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The Anti-Terror War in Somalia: Somali Women's Multifaceted Role in Armed Conflict

Es ist Ziel dieses Aufsatzes, den von den USA angeführten Antiterrorkrieg in Somalia zu diskutieren und seine Auswirkungen auf die Stellung und Rolle von Frauen in Somalia zu untersuchen. Mit den Anschlägen der al-Qaeda auf die Botschaften der USA in Nairobi (Kenia) und Dar es Salam (Tanzania) im August 1998 entwickelte sich islamischer Fundamentalismus und Terrorismus zu einer bedeutenden Bedrohung für die Region. Als Antwort darauf initiierten die USA in Ostafrika, insbesondere in Somalia, einen Antiterrorkrieg. Sowohl in diesem als auch im somalischen Bürgerkrieg ist die Beteiligung von Frauen bedeutsam. Bislang existiert keine umfassende Studie über die Rolle von Frauen in bewaffneten Konflikten und deren Auswirkungen auf Frauen in Somalia, einem Land, das bereits von Hungersnot, politischer Instabilität, ethnischem Krieg und geschlechterspezifischer Gewalt geprägt war.

Bewaffnete Konflikte bringen neue Möglichkeiten und Zuständigkeiten im privaten wie auch im öffentlichen Bereich, durch die die sozialen Beziehungen zwischen Männern und Frauen neu definiert werden. Nach Ende des Konfliktes bestehen diese Veränderungen jedoch nicht immer fort und patriarchal dominierte Geschlechterrollen treten in vielen Gesellschaften wieder in den Vordergrund. Am Fallbeispiel Somalia geht dieser Artikel der Frage nach, warum Geschlechterrollen, die bereits vor dem Krieg existierten, nach Konflikten wieder auftauchen.

Keywords: al-Qaeda, anti-terror war, conflict, Islamic fundamentalism, gender, Somalia, terrorism, USA.
Al-Qaeda, Anti-Terrorkrieg, Konflikt, Islamischer Fundamentalismus, Gender, Somalia, Terrorismus, USA.

1. Introduction

According to Bouta, Frerks, and Banon (2005b, 3), gender "refers to the socially constructed roles ascribed to women and men, as opposed to biological and physical characteristics." Francis (2000) and Lazaris (2002, 14) also see gender as the social construction of sex differences expressed in constructions of masculinity and femininity. Within the study of gender and conflict, there are two major streams of feminist thinking: one "essentialist," the other "constructionist." For essentialist feminist thinkers, according to Sikoska and Solomon (1999), men's and women's attitudes, behavior, and values are by nature different. Therefore, gender difference is seen as a matter of nature rather than nurture. Moreover, gender identity and gender differences are viewed as static. This means, all men are masculine and all women are feminine (Skjelsbaek 1997). Applied to gender and conflict issues, an essentialist approach portrays men as the aggressors and perpetrators of conflict and women as victims. In this view, women's potential in conflict prevention results from their mothering role (Sikoska/Solomon 1999).

On the other hand, the constructionist position, as noted by Sikoska/Solomon (1999) and Burr (1995), insists that gender identities are constructed rather than predetermined by nature. Therefore, gender identity is not fixed or permanent. It is constantly shaped and modified by various cultural and historical conditions. This approach argues that the institutional system of oppression, i.e., patriarchy, is the main reason behind women's different experiences resulting from unequal access to material and symbolic resources (Sikoska/Solomon 1999).

In the past, many researchers portrayed war as men's business and women solely as victims. Scholars such as Ruddick (1989) perceive women as closer to peace and men as closer to war. Many authors (Burris 1992; Caprioli 2000; Daly 1984; Elshtain 1987; Gierycz 2001; Jacobs/ Jacobson/Marchbank 2000, 13; Miller 1988; Mueller 1973; 1994; Ruddick 1989; Togeby 1994; Tickner 1992) have emphasized women's motherhood, nurturing, and non-violent role during conflicts. De Maio (2004, 3) has also confirmed this view: "Many feminist theories argue that women are by nature and nurture more pacific." This idea of radical feminists which was dominant in the 1970s and 1980s was based on the 19th and 20th century feminist tradition (Confortini 2004, 1). The approach that associates men with wars and sees women as merely passive victims of war and conflict can be described as "pacifist" (Byrne 1996a, 9) or "maternalist" (Jacobs/Jacobson/Marchbank 2000, 13). However, more recently this "maternalist" position has been criticized by feminist writers who want to de-link women from the passive, peaceful stereotype, largely due to revelations about women's combat participation in many armed conflicts (Brock-Utne 1985; Byrne 1996a; 1996b; Enloe 1993; Francis 2004, 5; Sylvester 1994; 2002).

