest way to do so is to make sure that the tribal system should take place in every election.

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3 Interview with the Scholar 19/07/2017
4 Interview with the Religious leader 21/07/2017
In this vein, many participants in the study perceived that in regards to tribal politics the Member of Parliament (MPS) and traditional elders are happy with it, because they are the most influential and significant players in tribal politics. But it is a totally different story when the state is exercising a one person, one vote system. It is quite difficult to influence an entire population. That said, government officials have less concern in promoting and preparing the state to the next level which is a democratic election. As described by the interviewed politician: “most officials who already occupy government offices are not willing to go and cede power, and the only way for them to make sure they should stay in office is to promote tribal politics.”

4.7 Traditionally Based
Somalis were traditionally mostly nomadic people. Their life was quite harsh. Inter clan conflicts were the norm, tribe mates were the only defenders and protectors. In the modern era, tribes are taking different shapes and affect political participation. Participants in the study agreed that different tribes want to obtain some share of the government, and traditional elders mostly put emphasis on the interest of their own tribe. As the politician explained: “The strong believer clan mates and social group are one of the triggers of tribal politicization in Puntland, that each clan want a considerable share in the government.”

4.8 Tribal Politics Continues to Direct Governance
Public accountability cannot be done properly, if there is a lack of transparency. Drawing on responses from the participants, one can conclude that tribal politicization resulted in bad leaders which translates into bad governance. Furthermore the system of tribal politics is mainly not free and is unfair; bad officials have come into office which brought bad governance. The Government official, my key informant, highlighted that “of course tribal politicization affects the governance, because political parties have not been formed and the concerned parties seems unenthusiastic to do so”.

4.9.0 Tribal Politics and Women’s Engagement
Politics in Puntland has always been a male domain. Women are likely to face many challenges in the political arena. They lack political networks that are necessary for

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5Interview with the Politician 20/07/2017
6Interview with the Politician 20/07/2017
7Interview with the Government official 22/07/2017
them to win seats of power. For example traditional elders play a pivotal role and take politically sensitive decisions such as the Members of Parliament MPS selection. For this the women participants agreed, tribal elders have the rather unfavorable cultural belief that women cannot participate in politics. One women’s group representative who was interviewed said:

“Tribes represent a major component of the social structure, yet almost all tribes in Puntland have representatives in the government. Tribes constitute a fearsome challenge of security and stability - and at time it looks as if it's stronger than the state. As a result, many officials took their offices for granted and believe they represent their tribe mates which impedes good governance”

Women’s political engagement is less than men. Participants said that women stay marginalized or segregated from politics. Tribe mates or traditional elders mostly don’t want a women representative in their share of the government. In addition, women participants also stated that if the woman candidate contesting a position is married to different tribe mate than hers, it is quite hard for them to win, since it’s believed her loyalty may lie with her husband’s side or his tribe mates. A female Key Informant highlighted that: “I was a candidate running for an upper house seat. I talked to tribal elders about it, they told me since I am a women I do not have their first priority, later on I haven’t been nominated to contest’”

4.9.1 Lack of Education

Women have less representation in Puntland politics because of a lack of education. A gender gap in education exists in Puntland. The lower level of political participation can be attributed to the lower level of education. According to Matera:

“Only around 30 per cent of all girls worldwide have made it to secondary education and more than 66 per cent of all university students are male. In sub-Saharan Africa for example, most girls only receive two years of education and do not learn to read or write, nor are they able to perform basic arithmetic. In some African countries, fewer than one out of 200 women attend university. In addition, over two thirds of the world's illiterate people are women” (Matera 2015).

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8Interview with the Women 22/07/2017
9Interview with the Women 22/07/2017
In this vein, Somalia and Puntland in particular, are not an exception. There is still many fewer educated women than men. One woman Key Informant commented on this issue: “Poor education is one of the reasons why our political participation is lower, and if this problem is well-addressed I am confident a lot of women would have realized their full potential and capability”.

Although the number of educated women has risen considerably in recent years, as one woman participant stated: “there is lack of education, but it wasn’t as it used to be, nowadays education for women is on rise, parents and society at large understood women can contribute a lot in society.”

4.9.2 Paucity and Scarcity of Financial Resources

The key way to promote women is to allow them access to financial resources. Good provision of financial resources which are available to women would empower them economically but also politically and socially. However, since campaign fundraising is not usually exercised in the country, the politician must be financially secure and strong. A woman participant highlighted: “Women’s financial constraints remains difficult for them to engage in politics, it is common knowledge in our society that man’s access to financial service is consistently a head of that of women, because they have less access to information and has greater family responsibilities, again since people not usually carry out political fundraising, as a politician you must be financially secure.”

Women participants pointed out that the reason women have less representation is because they are not financially strong and the existing system which is "tribal politics” doesn't encourage women’s engagement in politics.

4.10 Traditional Elders' Influence and Tribal Politics

Traditional elders engage in community matters. They are accountable to their community in maintaining peace, reconciliation, politics and so on. Traditional elders' political engagement and participation isn’t something new, because even before Somali independence in 1960 traditional elders used to settle tribal grievances and

10 Interview with the Women 22/07/2017
animosities. However, their work as elders is to counter that effect and advocate unity and cohesion in the community. A traditional elder stated that:

“as a traditional elder, we did a lot of job serving the country toward peace, reconciliation and prosperity, everything we do, its for the betterment of the community. Political participation is a duty since we represent different tribes unless tribal politicization is abandoned”\textsuperscript{11}.

