

INCREASING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND
INCLUSION IN JUBBALAND PEACE PROCESSES

Life Stories

WOMEN, CONFLICT AND PEACE:
LEARNING FROM KISMAYO

Women, Conflict and Peace: Learning from Kismayo

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Cover photo: Portrait of Somali Woman, 1985. Liba Taylor, Getty Images

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Introduction

In October 2016, the Life & Peace Institute (LPI), Peace Direct and the Somali Women Solidarity Organization (SWSO) began a qualitative study to understand better how women in Kismayo had been affected by the many armed conflicts that had taken place in the city since the collapse of the Somali state in 1991. What roles had women played to end the violence and help bring peace? The aim of this study is to illuminate ways to enhance women's participation in peace processes in Jubbaland and so help to bring women's voices to bear on policy and practice in the region. The full report of the research and study findings is available at on LPI's website at www.life-peace.org.

During the course of the fieldwork, the all-Somali research team (four women and two men) consulted with and listened to 149 women and 51 men through a series of 16 focus group discussions. It is evident from these consultations that the research touches a previously untapped vein of memories and experiences about women's lives in Kismayo since 1991. These discussions about the gendered nature of clan conflict, and about the challenges and strategies women peace activists deploy in such a context, along with their limitations, have generated an enormous amount of new knowledge and raised a number of new questions about clannism, conflict and peacebuilding in Somalia.

The findings of this research provide testimony to the multiple and appalling ways clannism has impacted women and girls. The findings also show that no social group has been spared from the violence. Perhaps most important for the purpose of the study – bringing women's voices to bear on peacebuilding and political settlement processes – the findings provide unique, powerful and empirical evidence of the critical roles played by women in the construction and production of the clan conflicts that have afflicted Kismayo.

Along with new insights into women's peace activism, these findings are potentially paradigm-changing in terms of thinking about conflict resolution, peacebuilding and reconciliation work in the Somali context. They indicate how Somali women should no longer be viewed as passive victims of clan conflict but rather as full players. Tokenistic representation and sidelining women in political settlement processes and peace talks leaves the way open for conflict to

reignite because female perspectives and experiences are left out of the calculations. As these women and the findings of the main study show, in a clan-based society all women have political agency and interests. As guardians and agents of clannism and co-producers of the violent masculinities necessary to proliferate clan warfare, women must be brought into the heart of conflict resolution and re-envisioning society in order to achieve sustainable peace.

During the fieldwork, ten women agreed to share their life stories when they were approached by the Somali Women Solidarity Organization (SWSO), LPI's local interlocutor. These women range in age from their late teens to their late sixties. Their names have been changed to protect their anonymity. This volume contains the accounts shared by six of these women, selected because they were born before the Somali civil war began in 1991. Their accounts shed considerable light on women's experiences since then. The other four life stories, from young women active in peacebuilding, are referenced in the main study.

These ten interviews are an opportunistic result of the broader research project. The idea for collecting and documenting these life stories belongs to LPI's researcher, who sat in on some of the women-to-women dialogue sessions, separate from but running parallel to this research project. Each of the women met with the LPI researcher individually – often with little time and lacking a quiet, comfortable space in which to tell their stories. The interviews are not based around structured questions. Instead, these women are simply invited to think back over the years to talk about their lives since 1991, which is the only guidance they were offered.

The results of these discussions are the powerful personal accounts presented here: the spoken words recorded in Somali, transcribed and translated into English, and reproduced without summarizing. A series of ellipses (...) occasionally appears in this text to indicate a cut in the transcription. This is usually due to an incoherence in the recordings that renders the speaker's words incomprehensible or sometimes because of a digression that takes the story outside of the frame of interest. Where necessary, clarifications are added in (round brackets) and explanations in [square brackets]. Footnotes are provided when speakers have mentioned something that requires further elaboration to understand its relevance. Otherwise, what is produced here are the translated words of each woman, untampered with and left largely uncut to allow the reader a chance to hear the full stories as they are told.

Through these women's collected memories, we hear and see the war through the lives of six ordinary women, who were young women or young

girls at the start of the war. Through their vivid, often graphic, sometimes ragged accounts, they talk about the minutiae of some of their personal experiences, their reasoning and their perspectives. Each distinct, their voices enable the reader to briefly inhabit landscapes of war that are otherwise hardly to be imagined: both physical and emotional experiences; as victims, perpetrators, objectors, witnesses; and always as survivors. From diverse clan backgrounds and experiences – some more educated than others, for example – what each woman chooses to share is varied and rich, offering insights into her life but also into how she has come to terms with events, or not. In itself, each life story offers valuable insight into resilience. Some accounts are more detailed than others. In some, women speak their minds on issues of concern rather more than about their own lives.

Remarkably, what each woman's testimony seems to have in common is a sense of self-discovery. For some, like Fardosa, this sense is there before they embark on the women-to-women dialogue process concurrent to this research. For others, it seems that becoming part of what they see as a path to reconciliation opens new ways of thinking about themselves in relation to their past and their future. Telling their life stories also appears to provide catharsis – a space in which to begin to release and share emotions about traumatic pasts. As these testimonies illustrate, trauma is not black and white: victim versus perpetrator. Behind the stories of the three women who directly engaged in violent conflict, for example, there are traumatic tipping points.

This life story collection begins with the youngest narrator, who was about six years old when the course of her is changed forever by the violent clan wars that broke out after state collapse. The collection ends with the life story of the oldest woman, who had served as a nurse during the Siyad Barre era but then had to resort to hawking second-hand shoes around the streets of Kismayo to earn enough money to feed her children and send them to Qur'anic school. In between are stories from a woman who almost died at the hands of another woman in a case of mistaken clan identity, along with the narratives of three women who directly engaged in conflict – two as fighters with their clan militia and one as a militia supporter.

Reflecting on these meetings, the LPI researcher notes the readiness of these women to speak about their lives and, in some cases, the joyful (perhaps even cathartic) way in which they tell their stories. Whether peace activism is a path to personal redemption for many, as it seems it might be the case for Khadiya, there is a discernible sense that the women-to-women dialogues are a

welcome opportunity to put the past to rights – to share pain and hurt, and in some cases, guilt and shame. These are emotional burdens that probably nearly every Somali adult carries. For as Amina says, ‘You won’t see anyone who has not participated in the wars.’

LPI’s purpose in publishing these unique first-person narratives is to deepen understanding about women’s experiences of the Somali civil war, including the roles they play in conflict, and the importance of women’s peace activism and political ambition. These stories are testimony to the gendered nature of the conflict and the resilience of patriarchy. Despite all that women have done in the name of their clans, and have done collectively in the name of peace, because they are women they are sidelined when it comes to political power and decision-making. Their agency (for war and for peace), resilience and determination is illustrated abundantly in their accounts. This is more evidence, if more is needed, of the relevance of an inclusive political process and system of governance.

To preserve their anonymity, the names of these narrators have not been recorded. Rather, each storyteller is provided with a pseudonym. Any relationship these pseudonyms may bear to the actual names of these women is purely coincidental. Their clan and sub-clan affiliations, along with specific locations through which such affiliations can be determined, have also been replaced with generic descriptors in the interests of preserving anonymity.

BASRA

Basra was around six years old, living with her mother and maternal relatives in a rural village in Middle Jubba when her life was affected by the clan wars that had erupted and split the Somali population after state collapse in 1991. She vividly remembers the dreadful impact of the violence that became an everyday reality. Her account sees the war through the eyes of a girl-child. Although she was not wounded or killed, as would have happened had she been a boy-child, she is made motherless. Both mother and daughter become victims of the clannism driving the violence – clannism that continues to affect Basra’s life, and over which she has no control.

For Basra, the worst violence comes from the hands of those closest to her – her paternal family members and later her in-laws. Her life’s shocking twists and turns illuminate the toxic and ideological nature of clannism. Clannism can be wherever there are people prepared to buy into it: between husband and wife, the wider family, the market, the school, the neighbourhood. Basra’s narrative illustrates the power of patriarchy and the readiness of some women to harm other women and girls to secure their own interests. Her life story also demonstrates how much easier this abuse is made when the victim is not from one’s own clan and lacks male protection. Harrowing to read at times, by the end of her story, it is apparent that Basra embodies remarkable resilience.

LPI’s researcher recalls that this was an emotional interview. She met Basra early in the morning, before the focus group discussion that day had begun. When they met, Basra was at ease and spoke openly and at length, happy to share her story. They sat outside, just the two of them, as no one else was awake. Basra needed little prompting.

There is no one who God created who has helped us. Even after they killed my mother, the problem did not leave us—until we moved away. The attacks at night carried on.

We have been through a lot during the conflict. We used to live in a village close to Mareerey [in Middle Juba]. I was born in Mogadishu, and I was taken away from there to live in the village. My mother and my father were divorced. In the beginning, my father kept us [her and her sister] with him. I am my mother's eldest daughter and I have a younger sister. My mother is from Kismayo. Actually, she is from the North,¹ My father married her in Mogadishu. So when they separated, my father kept us, and we were living with my paternal grandfather, my paternal uncles and paternal aunt. My mother heard we were mistreated and suffering there. She came slowly closer to where we lived, asked around about us, visited us regularly and one day, she kidnapped us. She ran away with us to the village where her mother lived. My maternal grandmother had farmland there. We lived well there, with my maternal uncles. We were doing well until violent conflict between clans erupted. And then we had to deal with unbearable problems. It reached a level where people broke into our houses, took our furniture, beat us, even ripped down the roofs and took the fruits from the trees. They'd leave you with nothing.

The people who did this are from a clan that lived there with us. They even knew us. They would beat us. My grandmother would be beaten with the butt of an AK [AK-47, an assault rifle], and the same goes for my mother. Without reason. Only that 'we are stronger than you'. That was back then, when the Harti and the Ogadeen were in conflict. The conflict didn't really start then, that was right before it started. My mother and her family are from the Harti clan-community. So, before the conflict has started, the Ogadeen used to persecute us. You know how bandits are anyway. They won't leave you with anything. They wouldn't leave you alone. Even at night, we didn't sleep in our house; we would run away to sleep with other Harti families.

One night, the bandits attacked us there. We were sleeping, women were sleeping. They lit matches and held them to our hair. Without reason. They entered and beat us. At some point, they ordered us to come out and beat us with their fists. They were men. Many of them, in fact. They were looking for my mother. They used to hate her. She used to be a beautiful woman. They have attacked her so many times. They wanted to take her by force. She refused so many times. Then they wanted to rape her and make her suffer.