Jacobs, Jacobson and Marchbank (2000) and Moser/Clark (2001) also reject an approach that denotes men as warriors and women as war victims by pointing to women's involvement in war as combatants. According to Bennett/Warnock (1995) and Sorenson (1998), women have participated as combatants in armed conflicts in many countries such as in Angola, El Salvador, Eritrea, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe.

Both men and women have been victims of war including rape, trauma, dislocation, loss of resources, etc. However, Moser/Clark (2001, 7) indicate that in their capacities as both victims and perpetrators, men and women experience armed conflicts differently. Though it is true that women are usually the victims of sexual violence (Kelly 2000), men and boys also sometimes experience such attacks (Moser/Clark 2001, 12; Žarkov 2002, 78–96). "But," as Giles and Hyndman (2004, 3–22) write, "the motivation and meaning of rape, and sexual violence more generally, vary across and within conflict zones."

As GTZ (2001, 11) shows, "female rape seems to aim at humiliating and even destroying the community as a whole," while male rape on the other hand, "may rather be a means to humiliate men." This claim is supported by Guhathakurta (2001) and Sideris (2002). For Strickland/Duvvury (2003, 8), women's bodies are usually viewed as both symbolic and physical markers of community identity. Though, as Byrne (1996a, 26) notes, sexual violence against women in times of war might be the result of the breakdown of law and order. At the same time, it is the result of a policy to demoralize the community. According to El-Bushra and Piza-Lopez (1993, 26), "the deep-seated cultural conception of women as passive, vulnerable and in need of male protection may find political expression in the violent sexual exploitation of women as a strategy for weakening the enemy's resistance." Though both men and women suffer from conflicts, we cannot deny that women are more affected (Moser/Clark 2001, 12). While most combatants in war are men and they are the major direct victims, wars have indirect negative impacts on agriculture, infrastructure, public health, and social order that affect women more than men (Plümper/Neumayer 2006, 3).

According to Pankhurst (2003), women's roles in war remained more or less invisible for many years. Vanessa Farr notes that "during conflicts, women surrender their physical well-being and bodily autonomy" (cited in Ekuam 2006, 123–124). Thus, they become victims of rape, sexually transmitted diseases and more. Women are particularly targeted for rape because they are considered bearers of a group's culture and identity. At present, as already mentioned, it is acknowledged that women play various roles during conflicts, including those of peacemaker and combatant (Ekuam 2006, 10). In the worst cases, women have even participated in genocide, as witnessed in the Rwandan civil war of 1994 (GTZ 2001, 10). Therefore, Reimann (2001, 10) argues that "women cannot be considered – whether socially or biologically – to be automatically more peaceful than men." Women's perceived "peaceful" nature was instead due to their exclusion from power in many societies, which made them dependent and assigned them the subordinate role within hierarchical gender relations (Reimann 2001, 10).

In many African societies, Bop (2001, 19–34) argues, the traditional role of men was that of family breadwinner. However, in situations of armed conflict, African women started to replace men as breadwinners since the latter left home for war. North, Unterhalte, and Aikman (2006) argue that in many countries conflict leads to changes in traditional gender roles. The new economic roles and social responsibilities (as new heads of households) women gain during conflicts, while men are away for war, give them self-confidence and independence. For Baden (1997, 40–41) and GTZ (2001, 10–11), women's new economic and social roles during conflict can help promote gender equality after the conflict. The increased role of women during conflicts is not limited to the domestic sphere but applies also to politics. One indicator of women's active role in politics can be found in their mobilization against wars and conflicts (Nzomo 2000) and their new role as peacemakers.

In peacebuilding processes, women participate both in formal and informal negotiations. Formal peace negotiations usually involve political leaders who are supported by external mediation efforts. In informal peacebuilding processes, voluntary grassroots organizations participate and sometimes facilitate formal peace negotiations. Unfortunately, in many formal peacebuilding negotiations women are underrepresented and the negotiators who represent the warring groups are mostly men.

In the democratization process of many African post-conflict countries, new constitutions were drafted and ratified granting women equal economic, political, and social rights with men. Moreover, many countries emerging from armed conflict have developed new quota systems to ensure that women get equal representation in decision-making institutions at all levels: executive, legislature, and judiciary (Sorensen 1998, 177). However, as witnessed in many countries, the implemention of this new quota for women representatives faces many obstacles and difficulties, including shortage of financial resources, the absence of political will among staff, lack of gender awareness, or the perceived "incompatibility" of gender equality with the existing cultural or social norms concerning gender roles (Sorensen 1998). Moreover, as Nzomo (2000, 8) indicates, in societies where unchanged patriarchal culture and social norms persist, these reforms cannot be implemented. This is the case, as Watteville (2002, ix) argues, because the society itself compels women to return to their pre-conflict gender roles. In some cases, male members of the society and local authorities discourage the political participation of women. In addition, women's heavy work burden as a result of the unequal division of labor in society inhibits their political participation (Sorensen 1998). Nzomo argues that "even though this role reversal is accepted during conflict situations, every effort is made to reverse it in the post conflict period" (cited in George-Williams 2005, 62). In some cases, women's new role comes at the expense of

men and leads to their resentment, which usually manifests itself in men's physical or psychological abuse of their wives (El-Bushra/Piza-Lopez 1993, 69).