The impetus for the traditional leaders was sparked after the collapse of Siad Barre’s regime in 1991. The country was lawless and chaotic, and that is when the role of traditional elders in socially and politically tense situations emerged. This contributed a lot towards peace and stability between tribes. On the one hand, traditional elders had no involvement at all in Siad Barre’s regime, since he was a dictator. On the other hand tribal politicization was in existence even though the government wasn’t democratic. In the words of one traditional elder: “we have good involvement in politics since we represent different tribes and regions; our objective is to unite different clans and tribes so that we get a well-established government.”

4.11 Religion and Tribal Politicization

From the religious perspective, tribal politics wouldn’t be a problem if it would contribute to justice, equality and fairness among people. As one religious leader stated: “If the political system is fair and just, and it doesn’t oppose the Islamic teachings it has no problem as long as the majority of the society wants it, but if they don’t it should be replaced with another system they want.”\textsuperscript{12}

The participant also stated that tribal politicization affected Puntland because people are troubled by unjust causes of political unfairness and inequality among the community. Hence, traditional elders, government officials or those who are involved in politics mostly act on their own personal preferences and agendas rather than on behalf of the public good. The religious leader stated that: “Tribalism is the main problem in Puntland and Somalia in general, and if we use that system here and then, we will just repeat the history itself.”\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11}Interview with the Traditional elder 23/07/2017
\textsuperscript{12}Interview with the Religious leader 21/07/2017
\textsuperscript{13}Interview with the Religious leader 21/07/2017
4.12 Impact of Politicians on Tribal Politics
Interviewed politicians agreed that they have little influence on tribal politics. Politician participants agreed that they can only raise awareness about the need to eliminate tribal politics. Government officials and concerned parties are the ones supposed to advocate and promote democratization. Besides, most politicians prefer a system which is easier for them to engage in politics. Nevertheless, there are those who see their interest in tribal politicization, and some, who have less chance to achieve their political desire in tribal politics. As one interviewed politician explained: “Our only task as politicians is to raise awareness both in government and society. Other than that, it is the government whose job is to establish parties to end this nightmare of tribal politicization.”

Another interviewed politician stated that:

“I am politician, and there are some offices in the government that I cannot contest for, because of tribal politics. For instance, if politicians of my tribe succeed to a certain post in government that counts, I might lose to achieve mine, because of tribal politicization. One tribe cannot take more than a certain number of posts and that impedes a lot of opportunities that prominent leader may get.”

4.13 Interventions to Eliminate Politicization of Tribalism
All participants agreed that awareness is promulgated for educating communities and government that tribal politics hinders the good governance, cohesion and unity of Puntland people. The social structure of a tribe can’t be denied, but its engagement in politics resulted in intense feelings among people. As the interviewed scholar put it: “Awareness is now on rise, we are only waiting the role of the government to act. “

Participants also mentioned that awareness raising usually takes place in different channels of communication such as radio, TV, social media and so on. You can see that people’s awareness is greater, but within government there is a reluctance concerning implementing and establishing parties for one person one vote. As one interviewed government official put it “at this point there is full awareness in every

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14Interview with the Politician 20/07/2017
corner, on how we have politically failed, and I am pretty sure it’s not that we detest each other, but it’s because we have bad leaders and a bad political system.”

4.14 Recommendations for the Elimination of Tribal Politicization in Puntland

The formation of well-established political parties in Puntland is an important task ahead. The phenomenon of tribal politicization can be eliminated if the concerned parties established political parties. It is so essential to the democratic reform of government and free and fair election for all people. A traditional elder Key Informant says: “Parties are pretty important, to get effective system which can work for us better we shouldn’t stuck to the long failed system of tribal politicization”

Participants also mentioned in their recommendation that they do not need political parties, if tribal politics still exists and stay alive even in political parties. Moreover, shifting from tribal politicization to tribal parties won’t be the solution; in fact the problem will be much bigger and more complex. The religious leader interviewed for this study pointed out that: “political parties are important, but the attitude shouldn’t be the same. Awareness should be carried out to rise peoples attitude not vote candidate based on tribe, rather to cast their ballots after evaluation of candidates and parties”.

- Awareness needs to be raised and citizens informed that tribal politicization has kept Puntland politically ossified and has failed. While these actions of awareness raising are carried out in Puntland, civic education is also an imperative for their critical understanding, wise choices they have to make or encouragement of their public active engagement in attempts to eliminate tribal politicization.
- A clear approach and policies to eliminate tribal politicization need to be developed. The role of the government is to act and do fairly well on whatever issues that need to be tackled in a manner that match up the public needs.
- The right of every citizen to have fairness and justice to participate in politics needs to be promoted no matter which region or tribe he/she belongs to.
- The role of tribal leaders in politics needs to be reduced and confined to traditional and custom issues.

15Interview with the Traditional elder 23/07/2017
16Interview with the Religious leader 21/07/2017
• Accountability and transparency must be guaranteed, to ensure the effective power of democratically legitimate government.

5.0 Conclusion
The objective of this study was to examine tribalism and its effects on Puntland politics, and to consider and propose strategies or approaches to reduce the long-lasting problem of tribalism in politics. The study employed qualitative methodology, and data was collected through Key Informant Interviews. This kind of interview data collection obtains in-depth information and data, since the interviewees have first-hand knowledge about the community and the topic.

The study found several factors of tribal politics in Puntland. The study found out that lack of governance and capable officials are the main factors of tribal politics in Puntland. Consequently, national development is arrested while the government is ineffective. Most of the participants in the study agreed that tribal politicization should be eliminated. They emphasized that well-established and functioning political parties may be the solution. The negative impact of tribal politics in Puntland can be reduced if awareness is promulgated among the society, and all the necessary information is spread that tribal politicization doesn't work for the betterment of the people. It is important to note however, that further research is needed on the Somali context in general.
REFERENCES