One night, they made us sit in line. Everyone had a gun to their head – my younger sister and I were the youngest, and we had guns to our heads. They knew she gave birth to us. Same with the other women. All of us had a gun pointed to our heads. They were looking for my mother. In fact, the bandit who

1 The narrator explains that her mother is from the Harti clan group. The Harti comprise : the Dolbahante, Warsengeli, Dishishe and Majjerteen, all sub-clans the whose 'territories of which' are in the North- East and North of the country. A small number, however, have lived in Kismayo since at least the nineteenth century. Hence her mother could be considered from the North in terms of her clan identity but from Kismayo in terms of birth.

led the militia had been sent by another man. He told them, 'Bring me that woman.' Because they were looking for my mother, we went into hiding every night. That night they found us.

They made us sit, and the women looked at my mother [to identify her]. The bandits found her. They told her to stand and follow them. She asked, 'Where are you taking me to?' They replied, 'You are impolite. Stand up and come.' They beat her with the butt of their guns. They dragged her and took her away. I was looking at her, with the gun pointed at my head. In fact, I am not even seeing that there is a gun to my head; I can only see my mother. When I jumped up, they beat me with the gun. I told them, 'Hit me!' I was still young; I was six or so. They brought my mother in front of the mosque. They argued a bit. Then they wanted to rape her there, so that all the men there would rape her. My mother said, 'You better kill me instead of raping me. There is no way you will rape me. No way you will make me suffer. Kill me here!' My mother was dragged away. They battled, beat her; they struggled. She was someone very tall and had a lot of strength. ... And the man was short but he had a lot of strength, too. As they were struggling with her, I was watching. I am sitting and I am crying.

At some point, I run as they hold that gun on me. I ran to an older man who is from their clan. We used to be neighbours. I told him, 'Uncle, they will kill my mother! Uncle, they have finished us! Uncle, they will kill my mother!' He remained silent and he didn't stand up. They kept struggling with my mother. And at some point, the man turned his gun and fired at her. *Bagagac!* [sound of gunfire] and cut her apart with it. All of this part was ripped from the rest. Her flesh fell to the ground. The gun shot perforated her. She fell on the floor like jelly.

That is how we became orphaned on our mother's side, like this. My mother died there. The old man who used to be our neighbour was there. He heard it all. He was looking at it, standing around the wall. He didn't come to us, didn't say anything to us, and my mother died.

Our father hasn't raised us in any way. Only my mother and my grandmother. May God have mercy on her. I swear we have been through a lot. There is nothing worse than living without a mother. She died there. No one could get close to her. As we heard the gun shot, everyone looked away. Her flesh was scattered there. Everyone was scared. I didn't have much maturity then. The next morning her dead body was taken away from there and buried. I was given a plastic bag to put on my hands and was told, 'Go! Go gather the bones and

Qof ilaahay abuurtay
oo noo caawiyey
majiro. Xataa markii ay
hooyaday dileen, dhibkii
nagama ayna daynin
ilaa aan ka guurnay
meeshii aan daganayn.
Weeraradii dhici jiray
habeenkii weli way sii
soodeen.

parts of flesh of your mother that are scattered!' That is how I gathered it all, and she was buried.

There is no one who God created who has helped us. Even after they killed my mother, the problem did not leave us – until we moved away. The attacks at night carried on. My grandmother was beaten up 24 hours a day. Since then, she still suffers from the beatings. She is lying down now; old and tired. My maternal uncles have almost all been exterminated with guns. They were killed. Some of my maternal aunts have been raped. If we weren't kids, they wouldn't have left me and my little sister alone. But we had to deal with other problems. For instance, when I was sent to fetch water at the well, the women kept the plastic bottles I took to carry water. They would beat me, forbid me to fetch water. Sometimes, I would go early in the morning and leave at sunset without water. In the end, we were evicted from my grandmother's farmland. And because of all these problems, we ran away. You know, when you are putting your life in danger by staying. Only a few of us survived and we ran away.

We moved to Kismayo. I was about eight years old then. My father was in Nairobi. He made contact with us. He said, 'I want to talk with my daughters and their mother.' He didn't know my mother had been killed a long time ago. He never used to communicate with us. That was the first time. My grandmother went to talk to him at a telephone station and told him, 'When you are asking for your daughters and their mother, where do you know them from? Did your daughters become your daughters today? Why didn't you reach out to them before?' Then a dispute began between my maternal grandmother and my father. At last, he was told that my mother was killed long ago, even the termites could no longer find anything of her in her grave. My grandmother told him, 'The mother has been buried for many years now. The girls are with me and they are doing good.'

They kept fighting because my grandmother told him, 'I am not keeping any daughters for you! Go get your daughters from the one who is keeping daughters for you!' My father talked with my maternal uncles telling them, 'Maternal uncles, I want to get to know my daughters. I want to talk to them. I want to take them back if their mother has died.' My grandmother refused to give us away, saying, 'Their mother died. I have raised them and I am not giving "my daughters" to anyone.' At last, my father gave money to my maternal uncles and said if they don't want to come, abduct one of them for me. So, they tried (but failed) to convince my grandmother and finally abducted me. My younger sister remained with my grandmother. I was taken away because I am older.

Honestly, you will find so many sorts of problems in Somalia. My maternal uncles took me, brought me to Kismayo, put me on a plane that was carrying khat.² That is how I went to Nairobi, where my father was. I stayed with him for a while, a year maybe. Then he left for abroad and left me with his latest wife. He used to have two wives. He divorced one of them. When he left, I stayed with the one who remained there.

I used to go to the Qur'anic school. My father talked with the teacher. He told him that I should keep going to the Qur'anic school and never miss a minute. He also told him, 'If you don't find her, do not even bother asking anyone. Just deal with it. You are her father and her mother from now on.' So, I stayed with my stepmother and she used to make me work. When I was about to go to the Qur'anic school, she would throw a pile of clothes at me and tell me to wash them. She had a stick to beat me with if I didn't do as she said. She would say, 'You had better not go through that door before you've finished washing the clothes!' She had five children but they were young and couldn't do the chores. I couldn't refuse her order. I would arrive late at the Qur'anic school. When I arrived, the teacher was waiting for me with his stick to beat me up because I had arrived late. Also, my stepmother, while I am washing the clothes, she goes to the teacher and when the teacher asks her why she hasn't sent me, she would tell him that she had sent me to school. She would say, 'She is like my daughter. I sent her to the Qur'anic school long ago but she is probably walking around.'

The other girls, her (birth) daughters, are already in the Qur'anic school. They left long ago. I am the only one missing. And she made me wash the clothes, the clothes with her children's pee and poop on them. I am sitting working, while she goes to the teacher and tells him untruths about me. Then when I go to the Qur'anic school, the teacher wouldn't even ask me anything but started beating me on my back. I was always biting my nails to the point where they fell out. When I arrived at school he would say give me your hand and he'd beat it until it bled. My uncle came, too, and he also beat me. I was thirteen years old and a pretty girl. They would not allow me to go out, even to the Qur'anic school, because they thought I was dating men. I had so many household chores to do that I reached a stage where I didn't have time to even comb my hair and I started having head lice. Problems never stop once your mother is no longer alive. If you are not with your parents, and without a mother, you deal with a lot of problems, really.

I stayed at her (stepmother's) place until I turned fourteen years old. Some older female neighbours saw the conditions I was living in. They were shocked.

² Khat is a mildly narcotic plant (*catha edulis*) native to the Horn of Africa.

Soon after, a man came to ask for my hand in marriage. I refused because I wanted to finish Qur'anic school first. I didn't even know how to flirt with a man. He flirted with me and I refused. I even abused him the first few days. After I insisted I didn't want to hear his stories, he sent women from the neighbourhood to talk with me. They'd say to me, 'Daughter, you will get out of this horrible situation. You are suffering. You will be free. Don't refuse a halal marriage.'³ At first I used to tell them, 'Leave me alone, crazy old women!' Then other women came to talk with me; to give me a bit of their wisdom. And then I said to myself, 'You will get out of the suffering you are under now.' And I thought, why not? I asked them if he is playing with me but they said, 'No, he is ready to get married.' So, I told them, 'Well, if he is ready for a marriage, he should talk to my father. Some people have given birth to me. I belong to a family, so he should first get permission.' I gave him my father's number. And when he called, my father shouted at him and told him, 'I gave her to another man a long time ago. You'd better leave this woman alone and never call me back!' When I heard he had already given me to another man, my mind split in two. All this time, I was thinking I should not overstep my parents and yet that is what he did. I was told, 'Your father gave you away to an old man. A really old man from your clan community.' I thought, 'He would do that to me? He would give me away to an old man? Marry me to an old man while I am suffering like this? And he wouldn't tell me about it?'

The man who wanted to marry me asked me to run away with him. He said, 'Let's run away and go to Somalia.' I said, 'Somalia? Where gunfire killed my mother? No! My ears cannot hear gunfire anymore.' So, he went to consult with a sheikh and asked him if marrying me without my father's consent was legal. He told him, 'I want to marry this woman. I asked her father for his permission and he refused, and the woman and I want to get married. Is it possible?' The sheikh said, 'Yes, it is permissible.' 'Can I marry her in this town?' He said, 'Yes, but she must go far away from where she is now.' So, on a Thursday when there was no Qur'anic school, I acted like usual, washing clothes. And when the whole family was sleeping, I hid my face with indha sharer [a piece of cloth that masks the face, except for the eyes], wore big clothes and met him in front of a restaurant where some women came with a car to pick me up. We went to another town and I was married there and stayed there. He went back, and I stayed with some of his family members in this town.

Both our families started fighting. He was from (a part of the Darood) .. My family didn't want him anyway. He told them, 'I asked for your daughter's

³ Use of the term '*halal*' here refers to a marriage that would be in accordance with Islamic practice and is therefore regarded as 'clean', as opposed to a marriage that involves transgressing religious prescriptions.

hand. In the honourable way of God. You refused without acceptable reason.’ And my family said, ‘We haven’t given you our daughter and you should bring her back.’ It had reached a dispute, and they even fought with their hands and beat each other.