A considerable number of scholars have attempted to draw a distinction between international (inter-state) conflicts, such as the anti-terror war, and national (intra-state or civil) conflicts. In order to ensure that gender impacts are fully considered, contextualizing this distinction is critical. At the same time, however, El Jack (2003, 1) correctly states: "It is important to recognize national/civil conflicts are not only internal but transnational in nature, in so far as they take place within a particular international context." For El Bushra and Piza-Lopez (1993, 6), "an international conflict, such as the Gulf war, is inextricably linked with other internal and regional conflicts." Byrne (1996a, 4) also argues that, though "conflicts can be divided into international and intra-state conflicts," they "are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories."

In the case of Somalia, it is very difficult to distinguish the impact of the civil war and the anti-terror war on Somali women, since both are going on simultaneously and mostly the same actors participated. As we will mention later in this article, the Somali warlords and clan leaders who played an active role in the civil war have also participated in the U.S.-led anti-terror war in the country. The best example of this is the role of the ARPCT (Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism) which was the collection of Somali warlords that was formed by the champion of the anti-terror war in Somalia, the United States.

In this article we pose the following research questions:

(1) What were the impacts of the civil war and anti-terror war on Somali women? How did they induce changes in gender roles in Somalia?
(2) How did Somali women react to the intra-state war and the anti-terror war?
(3) Taking into consideration the current on-and-off war in Somalia, how can we assess the changes in gender roles and their perceived or real reversal?

2.   Somalia: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Anti-Terror War

We select Somalia as case study, because in the global war on terror, Somalia is the most important battle ground in Africa. Due to its prevalent anarchy and the absence of a stable government, Somalia is considered as potential safe haven for terrorists and radical Muslims. Moreover, Somali society is one of the most conservative, patriarchal societies in the world. Therefore, to any researcher interested in gender and conflict, Somalia offers an ideal situation to examine changes in gender roles.

As a state, Somalia appeared in 1960 when British Somaliland and Italian Somalia united and became independent (Le Sage 2005, 18). In 1969, General Muammed Siad Barre took political power in a military coup (IDMC 2007b, 17). Siad Barre's policy of favoring his Marehan clan angered other clans who later on formed various political groups who revolted against the government. Siad Barre's 21-year rule ended in January 1991 as a result of various rebellions. The two main opposition groups who spearheaded the rebellion against Siad Barre were the Somali National Movement (SNM), which liberated the Northern Somalia (i.e. Somaliland), and the United Somali Congress (USC), whose political center was in the Southern part of Somalia. After the fall of Siad Barre's government, the USC disintegrated along clan lines, causing a civil war in the country (Nyuot Yoh 2003).

In the mid-1990s, another force came on to the political scene: the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). The ICU was led by Hassan Aweys, former vice chairman and military commander of the

al-Ittihad al-Islaamiyya (AIAI), and Sharif Ahmed. The Islamic Courts Union and the AIAI united to form the Supreme Islamic Courts Council (SICC). The ICU, a group of Muslim legal scholars and business people, emerged out of a judicial system financed by the business community to bring law and order by clamping down on robbery, drugs, and pornography films in a stateless Somalia. The ICU militia punished criminals through amputation and execution (BBC 2006). The ICU occupied Mogadishu on 4 June 2006 by rapidly defeating the various warlords, including the "Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism" (ARPCT) war lords. The ICU was able to pacify parts of South and Central Somalia, including Mogadishu.

The relationship between Somalia and al-Qaeda started in the 1990s when bin Laden resided in Sudan. Al-Qaeda provided training to Somalia factional militia who fought against the U.S.-led international intervention force in 1993. In addition, key al-Qaeda leaders, including Mohamed Atef (Bin Laden's deputy) and Ali Muhammed (al-Qaeda's principal trainer), visited Somalia in 1992 and 1993 (Bryden 2003, 27). The U.S. policy in Somalia has three goals: counter-terrorism, the creation of an effective government, and providing humanitarian assistance to the Somali people (Dagne 2007, 5). Somalia has become a haven for radical Islamists due to its lack of a central government and its ungoverned territory and coastline (West 2005, 19).