I didn’t have a problem. I was living in the room that was prepared for me and I had what I wanted. But the families kept fighting. It reached a level when traditional elders were brought together because the clans were about to fight. On my husband’s side they said, ‘She is our woman. She is a wife to a husband now. Take it as a fact or a threat. We will stand by it.’ My family became crazy. They ended up saying, ‘OK, it is not bad that she is a wife to you. We will give her to you but we have to do it in an honourable way. Bring her back to the house. We will organize a wedding ceremony here and you can pick her up from there.’ So, the elders came to me. In fact, the man’s paternal uncle came to me and said, ‘We have reached an agreement with the families and it is best for you to go there. It is better to prevent a violent conflict between these two clan families. Your family promised no one will hurt you and you will come back to your husband.’ I told him, ‘Uncle, I know my family well. You don’t know it but if you take me there, you will never see me again. I will suffer a lot and you will never see me.’ The uncle said, ‘Don’t worry. This will not happen. We will bring you there and take you back after the ceremony.’

I knew that my family would not spare me but you have to save two clans from fighting. I agreed. They brought me back. The elders were asked to leave once they had brought me. And from then on, I was beaten up. A lot of men hit me. They beat me. Kicked me with their boots on. They tied my hands and legs and kept beating me. My blood was flowing. The other clan family didn’t know about what was happening to me because they were asked to leave, right? The men who were beating me called my father. He said, ‘Bury her alive! I’d rather have her buried than that she marries this man and becomes his wife.’ They kept beating me, days and nights. I had wounds everywhere. They kept telling me to stay away from that man and I kept saying no.

They beat me until one of my paternal uncles called. He told them, ‘Did this girl bring a bastard? No! Did she become a prostitute and go on the streets? No! Isn’t it a halal marriage? So why are you keeping her from it?’ He told them, ‘You are wrong. Leave this girl alone. Let her marry that man and if I hear once more than she has been beaten, I will order your arrest. All of you!’ Anyhow, the whole story was brought to the elders, including religious men from the Qur’anic school. All of them told my family that they were wrong and that they

4 Eastleigh is a suburb of Nairobi, located to the east of the central business district. It is predominantly inhabited by Somali immigrants.

should leave me alone. That's how I ended up being married to him. That day, I was wounded all over. I even fainted. But finally, I was brought to my husband's house. I didn't talk much with my father. Since then, we don't get along.

At last, I gave birth to my son. When my son was three months old, my husband went on tahriib [unlawful migration]. He was away for four years. I was waiting for him. When my son turned four, he told me he was going to come at the end of the year – on the 30th of the seventh month. So, before he came, I went to Mogadishu to visit his mother, who was sick. And I took my son along. So, I was with his mother, his sister and her husband, who also was his relative. My sister-in-law's husband was an alcoholic gang member and he always wanted khat. He asked me for money. I gave him some once and then he wanted me to give him money every time I received money for the month. I used to receive USD 100. With this money, I should buy my son's milk and medicines, right? I told him that, and I also told him if he wants money, he can reach out to his brother-in-law himself. And the sister-in-law wants me to share the house chores with her. In fact, she wanted me to work for her. But then I was a grown up. I was a married woman with a child (and did not expect to be treated this way). So, they started spreading rumours about me and talking to the man (my husband). They told him, 'She is Hawiye. We are scared. She is sending us militiamen to beat us and kill us.' Even the mother was saying this to him. All of this was false, of course. I didn't know Mogadishu and I was scared to be there myself! But that stupid man believed them. And he didn't even talk with me about it.

He decided to divorce me but he didn't tell me. He told his mother to keep my son and he had a plan to get rid of me. I wasn't aware of any of this. His mother told me, 'Go back to Nairobi! Your husband will come and I will keep the baby.' I refused. I told her, 'I gave birth to this one and I know what I have been through for him. I wouldn't leave him with anyone. The one you gave birth to is coming. Take him! But my son will go wherever I go.' The grandmother made herself sick; she went crazy. They sent so many people to talk with me and convince me. They told me it would last only one month. After that, the grandmother and he would join us in Nairobi. The man called me and promised me it would be like that, and it will be for 30 days. In fact, that was part of their plot. And I believed them. I left my son there, crying. He sent me the ticket and I went back to Nairobi.

Once there, he sent me USD 2,000. He told me to buy us furniture, to buy myself some gold and to prepare us a place we could stay. So upon return,

I started buying what he asked, rented an apartment, got myself ready, like a woman expecting her husband.

When everything was ready, he sent me an email with my divorce papers. I remember that day. I was in the Eastleigh market⁴ when he called me and told me to check my emails. When he said check your email, my heart jumped three times. I went to the computer spot and when I opened the email it read 'first greetings, second divorce'. I was sitting there and my tears were dropping. I couldn't stand up from the chair. No one believed me, no one. They kept saying, 'The man you have been through all of this with, he would never do that to you!' I printed the letter and only by showing the letter did people start believing me.

I got sick then, for at least three months. He would call, I would just look at his calls. I finally told him, 'You have reached a decision, right? Why would you make me waste the money on top of that? Why didn't you tell me, "Keep the money and make a business with it?" I could have done so much with that money. I could have started working for myself. Why do you waste my time like this?' Worse than wasting four years waiting for him, I also wasted that money. I could have started a small business to cover my expenses. I got really sick. He was the man I had gotten into a fight with my father for. My father is still angry at me. Anyway, that is how we separated and how they kept my son. My son now is fourteen years old. He calls me often. Now it is OK. They let him talk to me. They even brought him to see me! In fact, after I got sick, I kept cursing him (my husband); wishing him bad luck. And bad luck befell him. He had an accident. We were not in touch but every time he would be mentioned I would curse him. And everyone I knew who would hear about the story would curse him, too. I would say, 'May God afflict you with pain!' No man can be trusted or believed. A man who treats you like this, he will be punished [by God], you know.

Eventually, I recovered from the man who divorced me and he recovered from his accident. After a while, I married my current man and we moved to Kismayo six years ago. He and I work hard to raise our children. He is also working but it is not a good job. Sometimes he is not paid. Just because you have a husband doesn't mean you can just sit at home. You have to work, too [to provide for the children].

I never really participated actively in conflict. The only thing I remember is when I was much younger, when I lived with my maternal family. When I was younger, after my mother was killed, and I was still living in the village where Harti and Ogadeen fought [Mareerey]. I was guarding a vegetable garden on the

farmland when armed men entered the (area). They were Hawiye militia. In the town I lived in, there used to be many Darood. When the Hawiye militia came, they were chasing Darood. A female neighbour, who is Hawiye, came to me hiding. She said, "Daughter, hide well under that tree. Militia men came into the village. Darood men ran away, and they shot at them. So, hide well under the tree!" I said alright and sat under the tree. A man came to me. He was hiding and he told me, 'Daughter, don't tell them I am hiding here. They are after me. They are chasing me!' I thought, 'You [your clan family] have killed my mother, persecuted us and you dare to call me "daughter"? Wait and see. Today, it is your turn.' I told him, 'Alright uncle, come and hide here.' He must have felt I wasn't sincere and he couldn't trust me because he left.

Other than that, I was only hoping the conflict would stop. I don't hold a grudge anymore against the clan family that killed my mother. I keep praying to God that the conflict calms down.

Today still, however, the problems are not far away. We are always a bit pushed because of the clan families. I am called 'that ugly foreigner'. You know, when there is a job, they share it among themselves. No one really thinks, 'She has no relatives here and let us support her' or such like. So it is only me, my house and my children. I sell different things to cover their expenses; sometimes charcoal, for example.

If there wasn't peace here in Kismayo today, no one would take a pen and paper to interview me or organize these projects. Because you would say, 'I won't go there. It is too dangerous.' I like these projects on peacebuilding and women. May God reward those who have brought them to us! These are really great projects. I would appreciate them even more if they could help us create jobs and support women's small businesses.

I would describe a place where peace is as a place where there is no fighting; there is no one injured; and no suffering. Peace is good. Nothing works without peace. You know the place where my clan community lives, where my father's father and mother, sisters and relatives live. When I talked with them, they said that there is gunfire from sunrise to sunset. After that it calms down. Al-Shabaab and the government troops are fighting. They tell me, 'Daughter, we have problems. We are in a conflict. May God calm it down.' So, I pray for them and tell them, 'May God calm it. We were ourselves in conflict. Now we are better. You will reach there. May God spare you!' So, there is nothing worse than conflict, really. And in general, guns and weapons are bad. There is nothing worse than that.

FARDOSA

Now in her late fifties or early sixties, Fardosa was once a government worker who worked ‘with a book and a pen’. Since the collapse of the Somali state, she has sold corn. Now a widow, she is her family’s sole provider. She tells the account of her life through descriptions of three deeply distressing experiences since the war: two incidents at the hands of other women, and one as a result of treatment by her husband’s kin. Fardosa never explicitly names clannism as the common thread but the details she provides make it apparent that clannism is the driving factor in at least two of the incidents.

By the time the third incident occurs, Fardosa realizes that she has no one to help her except herself. Far from beaten, she finds a solution that ultimately wins her admiration and helps awaken a greater sense of humanity in the women around her. A proponent of peace, her confidence strengthened, she ends her story with a flourish – a heartfelt proclamation against war and a call for women’s persuasive powers to be directed towards building peace.

Fardosa’s life story was recorded outside the hall where the women-to-women dialogue took place, close to the entrance. The LPI interviewer remembers that the location was not ideal. People could walk past and easily listen to their conversation or sit down to join them. This did not bother Fardosa, who is very confident, open and even joyful during the interview. One point Fardosa seems keen to convey is how she has had to stand up for herself and cope with hardship alone, after becoming a widow. Not receiving support from her late husband’s family hurt her. For the sake of her children, however, Fardosa has had to keep going.

I defended myself with my mouth. That is why they stopped abusing me. I can support anyone I want, as an individual. But I shouldn't be abused for it, because I didn't abuse anyone, nor did I hit anyone.

I was born in Kismayo then I moved to Mogadishu, where I got married. My parents and my family live in Kismayo. ... In Mogadishu, I used to work in the state administration, in insurance – the national insurance system. Then the war started, the period of burburka [destruction; refers to the fall of Siyad Barre in 1991]. That is when everything was destroyed in the early 1990s. I fled with my husband to Kenya and then we came back to Mogadishu. Shortly afterward, the 'Hawiye-Hawiye' war began, between clans within the Hawiye.⁵ We needed to flee again, back to Kismayo, but I was expecting, so I had to deliver first.

I used to live in the neighborhood Waaberi. This neighborhood was divided into two back then (because of the war). I used to live on the Habr Gedir side. I found a good midwife in the afternoon of the day I delivered. ... I had been told of her. She lived in the opposite camp, in the Abgal area (of Waaberi). When my labour started at 2.00 a.m., I went to her. I was exhausted. I knocked at her door. She opened it. I told her, 'It is the woman who came to you this afternoon. I am about to deliver.' I came from the Habr Gedir side to the Abgal side and she had seen this [i.e. she thought the narrator was from her sub-clan's enemy]. After she helped me give birth, she sewed me up wrongly. She (stitched the opening so tightly and completely) and sewed me really wrongly, so wrongly that no blood could come out. When I left her house, I hadn't realized what she had done. I was taken away from her house and I arrived at mine and none of us knew what she had done. Shortly after arriving home, I became very sick. I started shaking. When I started shaking, my relatives covered me with blankets. That is also what a doctor advised to do when he came to see me. I kept shaking. I reached a state when I was vomiting on myself.

My mother went to see the midwife. When she arrived at her place, by the command of God, an old man was sitting with the midwife. This man happened to be the father of the midwife's husband. My mother and the older man knew each other. My mother greeted them, then said, 'The daughter of M.G. gave birth here today.' (When she heard my father's name), the midwife was shocked and scared because this meant that her husband and I are from the same family. We are Dir, and she is Abgal. She was shocked. My mother told the midwife, 'The girl you helped last night is really sick.' The midwife responded straightaway, saying, 'Mother, I did her wrong!' Then the midwife came to me to open the sutures with her scissors. She had stitched me up with the blood blocked inside.

5 The war to which this narrator refers was between the Hawiye sub-clans of General Aideed and Ali Mahdi, leaders who both claimed presidency of Somalia after the fall of the Siyad Barre regime in 1991.

Since then, the sutures and re-opening them have scarred me. The mark is still there. And she touched my vein, too. Since then, my hips ... I can't squat. That is one of the ways the conflict between clans has affected me. Although I didn't take part because I didn't belong to any of the clans in conflict, this is how she fought with me.

I gave birth to nine children but only six are still living. Three have died. I do my best to cover the school fees and the daily expenses for the six of them. My husband used to work for the government; he had big responsibilities. But then he developed a cancer in his legs so he stopped working. For 14 months, he was in bed and we fed him through a tube. This is how I quit working, and that destroyed our strength and the income we earned. Back then, I had a store where I sold crop seeds.

When my husband died, I became the sole breadwinner. The children don't have family on their paternal side. The only paternal uncle passed away before my husband and they didn't have sisters. A dispute erupted between me and their family (close clansmen). My husband's family abandoned me when my husband started being really sick. They didn't do anything for me when he was sick, or for his burial.⁶ Other Muslims (people from other clans) helped me bury him. They had already left me alone to take care of the father (my husband) himself. So they have abandoned me. Because they have wealth – it is a wealthy clan – I was offended and told them, 'You can never come back to me, neither in marriage nor in death.' And this is how we separated.

My children are on my side in this dispute and this is why I raise my children by myself and how I stay away from my deceased husband's family. Now I am the sole breadwinner and raise my children alone. I work in the market; I sell corn. With this, I cover our daily needs. I sell this corn and I come home to my children with whatever I earn to cover their school fees and their food. One of my daughters helps me. She grills things (for people to buy and eat) and this helps me meet the expenses of the younger ones.

I didn't get involved in the conflict but it has affected me.

And the same kind of experiences of clannism happened here in Kismayo. You know there was a dispute within the Jareer Weyne,⁷ I was supporting one of the sides. They had a dispute between themselves and for their own reasons, and I supported one side (because of my friend). Because I was with her, the other side abused me, too. They said I was not Darood but I was pretending to be one [*sheegato*]. I asked my friend, the one I was supporting, to defend me against this horrible abuse. But after a while, I saw she couldn't respond to it.

Afkayga ayaan isku difaacay. Waana sababtaas mida ay iiga joojiyeen xadgudubkii ay igu hayeen. Qofkii aan doono waan taageeri karaa anigu, laakiin ma aha in arintaas awgeed la ii wax yeelleeyo cid aan wax gaarsiiyayna majirto.

⁶ One of the expectations of clanship is that close male clan members will help one another's families in times of need; e.g. with medical bills, wedding costs and burial costs. This narrator's children are from the same clan as her husband, so she feels abandoned on behalf of her children, as well as her husband. She also knows when her children become adults, the clan can demand that her sons pay *qaraan* (clan contributions). By telling her husband's close clan members that she will have no more to do with them, she is also warning them not to expect anything from her or her children.

⁷ A derogatory name used to describe Somalis of Bantu origin.

So I wondered, ‘How should I reply?’ You know, I used to work before, so I took a book and a pen and I came up with a poem [*buraanbur*].⁸ To recite it, I joined a wedding that one of the women I support was organizing. When it was my turn, I recited my poem. It went like this [rough translation]:

I gave birth to Darood, and Darood gave birth to me
My lineage is Dir, what did you make of that?
Calm down you ... [nickname of the lady]

I was addressing the ones who abused me. All of them laughed. So to explain a bit. ... They said I was pretending to be Darood, but I told them that I gave birth to Darood, and that the [Darood] are married to me. ‘My lineage is Dir’ I told them, in the sense that my clan is Dir. It is important – I have reminded them of my clan, and my relationship to Darood. Finally, I added:

‘I am a black beast that grows.
You should not start abuse or sinister rumours.
Or I will come after you, spreading like a disaster.

In fact, this tells them, ‘If you don’t leave me alone, Somalis [meaning, regardless of clan affiliation], I will come after you.’ My poem made other women react and understand my pain. One lady then said, ‘We should help this woman. We are the ones who are in conflict. This woman is a Somali woman. Moreover, she is our sister. She can support whatever side she wants and we shouldn’t abuse her.’

I defended myself with my mouth. That is why they stopped abusing me. I can support anyone I want, as an individual. But I shouldn’t be abused for it, because I didn’t abuse anyone, nor did I hit anyone. I couldn’t understand why I was abused. That is how I demonstrated that I am not fake, nor do I pretend and claim to be someone I am not. But now the two sides have reconciled and I am happy about it. My heart welcomes their reconciliation.

You know, I have never composed a poem in my life before. During the conflict, besides the displacement and the thing I told you (about the midwife), I was not with any of the groups that were involved. I came to write this poem because of the anger and bitterness the abuse left in me, and because the one I was supporting, my friend, could not defend me. Before, I was a student, then I worked with the government. It is only now that I am not (formally) employed that I get involved in these things. But if I am employed again, I won’t get involved anymore.

8 In the conventions of Somali poetry, there are different poetic forms for men and women. The *buraanbur* is the highest poetic form in compositions by women.

If we look at it, we have been through a lot of different conflict. Many wars with groups or faction leaders, then religious leaders.⁹ We have been through everything. But today, by the grace of God, we have a state [Jubbaland]. And it is important that women seek their rights, and by the grace of God, we are ready to seek our rights; to take part in peace and to run where conflict erupts (to stop it). The reason why we run is because we have had too much conflict. It has wounded us way too much. The reason why we are running and seeking reconciliation is because we know what we have been through.

We know that the one who died is our husband; that it was our child; that it was our brother; that it was our father. We also know that the ones left to go through it, and who bear the pain, are women. Having lived through it, we have decided that where once we used to train with the gun, now we should train with the book and the pen. That the encouragement we gave to our husbands to fight becomes the strength we find to lay down the peace mat. And that it becomes the place we return to. We will get a bigger role (in politics and in public decision-making) as long as we, women, are united. And we will succeed even where men have failed. I am very confident that if we get trust ... and if we set ourselves a goal to build the minds of the people and their confidence, we can do it.

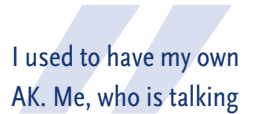
⁹ Presumably a reference to Al Itihad, Ras Komboni and al-Shabaab.

KHADIJA

A trader before the war, Khadija's story testifies to the contributions made by women during the many conflicts in the name of clan supremacy. Her narrative also highlights that women ultimately have been let down by those they helped to secure power. Khadija had originally wanted to flee Somalia when the conflict started but she did not have the necessary documentation. Forced to stay, she has lived through all of the many conflicts that have taken place in Kismayo. She acquired an AK-47 assault rifle, which she used to guard her store and to fight alongside her clan members. When she was not fighting with them, she supported them logistically.

Khadija is candid about the mercilessness and brutality clannism unleashed – in both women and men. She also speaks about the intense fear amidst the violence. She looks back at her time as a gun-woman with mixed feelings. Khadija is proud of her bravery but uncomfortable about the dislike and fear she and other female fighters inspired. Now fervently and manifestly 'a woman of peace', she is a powerful advocate of women's political rights.

LPI's researcher says of her meeting with Khadija that they sat closely together behind a big tree, on two plastic chairs, near the hall where the focus group discussion had taken place. The two were alone and Khadija was enthusiastic to talk about her life. During the interview, she is forthright and confident, coming across as a strong character. A civil society activist, Khadija is at ease and proud to talk about her involvement in peace activities.



I used to have my own AK. Me, who is talking to you. I was part of the fighting. I got involved even before some of the men did. When male fighters were on the street defending, I ran there and arrived before other men.

was born in Baidabo. I arrived in Kismayo during the early years of the conflict, in 1991. I have lived in Kismayo for 26 years without interruption. I gave birth to my ten children in this town.

During all these years I have been living in Kismayo, there have been many wars in the town that involved different groups at different times. In the end, there have been at least 12 distinct, unrelated conflicts in Kismayo, involving clan militias, religious groups or the government. I have witnessed them all. In the 1990s when Maxamed Siyad Barre was overthrown, it was a war of ignorance; a truly clan war. There was so much relentlessness. So many rapes in which even children were not spared. Livestock killed. Houses burned. That was the worst phase we have ever been through. After that, several wars have followed within the Darood clan communities, also causing many killings.