In 2001, the U.S. added the home-grown Muslim organization AIAI to its list of terrorist groups. Moreover, al-Barakat, the Somali money transfer organization was added to the same list. It is also widely believed that the al-Qaeda cell in Somalia had participated in the bombing of an Israeli-owned hotel in Kenya and the failed attempt to shoot down an Israeli commercial plane in Kenya (Shinn 2004, 41). In February 2006, with the aim of checking the movement of international Islamic terrorists in Somalia, the U.S. supported a coalition of Somali warlords known as the "Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism" (ARPCT), which was eventually defeated by the ICU in 2006 (AFP 2006; Dagne 2007, 16). In January 2007, in the war between the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) forces and their Ethiopian allies on the one side and the ICU forces on the other side, the U.S. Air Force conducted air raids in Southern Somalia in search of Islamists, the remnants of the ICU forces and al-Qaeda elements, as part of its anti-terror war (IDMC 2007b, 9). The U.S. Air force supported by AC-130 gun ships bombarded areas in Southern Somalia, where the remnants of the ICU were suspected to be hiding. The main targets of the attack were three terror suspects who were alledgedly responsible for the U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. It was reported that around 70 people, including innocent civilians, were killed in this U.S. aerial bombing (Dagne 2007, 2). The U.S. strike against the suspected al-Qaeda and ICU hideout in Southern Somalia was criticized for the indiscriminate killings of women and children.[1] However, the U.S. Ambassador to Kenya, Michael Ranneberger, denied the death of civilians. "Contrary to press reports, US actions have included only one strike against a group of al-Qaeda in Southern Somalia. No civilians were injured as a result of this action," he said (cited in IRIN 12 January 2007).

3.   The Status and Role of Somali Women

According to Askar (1992), Siad Barre's government (1969–1991) declared that women and men should have equal rights. To the dismay of the Mullahs, women were even allowed to wear trousers. According to the law introduced by Siad Barre's government, women were allowed to inherit property at half the level of their brothers' entitlement. Despite these cosmetic reforms, Somalia's patriarchal culture continued to systematically subordinate women. According to

Cerulli (1964), in public law a Somali woman has no saying in the *shire* (assembly). In civil law (*xeer*), a Somali woman does not exist as an independent legal person, because she is under the authority of her father before marriage and under the jurisdiction of her husband after marriage (Bryden/Steiner 1998, 30). In reality, therefore, in pre-conflict Somalia, women played no role in formal or informal political activities (Power-Stevens 1996, 93). Moreover, the traditional justice system of Somalia, which is based on the negotiation between parties and includes *dayeh* (blood money), discriminates against women. For instance, the *dayeh* for a woman is only half of that of a man. However, if a pregnant woman is killed, then the *dayeh* is similar to that of a grown man (Power-Stevens 1996, 96). As Somali society is exogamous, a woman becomes the property of her husband and his clan after marriage (Power-Stevens 1996, 101).

The traditional role of women in Somalia is best described by the old Somali adage, "A mother's purpose is to be a cook, laundry woman, nurturer, and wife to her husband." According to the Somali tradition, men were responsible for providing their families' basic needs. However, the civil war in Somalia fundamentally changed the traditional role of women. The war killed many Somali men, leaving behind widows and orphans. Therefore, Somali women took on new roles: they became the providers of their families' basic needs (IRIN 3 May 2005). Dixon (2006) further explains that in Somalia's civil war, women first became breadwinners, since many of their husbands were killed, and only later became peacemakers. As many gender experts indicate, in times of conflict and war, gender roles shift dramatically. Most of the time, these shifts challenge power structures. Sometimes, the shifts in gender roles (especially when women become heads of households) make women defenseless, exposing them to sexual attacks and economic and social exploitation. As we stated above, many Somali women became the main breadwinners and heads of households after the fall of the central government. As reported by China View (14 August 2007), "Somali women who engage in business are mainly widows and divorcees who found themselves forced into the world of commerce after their husbands died or were separated from them." Vincent (2001) reveals that those Somali women who were involved in trade during the armed conflict became victims of stigmatization, being stigmatized as prostitutes.

Somali society is traditionally organized along clan and sub-clan lines. This traditional organization does not consider Somali women full members of clans. They are removed from decision-making bodies both for war and peace. However, they are the ones who suffered most from the disturbance of peace (Mohamed 2000). In 2004, it was reported that many innocent women and children were the prime targets in the inter-clan fighting in Southern Somalia. In the words of the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Maxwell Gaylard, this "is a very disturbing trend and one that has shocked the communities themselves, for both the unusual brutality of the killings and the intentional targeting of women and children" (UN News 2004).