Besides the fighting, problems were many; for example, there was famine. And women have a lot of problems when men fight. We could not leave the house. There were women who threw themselves into a well out of fear. I remember this woman who threw herself into the well, head first. She died. They [those attacking] went after her. Although they didn't push her, they killed her. We, as the women who were her neighbours, took her out of the well. One of us went down inside the well, carried her on her back, and we pulled her out of the well. We were lucky she was a young girl [i.e. she was light to carry]. That is how we took the dead body out of the well. We cleaned her body for burial. In the morning, we hired a group of men to bury her and we collectively paid for her burial. That is how we buried the girl.

I was born into the Mareehan-Darood clan community. My clan has been involved in several conflicts. I was a trader back then (before the war). I used to sell clothes that I imported from Mogadishu. I used to bring them to local women who sold them on. When the conflict started, other traders and I gathered our belongings together and arranged for a militia to protect them. I organized a militia group from my clan community and together we paid for their lunch, khat and accommodation. We told them we would pay for this and in exchange they would guard our property. For seven days and nights, I was on stand-by, sleeping among the militia in front of the store to protect our property. By the grace of God, that is how we safeguarded our property.

When my clan community won and took over the city, peace returned. I helped save other business stores that belonged to women and neighbours who were not from my clan community. We gave everyone their belongings back (that had been looted). We also went to our elders and told them, 'These are the

poor people. Let them do their business. Take the militias out of town and have a military group to assure the security of town.’ They accepted and build a bit of security. That’s how the stores were able to open again.

After two years, however, another conflict erupted in which my clan community was pushed out of town. We were defeated and lived in the countryside. ... Whenever clans fight, be they big or small, some lose and others win. Even big clans lose and they can be negatively impacted. They are not spared from injuries, killings and revenge. This affects their women, too. ... That newly powerful clan in town says, ‘Women of this clan should be killed just as our women have been killed.’ So then, when my clan was pushed out, while I had been safeguarding other women before, now I became a target. God saved us, however. By His mercy, we survived.

Some people fled when the conflict erupted. Brothers, paternal cousins and neighbours are killed. First you have to bury your dead. The man that I loved and trusted the most was killed. He was the eldest and only son of my mother. When my brother was killed, I stopped all forms of business. I liquidated all my property, too, because the conflict intensified. I wanted to do like all of my friends and neighbours and join the diaspora. Many times, I tried finding papers so I could leave the problems of the city. But God didn’t write it for me.¹⁰ So that’s how I stayed in the city and took part in the conflicts in Jubbaland.

The war impacted us women but we also played an active part in the fighting. We had a big role, to be honest. We carried the wounded to get healthcare or carried the dead so they could be buried. If you look at it, people who were fighting are relatives. Despite the grudges we hold against each other, we are all Darood. So, during the fighting, we called the youth who were our neighbours and told them, ‘Brothers, there are this many of our men who were killed in the countryside, and so many men are injured. We want to collect these people and put a stone on them [i.e. bury them], and bring all those who are wounded to the hospital.’ A very good man, an Ogadeen-Darood, of the clan we were fighting against, gave us a car and a technical¹¹ so that we could bring the wounded to the hospital.

I used to have my own AK. Me, who is talking to you. I was part of the fighting. I got involved even before some of the men did. When male fighters were on the street defending, I ran there and arrived before other men. Upon arrival, I was told to fill the empty spot [i.e. the gap in the firing line]. You know, we used to switch places. So one of them told me to replace someone. I was part of them, like normal – switching places with men like any other male fighter.

Aniga kula hadlayaa
waxaan haystay
qori AK ah. Waxaan
ka qayb galayay
dagaalada. Rag badan
anigaaba uga horeeyay
dagaalada. Markii
ragu dagaallamayo
ee ay difaacayaan
wadooyinka, anigaa uga
horayn jiray dagaalka.

¹⁰ A literal translation from Somali; conveys the Muslim belief that one’s fate is decided by God, as in ‘it is written’.

¹¹ This is a reference to a vehicle that is mounted with a machine gun or rocket launcher.

We are not so few women who took up the gun. We are not. There is only little understanding or knowledge that there are many females who took up guns and actively fought alongside men. Women participated in the war, and the same rules [as for men] applied to them, too. They took guns, went on technicals, fired guns, injured, killed, finished off the wounded. Some women used guns; others slashers or big knives. It was pretty obvious that women participated in the conflict. The Hotel Kismayo. You know the place? A man was killed in front of it. He was a young man, a kid, just twenty-two years old. He was a (member of a Darood clan). When he was injured, he ran away to find protection in the hotel. Some women in the community (fighting against his clan) caught him while he was still in the street, and I swear, he was cut with slashes. Like this – horizontally.

When you hold a gun as a woman, people think you are weak. That it is a weakness. You are seen as something bad. People are not happy that you, a woman, hold a gun. In fact, that's not something to be proud of. Sometimes the men in your clan tell stories about you: 'She is a brave woman. ... She is active. ... She is good at fighting. ... She carries the wounded for us'. That's also what they tell you. But the rest of the people, your neighbours, or those who see you carrying your gun, they see you as someone bad. A really bad person. They develop the same fear for you as the fear they have of men who carry guns. That is for sure. Your neighbours will not support you or feel free to talk with you. They will hide from you. Just like they are afraid of men, they will be afraid of you. If the women carry guns, they are afraid of them as much as people are afraid of men. This is clear.

In fact, I also used my gun to protect my neighbours. For example, I used to tell them, 'If I give you the order, make sure you lie on the floor!' I was up on the second floor in a neighbouring house. So if they were standing, they might have died, too. So that is how I fought. That is how I used to protect my neighbours. It became a joke, even. When there was a gunshot in the evening, people used to say, 'That's [her name] gun!' I would say, 'What if the men attack me because you're saying that it is a woman who is firing from the second floor? Say a male name instead like, 'Abdi X!'

So, that is how people started to view me differently, and praised me when I carried a gun. It was because I wanted to protect their property and belongings. But until I did that they saw me as an enemy. They saw me as bad person. But when I saved and protected their belongings, they saw that I helped them, and that day and night, I slept on their belongings and protected them.

Then they felt that I had a different mindset than others with guns. That I was a peaceful person. But before I saved or protected their belongings, they saw me as bad.

Yesterday I was carrying a gun for my community, right? Everyone was carrying a gun for their clan community. But then now, I was carrying a gun for them (my neighbours). When our clan community had enough power, I didn't allow my clan to loot my neighbours' property or belongings. The girls and the women I knew, I defended their properties. From there came the good. The bad preceded it. The bad they used to see has been destroyed by this good. And to be honest, I still have the gun – by the grace of God! I don't go into conflict with it but I have it for my own safety, to tell the truth. It is there, and if I live in an honest country, that respects Islamic teachings, with a proper state, it will stay inactive. I had it registered back then, when I was guarding the stores, and it is still there.

Until my clan community lost, I participated in the conflict by bringing fighters water, food or ammunition. I even remember that I was seven months pregnant when I carried water to the fighters. I was on the way to a fighter when my clan community lost. I was doing this, while my friends took a car to run away to Kenya. I swear in the name of God, I was carrying a pot of water, small water bottles and a whole package of cigarettes. When I heard that they lost, I threw them away and quickly ran back home.

Every one participated. No one is clean. Even if you didn't support by carrying guns or helping during the fighting, you were supporting in your heart. I have been loyal to my people and to my country. And even after all I have been through, I am not bitter and don't hold grudges. I now eat with those who killed my brother. I came to terms with his killing. I reminded myself that my brother died because it was written; it was destiny. And that is it. He would not have had more time. His time ended then. It was necessary for me to remember God. If one remembers God, the conflict in them leaves. If the person remembers God, and it becomes clear that the dead person is in paradise, then the person will remember the good.

Today, I have exchanged my spot in the battlefield with a loud voice at the table of peace. You saw the white veil I was wearing this morning when I arrived? I am standing for peace. Even the microphone. I was preaching for peace among women, in refugee camps and to politicians, as well. I have many flags – the Somali flag, the Jubbaland flag, the one for peace. They are all at my place. All of them are there. And it is obvious I stand for peace.

Today, Jubbaland is one the most peaceful places in Somalia and that is because of women. The president said that he is women's closest friend. We have his word. He agreed to our request to have a representation of 30 per cent women as members of parliament in Jubbaland.¹² He agreed and we got it. We also went to the national federal government. We beat on the table. Although the elders stood in front of us [i.e. objected], the quota has been accepted. Even the UN insisted that in every three people, there should be a woman. We have threatened that if one woman is missing from the quota, we will not participate. We even composed a poem: 'If we don't get our 30 [per cent], we will ask for our three' [a woman who asks for 'her three' is a woman asking for a definitive divorce]. Everyone understands our strength. Because we also carried guns, we took part in the conflict and we helped give birth to peace. What prevents us from sitting at the table, too? Nothing forbids it. I will beat the table and sit firmly. He was born in nine months and I was born in nine months; nothing forbids it. We are not rejecting our religion. We will not take off our veil, or wear a shirt and trousers. It is with our hijab that God sees us – as mothers, too; that we are ready to sit at the same table as men.

I want my daughters to stand at the table of peace. I don't want them to do like I did. I don't want them to follow how I used to be but to remember the good I have done. And I want them to follow that. I want them to take my courage to stand for peace. That they stand for their country, their people, their women. And never participate in any fighting. I want them to never ever take up the gun for a war of ignorance; a war of clan.

¹² In fact, Jubbaland fell short of electing 30 per cent women but it did appoint women to more seats than any other federal region in Somalia.

SADIJA

Just thirteen years old when civil war reached Mogadishu where she was living, in December 1990, what is striking about Sadia's account is how she looks back on her life since then as a series of random opportunities rather than a life of loss and hardship. Displaced to her birthplace, Kismayo, Sadia's story is one of resilience, enterprise and passion – passion to revenge the clan murder of her cousin, which leads her to support her clan militia.

Then, after years of promoting conflict, Sadia counts her losses and transfers her passion and energy into helping to secure peace. Towards the end of her account, unprompted, Sadia enthusiastically reflects on her experience as a participant in the women's dialogue process and how her reconciliation with women who once had been her enemies has changed her life.

LPI's researcher says she spoke to Sadia outside the hall where the women-to-women dialogue session had taken place. They sat near the entrance and were often interrupted by the comings and goings of others. Sadia seemed unbothered by this. In the end, they had about 30 minutes alone together. Throughout the interview, Sadia is open and self-assured in telling her story. In particular, she expresses an impressive degree of self-reflection about herself and her life experiences.

I personally contributed financially by buying and bringing milk and water to the fighters. I also used to nurse the wounded, help carry them and bring them inside the house. I used to give information, too. I'd say, 'These people are there! Defend us!' or 'Beware! They are coming! They are going to attack!'

was born in Kismayo and got married in Mogadishu, in Wadajir neighbourhood. ... When *burburka* [the Destruction – refers to the fall of Siyad Barre in 1991] happened, I was thirteen years old.

In Mogadishu, I was a businesswoman. I used to sell fuel in the neighbourhood. ... When I got pregnant with my first child in 1997 ... I went to Kismayo to give birth to be closer to my mother. I went there by road. When I arrived, I met a man who used to teach us in high school, a doctor. ... He approached me because he had started a programme to re-establish the ministry of education [which had collapsed in 1991, along with all other ministries]. He organized seminars for us over a six-day period. When we finished the seminars, we were given tea and USD 150. ... Thank God we finished ... and were successful. We were registered as teachers, then I started labour. I gave birth to a girl. My mother looked after me until I recovered.

The father of my children called me then from Buucale (a town to the north west of Kismayo)... He was also born in Kismayo. He had started a business with his brother who had a boat. ... So he called me and he said, 'Come and see if we can live in this place. It is a village but come and see if we can live here.' So I joined him. As I was walking around in the village, by God's command, I met a man I used to study with in high school. He told me, 'There is this organization that came from Nairobi. You have to pass an exam but since God brought you here, do the test and maybe you will find a job here.' That was in 1997. ... Luckily, I passed the test and I started working in the health sector. But after some time the organization collapsed. ... So I changed organization. I came to Kismayo and worked for an international NGO. In the end, I stopped because I had too many children. I have eight children. So I became a regular businesswoman around the port. I was selling the things that are needed on boats, like fuel. ... With that, I was trying to cover my children's daily expenses.

My husband visited us, of course, but he was exporting charcoal. So that is how we used to work. Then al-Shabaab entered the city in 2008. I sold the business I had around the port and went to work in the market. There, I used to sell vegetables that came from Jilib and that region[Middle Juba]. Then as I was doing my things, the current president of Jubbaland [Ahmed Madobe] came to power and I entered the local administration of Jubbaland. I was then put in the municipality. I am now a general civil servant of the municipality, in the women's department.

During the years of state collapse [from 1991 to 2013, when the Jubbaland Federal Administration was formed], I supported the militias of my clan. You

know, to take part you don't have to necessarily take up a gun. You can take part in many ways. You can take part by supporting your clan community when it is fighting against another clan community. You can contribute financially. I personally contributed financially by buying and bringing milk and water to the fighters. I also used to nurse the wounded, help carry them and bring them inside the house. I used to give information, too. I'd say, 'These people are there! Defend us!' or 'Beware! They are coming! They are going to attack!' That is what I used to go and tell the men. I wasn't scared at all. I used to walk among them in the battlefield, while they were shooting at each other. I became like plastic. Like plastic. I didn't feel anything at all. I did a lot, in fact, to support the conflict and I also used to encourage it. A lot, in fact.

Why did I encourage it so much? Let me tell you why.

There was a man, the son of my paternal uncle. He was twenty years old when the conflict started. He was taken away from my house. We were all there when they took him. They told us, 'We will kill you, and you, too!' Then, 'Dhac!' [sound of gunfire]. They shot at the stomach of a boy standing there, who was doing nothing. And he died because of clannism. I thought, 'We have fled. We are displaced. And even here they are running after us?' My paternal uncle was killed, his son was killed and they were searching for the other boys. People are killed in front of you. Our wealth is looted. So, we thought, let's join the fight from our side. That is what made me join the conflict. When people are killed in front of you and you can't defend them. So when it is your turn, you carry on the fighting from your position. In the end, we saw that the losses had increased and there was no benefit at all to it.

Back then, I already had given birth to one or two children. But my siblings and my own mother were raising them when they were very young. Now, one of my sons is an imam at a mosque in Kenya and another one works in Mogadishu. Now, I still have these two sons and a daughter. I was the second eldest child of my mother. My mother used to be very scared back then. Her clan community didn't live where we lived. She is Majerteen. When the *faqash* [Siyad Barre's army] entered the city, my mother was very famous. She is the paternal cousin of a famous faction leader you probably know of. So, he used to come with his army to our house. Our house was their base in the city and it became well known to everyone.

So that is what forced us into conflict – that all of our people were killed in front of us. But at last, the conflict forced us to seek peace and run away when-

Anigu shakhsi ahaan
waxaan kaga qayb
qaatay dagaaladii
sokeeye inaan soo iibiyo
caanaha iyo biyaha oo
aan u geeyo nimanka
dagaalada kujira.
Waxaan sidoo kale
dawayn jiray dhaawaca,
intii aan soo qaado
ayaan sidoo kale gayn
jiray guryaha si loogu
daweeyo. Waxaan la
wadaagi jiray wixii xog
aha ee aan soo helo.
Waxaan ku oran jiray
'nimankii halkaasay
joogaan! Naga difaaca
nimanka!' ama
'digtoonaada! Way soo
socdaan! Weerar ayay
inagu soo qaadayaan!

ever you are chased after (instead of fighting back). Since then, I run away. I prefer to seek peace.

Because of my involvement in supporting my clan community, I got a position in the administration. And I still work there now. Working in the administration isn't easy all the time, honestly. Well, the job is good but you cannot live in peace [because government workers are targeted by al-Shabaab's armed insurgency]. Several times, a shell has exploded in front of my house. I have also survived many explosions at the office. And many of my colleagues have died in front of me because they were standing on the wrong spot at the wrong time. It could have been me, as well. Nevertheless, we rebuilt and we are still working there.

So back then, I used to inflame the conflict so much. And encourage it, really. But when I think about it, when I evaluate what has happened, I've come to know from experience that there is no benefit from entering into conflict. That peace is better, in fact. And now I encourage peace. ... I love peace and I am working for it.

Unprompted, the narrator then went on to describe her feelings about becoming a participant in the women-to-women dialogues that LPI and SWSO have initiated in Kismayo:

God has mercy and we thank SWSO and LPI for holding these training on peace. I really love learning and taking these courses. I would love to learn more about it, to educate ourselves. For this partnership to provide us with this programme is wonderful. We have come a long way since the first days of this peacebuilding programme and now, in uniting and supporting women, especially women of Jubbaland – Somali women.

Since then a lot of things have changed. Major changes involved, in fact. That we still had grudges against each other and there was still bitterness. But now that I have become clean [i.e. stopped supporting violence], I like to encourage peace. Now, whatever happens, I like to stay patient, prevent conflict and rise above it. Now, I love peace all the time. I love the dignity and the good it gives us. This kind of programme is the first of its kind to have women as leaders and put its focus on women. We benefit a lot from it, honestly. It is in these seminars where even women from the same clan community got to know each other. This really shows you how little communication and contact there was between us. We got to know each other in these seminars, to meet other Somali women, who gather together. We didn't know each other before,

although we are related (from within the same clan family). That was the first thing. That women from different clan communities, Somali women, got to meet each other. The second one is that we are happy with one another. We meet here and when we see each other in other places, we happily greet each other and remember each other's name. The women who yesterday were in conflict are coming closer to each other with joy; that each of us gathers together in a good and dignified way. We are at this stage now and I would love to reach out this happiness to other women, especially in the regions. And the third thing is that beside this happiness, when we leave in the afternoon, we transfer this happiness to our children. And we can go and buy our flour and rice (with peace of mind). Because we have learned these lessons and we do our daily activities without bitterness inside.

This is how peace is like milk. Peace is prosperity, *nabadaa naas la nuugo leh* [peace has breasts to milk]. You know, people have different views on what peace is. Some have wrong thinking. We have to call on them and make them understand what is wrong and show them what is good – move away from the bad side. That would make me happy.

I see that in the future we will reach a good place. You know three years ago, we were far from the stage we are at today. And we will even go further forward. Today, we are different from yesterday because we have moved away from dealing with things by our hand to dialogue. We have moved to a programme that helps develop us. I hope it is like this, and even better in the future.

SUAD

Wide ranging and filled with emotion, Suad's account of her life since 1991 offers up a microcosm of the drivers and impacts of the war, in particular the consequences for women. It is part personal testimony: Suad was a fighter and one of the women who helped oust al-Shabaab from Kismayo. It is also part analysis and exposition on how state collapse has impacted on women, the shortfalls of the international community's political analysis and intervention on behalf of women, and what women need to do to be able to compete and secure their rights as equals to men in the political arena.

Suad's story is one of female agency and determination. She begins with the dramatic event that led to her leaving her young daughter and divorcing her husband to take up arms and seek revenge by joining her clan's militia during the period of violent inter-clan war in the early 1990s.

As with the other women she interviewed that day, LPI's researcher says she sat under a tree with Suad, near the entrance to the hall where the focus group discussion had occurred. Their chairs were close together. They sat, slightly facing one other. During the interview, Suad is candid, forthright and engaged. She is also curious about the interviewer's own personal history.

How could I be scared? My brother had been killed! I didn't even know that I was a woman. Who would look at me specifically and notice I am a woman? I am holding a gun. I shaved my hair and wore a hat. No one noticed I was a woman.

Women have participated in the conflict. Me, who is talking to you, took part in it. Let me tell you how.

In 1991, huge fighting broke out in Somalia. Back then, people would attack and be attacked because of their clan. My family is Darood. When the war started we fled to Dhobley [a town in Lower Jubba]. With my mother and sisters, we had to stay there or else we would have been killed. The men used to go and fight [with the clan militia] and then come back to where we (the women and girls) were hiding. One day, my brother came back to hide. He arrived at home at sunrise and greeted my mother. Then a clan militia group arrived at our house and entered from the back. They took my brother by the trousers, blindfolded his eyes and took him away. We were nine children in the household, a mix of the children of my father and my paternal uncle. All of us were siblings and there were no differences between us. We loved each other without distinction. But my brother was the man I loved the most in my family. He was the eldest and only son of my mother. They took him away.