Women can serve as peacemakers and also play a role as warriors, as indicated by El-Bushra (2000), Jacobson (2000), and Mukta (2000). In the period between 1991 and 2007, Somali women participated both as warriors and peacemakers. Despite the customary limitations, Somali women struggled to contribute to the peacebuilding process in war-torn Somalia (Byrne 1996a, 29). In 1992, for instance, the Somali Women Development Association (SOWDA), a local women's organization, attempted to collect money to establish a police force that would keep law and order in Hargessa city, Somaliland. The SOWDA also organized a demonstration in 1992 to motivate and encourage local elders to mediate the then conflict between two clans in the area. Encouraged by the activities of the SOWDA, the local elders successfully mediated between the warring clans and were able to end the conflict after a five-month negotiation effort

(Mohamed 2000).[2] In a similar manner, Somali women in Bosaso (Northern Somalia) success-fully lobbied for a police force and prisons financially supported by a monthly levy from Basaso port. This police force made a significant contribution to peace and order in the area. In 1998, the women handed over the management of the police force to the new local administration. Somali women also played an important role in the demobilization and disarmament of the local warring militias. One example of such an endeavor was the role of IIDA (Women's Development Organization) in Merca (Southern Somalia) in 1997. In collaboration with COSV, an Italian NGO, and with EU funding, the IIDA offered education, housing, and income opportunities for about 150 disarmed militias in return for submitting their weapons (Mathews 2001, 67). In the capital Mogadishu similar activities have taken place through the initiative of a Somali women's or-ganization known as the Coalition for Grassroots Women's Organizations (COGWO). As a result of the efforts of COGWO, the Peace and Human Rights Network (PHRN) was established. The PHRN was able to bring together traditional elders, civil society, ex-militia, and sport groups (Mathews 2001).

Almost always, the various all-Somali peace conferences which took place in and outside Somalia were (for all practical purposes) synonymous with clan conferences. Clans are domi-nated by male clan elders and clan chiefs, since women are formally segregated and not allowed to play an active role in these conferences, in line with the traditional customs of Somali society (Elmi 2004). Despite this unfavorable situation, Somali women have been struggling to voice their opinion as clan-free women and part of society.[3] The first significant opportunity for So-mali women to contribute to peace and dialogue among the Somali people was through their participation in the Arta, Djibouti, conference which took place in 2000. At this conference, in addition to other decisions that were taken, it was agreed that female representatives would be included in the future national parliament. A quota of 25 seats (or 10.2 percent) was reserved for women in the future national parliament of Somalia (Elmi 2004). One of the few women delegates to the National Peace Conference in 2000, Asha Hagi Elmi, explained the difficulties women delegates faced at the time: "We lobbied for a quota for women in the future legislature, the Transitional National Assembly. But we faced opposition from the male delegates. 'No man', they told us, 'would agree to be represented by women' " (cited in Rehn/Sirleaf 2002, 78). The conference also facilitated the formation of the Transitional National Government (TNG) that got a mandate to rule the country for three years. However, contrary to the principle and good spirit of the Arta conference, the TNG failed to give a single cabinet post to Somali women. In October 2002, another conference (the Somali Peace and National Reconciliation Conference) took place at Eldoret, Kenya, with the support of the IGAD (Inter Governmental Authority on Development). At this conference, 33 percent of the delegates representing civil society organi-zations were reserved for women participants. Moreover, Somali women got the chance to participate in the various conference committees, including the committees for disarmament, the drafting of the federal charter, reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. In addition, women representatives were allowed to be members of the 39 member inter-group crisis manage-ment team (Rehn/Sirleaf 2002). In an increased effort to restore peace in Mogadishu, as many as sixty women peace activists appealed for the restoration of peace and stability in the city in June 2003. In their declaration they said the following:

> *We have decided that we will do anything to bring pressure to bear on the leaders ... to restore peace and stability ... This city has suffered more than anywhere else in Somalia, and it is the women who bear the brunt of the problems. We are the mothers, sisters and the*

> *wives who have to care for the family after our men are killed or maimed (IRIN 10 June 2003).*

In January 2004, the Somali consultative meeting was held in Nairobi, Kenya. At this conference, Somali women advocated to get at least 25 percent representation in Somalia's legislative, executive, and judiciary institutions (IRIN 28 March 2003). At the end of the consultative meeting, a declaration was issued, signed by the Somali delegates. One of the signatories of this document entitled "Declaration on the Harmonization of Various Issues Proposed by the Somali Delegates at the Somali Consultative Meetings" was a woman (Asha Hagi Elmi) representing civil society. For the first time ever, a Somali woman signed a peace agreement. Though the Somali women failed to achieve the 25 percent target, they were able to get some concessions. In the new constitution adopted in January 2004, it was stipulated that twelve percent of parliamentary seats should be reserved for women. In other words, out of 275 seats in the parliament 33 seats were assigned to women deputies. However, this was not properly implemented. Only 22 seats were assigned to women and the rest were allocated to male deputies (ICG 2004, 4; IDMC 2007a, 60; IPS 16 December 2004). In 2005, with the aim of improving the security situation in Mogadishu, the Mogadishu Security and Stabilization Plan (MSSP) was initiated. The plan included a proposal to demobilize 1,400 militia men and 60 "technicals," and place them into two camps outside Mogadishu. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG 2006, 6), "women's neighborhood groups … assumed direct responsibility for providing food to the encamped militias."