When the sun rose and we prayed the morning prayer, his wife told me, 'Your brother came earlier and some men came and took him away.' I stood up. I didn't know where to go. ... I had just given birth to a little girl to the clan family that had taken him. I finally went to where he was being held, in Mareerey, the place known as the office of the clan community that took him. When I arrived, the guard of the clan community asked me, 'What do you want?' I told him, 'Brother, my brother came here but we haven't had any news from him.' The place belonged to the clan community into which I was married – those who were holding my brother captive. [Hence she was able to approach them.] So he asked me, 'Is your husband here?' I answered, 'No, he is not here.' Despite this, he told me where my brother had been transferred. Three cars arrived and I quickly got into one and set myself about getting my brother.

When the car reached Mareerey, people told me, 'He was taken away to Jilib.' Others said, 'He was taken to Mogadishu'; 'He was taken there'. All lies, only rumours. He wasn't taken anywhere. He was killed inside the (Mareerey Sugar) Factory, at 5.00 p.m. A woman decided she had to kill my brother. I got to see them. My brother was tied with cords, guarded by this woman and her gun. When they were not able to untie the cord, the other male guard and the woman got into a fight because of my brother. That night, when I heard the gun shot, I fell off the chair. I felt it. I felt that my brother had been killed. The same night, a man came to me saying, 'Your brother has been killed! His dead body lies between the houses over there and the bushes, and is still tied with cords.'

12 In fact, Jubbaland fell short of electing 30 per cent women but it did appoint women to more seats than any other federal region in Somalia.

I wore my trousers and shirt – with short sleeves. I put oil on my whole body so that no one could catch me. The soil was muddy. Those who know will remember. In 1991, God ordered so much rain.

I went to the place I had been told about. They had shot him dead, in the back, on a sandy road. His dead body lay there. His two hands tied. He was wearing his sport shorts. I will never forget. This is it, I thought. What can I do? I am not allowed to collect his body.

I came back home. I didn't talk to anyone. ... I fell there. They had refused to let me take the body. The people who lived there told the man (her husband) whose daughter I gave birth to what had happened. He was staying in another town. He came to where I was and tried to reason with me. I told him, 'You better not try to reason with me! This conflict stands between us. Only God will keep me away from [fighting with] you. And today is the last time we will see each other!' After that I stayed in the town where my brother's dead body was. His dead body was laying there for eight days. No one buried him. On the ninth day, militiamen entered town.

My brother had been killed without reason. He was killed because of his clan. That J [the person she blamed for disclosing his whereabouts] had denounced my brother, told the Hawiye where he was hiding. When my brother died, I didn't think of seeking peace with those who killed him. Instead I thought I should seek revenge. I shaved my hair. The man who snitched on my brother ... was among them. A man among the militia was carrying my brother's gun. The day they entered, I became... I shaved my hair, by God's command. The woman who killed my brother was shot five days after she killed my brother. 'Tshak!' [sound of the bullet]. She died instantly. I shaved my hair, wore trousers and a shirt. I went after the man who had snitched on my brother. I looked for him. I didn't find him. He ran away. The gun of my brother was brought to me. That was a gun! Like a pistol, you know. ... For six months, until we arrived in [location], I was with the militia. Every night when we were told, 'They are hiding there!', I would be among those who would run there to get them.

How could I be scared? My brother had been killed! I didn't even know that I was a woman. Who would look at me specifically and notice I am a woman? I am holding a gun. I shaved my hair and wore a hat. No one noticed I was a woman. Maybe I was also youthful. Joining every fight, running to it, to take people away from each other. ... You know this kind of arrogance. The arrogance when you are young. I wore a sweater, a jacket, trousers, boots and my gun. And that is how I walked around with the militias.

Sideen u cabsanayaa?
Walaalkay ayaaba
ladilaye! Waxaan xataa
hilmaamay inaan
dumar ahay. Yaa ii
firsanaya oo dareemi
karaya inaan haweeney
ahay? Qori baan wataa,
timihiina waan iska
gaabiyay, koofiyadna
waan xidhay. Qof
ogaaday inaan naag
ahay majirin.

10 A literal translation from Somali; conveys the Muslim belief that one's fate is decided by God, as in 'it is written'.

11 This is a reference to a vehicle that is mounted with a machine gun or rocket launcher.

After a while, my father told me, ‘My daughter, please get my blessing by quitting the fighting.’ I told him, ‘I will not stop.’ I kept on being in the conflict. After the day my father called to talk with me, my family started organizing ceremonies for me in which sheikhs read the Qur’an in my name. My father said we should do this because ‘This one has become crazy’.¹³ So, they read the Qur’an in my name – all of the 114 surah [chapters]. My father begged me to stop fighting. So I stopped.

The day I put down the gun was also the day the killings started between the Harti and the Ogadeen, within the Darood clan-community.¹⁴ That afternoon I came back from Barawe [a coastal town in Lower Shabelle, north of Kismayo] with the militia. On returning to town, I saw a dead body under the bridge. That same afternoon, I sold my gun and went home.

In general, most people saw my involvement with the militia as good. Back then, there was no state but there was a civil war. Faction leaders and clans were killing each other. I am telling you about the time when Maxamed Siyad Barre had been ousted in 1991 and people were divided by clan, especially the Hawiye and Darod. This was back at the time of Aideed, Morgan, Bare Hiraale and Omar Jess.¹⁵ My brother had been killed by Hawiye who came from Mogadishu. They killed him in Marerey. So I thought a clan had invaded us and killed my brother, and that’s how everyone else saw it, too. And I was fighting for my clan.¹⁶

Also, I guess I had done enough for my brother. I sought revenge for him over a nine-month period and divorced the man who was from the clan community that killed my brother. I also came to realize that there were people who had gone through worse than me. I remember among them an old lady who was crying and was bitter that her son was killed. Her nephew was standing in front of her, comforting her while bending over and leaning on his AK, with the muzzle of the AK under his chin. As he was trying to comfort and reason with her, he shot himself in the head unintentionally. The woman saw it happen. She went silent out of shock. This is only one example but I came to realize that there were people who were worse off than me. ...

After leaving the militia, I then worked in the market where I sold food-stuff like sugar, pasta and rice. Our stores are small ones. We buy from people (who collect imports) from the port and they bring it to our stores. You buy their items with what you have and the rest you have as credit and you give them the money afterwards. As businesses, we pooled our money together. We put the clothes trade together with the food-stuff trade. When the government

13 Reading the Qur’an in this way is believed to counter mental illness.

14 This indicates that the war had transformed from inter-clan to intra-clan conflict.

15 These are leading figures in the inter and intra-clan wars, post 1991.

16 The narrator’s explanation about how she had rationalized what happened to her brother, and that justified her joining her clan’s militia, provides valuable insight into the phenomenon of clannism and how it has driven so much of the violence since 1991. She explains how she and others interpreted the actions of a few ‘who came from Mogadishu’ as the mindset of the many, which it did become. It should be said that clannism did not spring up purely in response to state collapse. For the past decade prior to his overthrow, Siyad Barre had entrenched his power and that of his clan family, the Darood, through a divide and rule strategy implemented along clan lines. The popular mindset was already viewing the world as an us–them scenario.

arrived, my business wasn't going so well, so I sold it and bought land. I still have my plot now. I built on some parts and the other parts I will do something else with. I left the business because before there was the state of Jubbaland, al-Shabaab didn't allow you to have projects or businesses. But you had to do a little business to provide for your children.¹⁷

As women, we took part in the conflict to become free from al-Shabaab. We used to communicate with the soldiers (from the Somali and Kenyan military). We used to tell them, 'They came. ... They kept walking. ... They have just arrived. ... No one is there'. We were supporting the government. We didn't want al-Shabaab. Islam is a good religion; a sweet one. It is not right to present the religion as a scary beast to annoy people and beat them up with. It is not right. Al-Shabaab had been harassing us. They had caused us problems because they used to cut off people's hands and legs. They'd say something like: 'They transgressed the religion!' For example, thieves. The thief had his hands amputated. Sometimes cross limb amputation – one foot and one hand. Girls were killed by stoning.¹⁸ Men were abducted at night and you'd find their dead body at the hospital. And you'd hear, 'Oh, there is a dead body at the hospital.' That's why we took part in the conflict in Jubbaland. That is why we participated.

As women, we supported the real government¹⁹ and worked for peace. ... The day the Jubbaland army entered the city, defeating al-Shabaab, I slaughtered cattle to welcome the soldiers. I was part of the girls who prepared the celebrations.

But after a year, political instability erupted again and gunfire started. Each of the five Jubbaland presidential candidates had an army. Their soldiers started firing at each other, with each candidate proclaiming, 'I am the president! I am the president!' The conflict lasted 64 hours. After that time, women of the region, we took mats and microphones to the football stadium and we gathered there. We said, 'We are the Somali women. We don't want conflict. There was conflict for 25 years. Here there are peace mats.' We called all of the five presidential candidates to join us. We kept calling their names and finally after three months they came together and started a dialogue. We went to them. We welcomed them. What we did was not easy. ...

Now there is a state with a system. ... I know the good a state can bring. We will reach this (improved position) eventually. Under Siyad Barre, I used to live in Jilib. I was among the people who had free education. I went to primary and secondary school, as well as high school. My books, uniforms, school buses and food were given by the state. My father and mother used to work for the

17 Al-Shabaab controlled Kismayo, and the rest of what became Jubbaland, from 2008–2012. During their rule over the city, they imposed strict dress codes for women and girls, and a ban on their movement in public areas, unless they were escorted by a close male relative. This, and the heavy taxation they imposed, forced many small businesswomen and petty traders to either give up their businesses or hand them over to male relatives. After an 11-month battle with the Kenyan and Somali militaries, al-Shabaab were finally forced out on 29 September 2012. After some dispute, agreement over the future governance of what was declared the Jubbaland Federal State was reached in August 2013.

18 Evidence exists to confirm amputation was common but there is only one account of a young woman being executed by stoning in Kismayo itself, although evidence of more such instances may emerge over time.

19 The narrator is referring to the government of Ahmed Madobe, Jubbaland president.

government. When I finished high school, I started working at the Mareerey (Sugar) Factory. I was a general accountant for production. I was working there when the war started. I would still like to have been able to carry on, using my skills to support rebuilding a good state. A state that does not make you pay but gives you education and ensures that the teachers get paid. But now, teachers take money from you and if your children cannot afford daily food at school, people judge you. Even the teachers do not have enough food. So we have been through a lot over the last 26 years but now we are in a good place. A bad state is better than no state.