4.　Somali Women and the ICU

As we stated earlier, Somali women have also participated as warriors. For instance, according to Dagne (2007, 6), "during the Mogadishu fighting, women supporters of ICU played important roles." In the earliest days of the ICU's military success in Mogadishu and other towns, Somali women supported the ICU largely due to the ICU's contribution to bringing relative peace and security to war-torn Somalia. However, the support of women to the ICU was short-lived (Washington Post 2006). Though Somali women warriors contributed much to the military success of the ICU, the short-lived ICU rule was not favorable to Somali women. For instance, on 15 November 2006 the ICU seized and burned eight tons of *khat*, an action that provoked and ignited anti-ICU demonstrations and public protests. It also officially banned the importation of khat (NDI 2006, 1). Like other commodities, khat was also one of the items traded by Somali women. The khat importation ban, therefore, seriously affected the economic activities of Somali women.

In its attempt to establish a Taliban-style regime in Somalia, the Islamic Court banned women from swimming at Leedo beach, the largest beach in Mogadishu, Somalia's capital. Announcing the ban, Sheikh Farah Ali Hussein, chairman of a northern Mogadishu Islamic Court, said: "We stopped women from swimming because it is against the teaching of Islam for women to mingle with men, especially while they are swimming" (Nor 2006). Somali women showed their opposition to the radical Islamic fighters (ICU) in various forms, including demonstrations (AP 2006). For instance, when the ICU forces captured Kismayou town, hundreds of women protested by staging a demonstration (The Moscow Times 10 January 2007). Under the ICU rule, Somali women felt less vulnerable to war-related and public violence, but lost their participation in trade. Under the Islamic regime, Somali women faced increasing difficulties in getting jobs (Dixon 2006). Moreover, women were instructed by the ICU regime to stay at home and attend

to their children instead of engaging in trade or other public activities. For instance, Dixon (2006) recounts the story of a female Somali newspaper publisher, Malyun Sheik Haidar, who was ordered by the ICU to close down the publishing house and stay at home. She is quoted as saying: "If this continues, it will close down my newspaper. ... This is our only expression. We are talking about children's rights and women's rights, and if they stop us from doing that, it means we lost our rights" (cited in Dixon 2006).

5.   Discussion

When the Somali state collapsed in 1991, almost all the modern state structures that were responsible for the advancement of women before 1991 were destroyed. This situation denied Somali women educational and employment opportunities and pushed them back to their traditional status and role of wife and mother. On the other hand, however, the armed conflict offered a new opportunity to Somali women: it increased their influence both in the private and public spheres due to participation in trade and commerce (Bryden/Steiner 1998, 67).

While wars bring much destruction, they also have some empowering effects on women: they push women to take up traditionally male-dominated roles (Reimann 2001, 10). Armed conflicts also have disempowering effects on both men and women, including post-traumatic stress disorder which manifests itself in mental illness, depression, and suicide. In the case of Somalia, armed conflicts and civil wars have opened new opportunities for Somali women to assume more productive roles and disengage themselves from the male-dominated societal situation (Meintjes 2001, 63–77). However, most of the gains of Somali women were reversed or short-lived. This was primarily due to the measures of the ICU which seriously curtailed Somali women's economic, political, and social activities. Though the ICU no longer has formal political power, the new government which was installed with the military support of Ethiopia is very weak and has failed to counter the influence of the ICU among the people. Moreover, the government is not strong enough to take a bold stance in favor of women, fearing that such action would antagonize and push society further towards the ICU.

For George-Williams (2005, 63), "there is usually an urgent return to the pre-conflict status quo fostered mainly by men enforcing the patriarchal social structures." Bop (2001, 19–34), Jacobs, Jacobson, and Marchbank (2000), Vincent (2001), and Weil (2004, 12) note that women's gains are fragile, emphasizing their reversal to the pre-conflict stage. According to Pankhurst, in African countries such as Eritrea, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zimbabwe where women had accomplished relative freedom during armed conflicts, women were later on compelled to return "to the kitchens and fields" (2000, 6).

By using the case of Mozambique, Nakamura (2004) argues that one of the major reasons for the re-emergence of pre-conflict traditional gender roles in post-conflict societies is that the state, relief projects, and the reconstruction process strengthen traditional gender roles. This situation can also be observed in Somalia. As noted by IDMC (2007a, 27, 79), in Somalia, local relief assistance is usually distributed through the clan structure. Therefore, those women who live outside their clan receive very little assistance. George-Williams (2005, 59–72) argues that one of the reasons women face difficulty in strengthening and retaining their gains, is the way gender issues are advocated. That is to say, for ill-informed males gender equality is understood as fifty-fifty equality in its absolute sense, and this misconception leads to stern resistance from male-dominated patriarchal societies. Therefore, "such confrontational approaches to men whose

psyches are fixed with notions of male dominance pose problems for the realization of gender balance. A more collaborative approach is proving more rewarding" (George-Williams 2005, 70). The other reason for the reversal of women's gains in the post-conflict period, according to Weil (2004, 14), is the absence or the lacking strength of civil society organizations which could serve as a replacement for the disrupted traditional fabric of the society. In the case of Somalia, civil society organizations in the modern sense do not exist except for the few women's associations mentioned in this paper and other associations of marginal significance. Therefore, Quinn and Farah (2008, 8) write that "there is rarely a mention in any Western or African media of the presence of civil society in reference in [to] Somalia, meriting more attention and forcing international actors to consider it in their policy analysis." Moreover, civil society in Somalia is very fragmented, lacks a firm social foundation, and has very limited political resources. In many instances, as Mohamoud (2000, 40f) rightly points out, civil society in Somalia is "a one man or one woman show."

Nevertheless, this does not mean that all gains were reversed. As Weil (2004, 12) emphasizes, "the gains achieved in gender awareness and capability rarely are rolled back, and many of the grassroots effort and other advances made by women can be sustained if adequately supported." Somalia is an interesting case with regard to this issue. As already indicated, Somali women had no significant economic position before the war. This changed when women gained an important economic position during the war. We argue that, though considerable reversal might be possible in the future, it is highly unlikely that women's economic position will be fully reversed.

Due to poor documentation and limited studies, women's role as combatants in armed conflict has not received much attention in the literature. Therefore, the stereotype of women as only victims of armed conflict was created. Recently, however, this research problem has been identified and research conducted to investigate the role of women as combatants and perpetrators of violence (Reimann 2001, 10). As Bouta, Frerks, and Banon note:

> *Whether the effects of war empower or disempower people, examinable changes are evident. Importantly, the image of women as solely victims is slowly changing, as it becomes more apparent that women in fact have multiple roles in conflict and in post-conflict situations. There is a need to safeguard the positive and empowering changes that conflict – paradoxically – has brought for many women (Bouta/Frerks/Banon 2005a, 17).*

Though Laura Bush, First Lady of the United States, claimed that "the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (The White House 2001), in Somalia the U.S. made an alliance with the coalition of warlords (ARPCT) whose militia was accused of pillaging, raping, and dislocating Somali women. The U.S. was criticized for its support of the ARPCT (Dagne 2007). In fact, the U.S. support of the warlords' alliance was counter-productive, because it ignited resentment among the Somali people and strengthened the Islamic Court's position (Boukhars 2006, 5; Spero News 24 Oct. 2006). When the ICU forces conquered Mogadishu, the ARPCT warlords and their militia fled the capital (Dagne 2007, 5).

As the above quote by Laura Bush shows, the U.S. has embedded women's rights discourse into its anti-terror campaign in an attempt to shape international public opinion that the war is not only a campaign against Muslim terrorists but also involves a liberation mission aimed at empowering women in "failed states." The American government has constantly pursued (in all countries in which it conducts its anti-terror war) a policy of supporting the participation of

women representatives in all branches of the administration (executive, judiciary, and legislative) in the post-conflict period. For instance, according to Brown (2002, 74), the U.S. insisted that women be part of the interim Afghan government during post-war reconstruction. The U.S. has pursued a similar policy in Somalia, paving the way for Somali women's empowerment. As part of this policy, the NDI (National Democratic Institute) operated a U.S.-government funded program which aimed at improving the parliamentary skills of 23 female members of Somalia's Transitional Federal Assembly (Parliament) (Fisher-Thompson 2006). The U.S. also selected a Somali woman, Farhiyo Farah Ibrahim, as one of the eight female champions of human rights "who have risked harassment and death to fight for women's rights" to receive the 2008 award from Condoleezza Rice, State Secretary of the United States (Morse 2008).

On the other hand, however, due to the civil war and the anti-terror war in Somalia, many Somali civilians were killed, maimed, raped, and displaced. Women and children constitute three-quarters of the displaced population in Somalia, which exhibits one of the worst displacement situations when it comes to IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) (IDMC 2007a, 79). The Dutch branch of Oxfam claimed that "throughout the Somali conflict, factions have used rape as a weapon of war to punish and intimidate rival ethnic factions. The collapse of the government and the ensuing crisis has allowed armed combatants to rape women with impunity" (cited in IPS 16 Dec. 2004). Sexual violence against displaced women in Somalia was widespread (IDMC 2007a, 28). Unfortunately, displaced women never report sexual abuses due to fear for their lives and the social stigma associated with rape (IDMC 2006, 15–16). Moreover, militias in Somalia have used rape as a weapon of war to humiliate a rival ethnic group or clan (Menkhaus 2003, 5–6; IDMC 2006, 15). As reported by IDMC (2006, 15–16), women in Somalia "are at particular risk of rape when they walk long distances away from the settlements in search of water or firewood. At night, the lack of latrines forces them to walk to the margins of the settlements where they are at risk of attack." In addition, due to the armed conflicts, many households in Somalia at present are headed by women and their huts are constructed from fragile materials (often with no proper door), thus exposing them to sexual assaults by men (IDMC 2006, 15–16).

After the fall of the ICU, due to the continuous warfare between the ICU remnants and the forces of the TFG, the situation of Somali women went from bad to worse. From January to April 2007 alone, around 300,000 civilians were displaced due to armed conflict in Mogadishu (Nyanduga 2007, 2). Most of the displaced were women and children. Human rights workers in the country reported that "escalating violence in Somalia is increasing the incidence of sexual attacks against women and girls and heightening their risk of HIV infection" (IRIN 16 August 2007). The report further added that "adolescent girls and women have been abducted, harassed and raped, leaving them vulnerable to unwanted pregnancies and HIV infections" (IRIN 16 August 2007). To sum up, the civil war in Somalia and the U.S.-led anti-terror war have worsened the plight of Somali women. As indicated by the IDMC (2007a, 17), the "United States-led international 'war on terror' has continued to fuel conflicts leading to internal displacement, for example in Colombia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Somalia."

6.   Conclusion

Between 1991 and 2006, Somalia lacked a strong central government, an army, a judiciary, and a legislature (ICRC 1999). At present, Somalia is divided into three parts: the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland, the self-declared Republic of Puntland, and the rest of Somalia where

the TFG (supported by Ethiopian forces) rules. For Rotberg (2004, 131), "Somalia is the model of a collapsed state: a geographical expression only, with borders but with no effective way to exert authority within those borders." The first conflict which led to the collapse of Somalia started in 1989 when the Ogaden, Issaq, and the Hawiye clans revolted against the government of Siad Barre. The revolt toppled Siad Barre in 1991, and this event led to internal conflict among Somalia's various clans as they vied for power (ICG 2004, 3). According to Weil (2004, 10), "armed conflict breaks down traditional social order for good and bad. It turns organizational structures upside down, scattering families and creating a leadership vacuum. Under such conditions, conflict can be both disempowering and empowering for women."

For Bryden and Steiner (1998, 4), the armed conflict in Somalia had contradictory impacts on the status of women. On the one hand, the armed conflict greatly reduced pre-war[4] progress in the promotion of women's rights since the pre-war modern state structures are now replaced by traditional clan structures that allow women only a secondary position in society. On the other hand, however, the armed conflict has brought a new status and role to Somali women. Now, Somali women (as merchants and heads of households) acquired important positions in society. El-Bushra, cited by George-Williams (2005, 62), reveals that the conflict in Somalia paved the way for Somali women in Somalia and Somaliland to be more independent and build their self-esteem to the extent that they assumed more active roles in decision making regarding marriage and divorce and in the selection of their marriage partners. As Olivia Bennet, Jo Bexley, and Kitty Warnock testify:

> *Before, the number of women who worked was limited. There was a certain shame attached to a working woman, with the exception of older women traders ... or some well-educated women working in offices ... But since the troubles started, it is rare to find a woman sitting at home. Circumstances have forced them out of their homes (GTZ 2001, 9).*

Though the U.S.' anti-terror campaign in Somalia was blamed for worsening the misery of Somali civilians including women and children, it would not be fair to disregard the U.S.' contribution to encouraging the fledgling Somali government to reserve a quota for female representatives in the parliament, executive, and judiciary. Therefore, contrary to their pre-war traditional role as housewives, at present, Somali women have an opportunity to participate politically. The main question now is whether Somali women will be able to maintain their new position. Perhaps, this will be seen in the near future when Somalia completely re-gains its statehood and law and order are achieved. More detailed research is required to fully understand the changes in gender relations within Somali households during and following the conflict. This will be crucial in the support of Somali women's empowerment. In addition, a more thorough analysis of gender and conflict in Somalia requires long-term field research and analysis, preferably designed and executed by Somalis themselves.

NOTES

1   The U.S.-led anti-terror intervention in Somalia forced many Somali women to join other Somalis in staging various anti-U.S. demonstrations (see BBC 2008). We argue that participating in these political demonstrations helped Somali women turn from housewives into political activists.
2   Byrne (1996a, 29) and Mathew (2001, 66) claim that women in Somaliland were able to act as clan ambassadors. On the other hand, Somali women are also often exchanged to seal peace negotiations between warring clans. As a Somali proverb instructs, "The stains of blood should be cleansed with a fertile woman virgin" (Byrne 1996a, 29).
3   According to Byrne (1996a, 28–29), "in the Somalian conflict, it was only through the pressure of the President of Ethiopia and the Life and Peace Institute that Somali women were able to gain entry to a peace conference in Mogadishu and even then it was only as observers."
4   It is very hard to say that Somalia at present is in a post-conflict situation. Even now there is fighting in the South and some other parts of the country. Somaliland and Puntland, however, are relatively peaceful and in a stage of post-war rehabilitation.

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