Governance: the current situation for women and her vision for the future

We have a state with a system. It is still not like we want but it is way better than before. I think the 4.5 formula in the government is flawed,²⁰ and I would support political parties.²¹ But anyway, I personally am not ready to be involved in the parliament. Somali women have suffered a lot. When we get free schools for our children, free doctors, safe schools, safe transportation, good places where they can receive their education, I might enter politics. But if your children are waiting for you to earn money so they can go to school, to Qur'anic school, and you have to take care of their health, can you join a party? No, you can't. Because you have to first build your house. Because of the conflict, the problems and the lack of independence, women cannot have a political party. We have to hide behind men. But we will eventually get there, with the younger generation.

You know, the other day I went to the airport when representatives of the UN came. I told them, 'You tell us that women should get 30 per cent of the seats.'²² But the traditional elders are men, the head of states are men, the parliamentarians are men. Where will the 30 per cent female come from? When you tell us that 30 per cent are for women and 70 per cent are for men, you are bringing men and women into an unfair competition.' The national advisors present were men. The regional administration – they are all men. There are no females anywhere. And every female should follow her clan and how would traditional elders choose you? He is carrying a man with him, he will not give it to you as a female. He will tell you, 'You are married to that clan community (your husband's clan).' The UN have brought this 30 per cent, so we should ask them these questions, right? Why didn't they say that the 30 per cent should be exclusively for women, without men deciding it? Men shared the seats among

20 The 4.5 formula was introduced in 2000 as a way of sharing political positions across clan groups. According to the formula, positions in parliament are equally shared across the four major Somali clans, with minorities and women treated as one group and allocated just 0.5 of the seats between them. In other words, the 4.5 formula is a device that discriminates against women's interests.

21 At present, politics is clan based, not party based, except in Somaliland, where there has been a political party system since 2002.

22 In the 2016 elections, under pressure from the UN and other parts of the international community, it was agreed women would be allocated a 30 per cent quota of seats in the national federal parliament and the regional federal governments. Which women would be selected, however, was a matter for the male elders to decide. In the end, less than 25 per cent of seats went to women, with as low as 2 per cent in some regions.

themselves, north and south. And they got more than 70 per cent of the total. What we are actually being told is, 'Go and chase the 30 per cent from men!'

In my view, I think men perceive this women's quota as a plot by non-believers (outsiders) to oppose us – men and women. If we have to seek selection by men, traditional elders will never let me have any position because I am married to another clan community. Although I lived in Kismayo, I was told that my clan has representation in Puntland, and that I should go seek a seat there!²³ You cannot convince men. You can never expect men to allow you, a woman, to get something! Even the peace seekers won't give you anything, so where will you get voices of support? Instead of giving it to you, the elder will give his voice (his vote) to a man that is related to him on his paternal side, who he knows will carry a gun for him tomorrow. Of course, there were females who carried guns for their clan communities but we are talking about 2 per cent. That's not much. We cannot base our argument on this. So, the politics is worrying for women. Every elder has a man they want to promote. And women are kept busy looking after the family, so they can't chase after political power.

So women have to plan together. They need to establish committees, have leaders who can debate for them. They have to have titles [recognized institutional authority], too, and negotiate with men. We need women who know and understand the religion, who are educated and literate. Women who can translate everything and who can defend themselves in front of men. But the women who the elders choose do not know anything. When they become parliamentarians, they throw away their hijab and tie a little veil around their necks! [They make themselves vulnerable to attack from the religious quarter]. I told the female politicians that they should know about religion to defend themselves against the religious men. That when religious men claim something on religious grounds they can argue back informed by their knowledge of the religion. But if you run after men without any knowledge, you will arrive in an empty spot! Women should think the same way as men. Men have consulted with one another and are together, they have committees, and everything. I swear, women who are educated can get a lot of ideas there, and if they don't plan together and think ahead, nothing will move forward. And that is a concern for the whole nation. Until we get rid of the 4.5 formula, there is no benefit for women.

Before SWSO, there wasn't any kind of relationship between women. Now we are together and all clans are represented. We are united. We also want to unite all women of Jubbaland, make committees and go to Galmudug, Hiiraan, South West, Banadir, Puntland²⁴ to unite all women, if God is willing. And we

23 Some of the clan families with histories in Kismayo originate from Puntland and territories further north. The Bajuni, a Swahili-speaking community, are said to be the original inhabitants of Kismayo. They have been marginalized since the area was colonized by Somalia's major clans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

24 These are the other federal states in Somalia.

will take what is our right from men. We have the right to do the things we can do, that we are capable and effective doing. You will find ... that we can do a lot without using muscles and physical strength. Although we are softer, men have killed us with weapons. It is possible that when men have guns, some women may cry while other may join them. So we (men and women) are similar in many ways, and we should share or exchange the tasks.

So now, we have state and a system. Now you can feel people have left clan-ism behind. Now they are together. We work to bring women from different clans together. Now, if there was no system, you yourself wouldn't have come here to do this seminar and neither would this project have been done, in which Somali women are brought together. It would not have been possible. We are really going forward now.

AMINA

In this final narrative, from the oldest of the women to share their stories, the war is seen through the eyes of a woman who describes herself as a wadaad, a religious person. Amina chronicles how she has been personally affected by clannism and clan-related violence, including the loss of her husband and her small business. Driven by her unshakeable spiritual belief, Amina explains her personal mission to share her religious knowledge with less informed women and children in the hope that they can be persuaded against engaging in ‘ignorant conflict’.

Throughout the years of war, Amina refuses to conform. Instead, she appears to have spoken out when she has witnessed injustice and preached against clannism—even though to do so is to swim against the tide. Her account offers further insights into some of the furious acts of revenge that have been committed by the hands of women. The acts of war Amina describes have not previously been documented. Presumably, however, these stories are all too clearly remembered by those affected, including the perpetrators. Left unreconciled, such memories have the potential to feed future conflict.

Describing their meeting, LPI’s researcher recalls sitting with Amina under a tree, near the entrance to the hall, on plastic chairs, close to one another. During the interview, Amina is calm, confident and open. She often highlights the fact that she did not participate in fighting or support conflict of any kind. Amina indicates that she is one of the women whose belongings had been safeguarded by female fighters, who she knew and to whom she was close. The message that she is keen to share is the need for women to have religious education and for men to be morally enlightened. In her view, this will enable both women and men from engaging and participating in conflict.

I have never carried water to a fighter and this will not be something I will have to deal with on the Day of Judgment. I have always refused to participate in fighting because I fear God. ... I have always detested that Somalis kill each other because sons have only died in wars and not been born of it.

I was an ordinary woman from Beledweyne [South Central Somalia]. I used to work with my pen for the government. My husband was a young man who worked when the USC [United Somali Congress]²⁵ and this kind of suffering started. We are people from [location]. We were targeted for being Darood. That is how my husband, the father of my children, was killed. When my husband died, our eldest son was eight years old. That was really a big loss to me. I ran away from Beledweyne with my children. I did not know anything about the land or people outside Beledweyne. I gave birth to my children in Beledweyne, and before that I was from Mogadishu. I had six children; two died and I ran away with the remaining four.

That is mainly how the conflict affected me. My husband was killed. I fled without knowing anything else of the country or people. Although my family lived in Mogadishu, I came to Kismayo with my children. Other members of my family went to Kenya, and for at least two years, we didn't communicate and didn't know anything about each other.

I was a wadaad [a religious woman], who loved to teach my children about their religion. I have always hated clan warlords and have never gotten involved in conflict. When I arrived in Kismayo, I brought my kids to a Qur'anic school, which I paid for by working as a street vendor. I used to sell second-hand shoes as an itinerant seller, and walked the streets all day. By walking over and over through the streets, I could cover the fees of my children. ... That is how I raised my children.

Once, the children's relatives sent me USD 150 as support for the orphans I was raising. I invested this money to buy clothes and start a small business. When things were going better and my clothes were being sold, the [intra-clan] conflict between the Mareehan and Majeerteen started. The Mareehaan militia entered the city and destroyed everything. Then people were fighting in the name of their clan. I was a religious woman and I didn't want to participate in any way in this conflict. I stayed at home. Then, if the fighting became too intense, I would move my business to another neighbourhood.

One day, I saw an old man, who also was a religious man. He was attacked in front of a store. They approached him and killed him. I thought, 'This old man has been killed. You can't do much for him, so let's just take his dead body out of the street.' Because we tried to take his dead body from there, we were beaten up and our store was looted and destroyed. Nothing was left. The militia wore the clothes they themselves had stolen. ... I didn't know the city, nor did I have any one [there to help me]. I picked up some of the things they had left

25 The USC, led by General Mohamed Farah Aideed, who went on to declare himself president, was an armed opposition group of the Hawiye clan, which played a key role in overthrowing the Siyad Barre regime. The USC entered Mogadishu in December 1990.

and brought them home. I sat at home, desperate. My family members had fled. They went to Dhoobley [a town in Lower Jubba, South West of Kismayo]. I had nothing to flee with. I didn't have enough money to run away with my children. All the money I had in cash was in my store, which was looted. I was sitting without anything. Fortunately, I didn't have to pay for the house rent. Back then, there were not many people in Kismayo and I was living with people of my extended family, who owned the house. So they didn't make me pay rent. I was sitting with nothing in my house. I had nothing.

Then one day, the women who worked at the market called me. They were traders. They were four women working at the market. One of them was a religious woman, too, and the elder one called me. They told me, 'Come work at the market for your children. Your children are young. They are orphans. Although you were looted, and treated this way, you shouldn't sit. We will give you this money as a loan. Accept our loan. Do your best at this table and when you make a good profit, pay us back little by little.' Thank God, this is how these women helped me; how I returned to selling things. Since then, to this day I still sell clothes at the market in Kismayo.

Since then, thank God, I am doing well. I have never killed anyone and I haven't suffered from any other killings than those I told you about. I hate it when people are killed. I used to go among people and talk to them with good words. I used to motivate other religious women, raise awareness among people who are in pain—those who raise orphans, those who were in need, those who have had relatives killed and the people who start disputes. As the women of the market, we were united. You know, when there are too many bandits and militia, religious people are viewed as weak. As religious women, we used to teach other women about religion. We would hold talks in women's houses to tell them to hold their children back from engaging in conflict or from supporting conflict. We reminded them that the conflict was only about worldly concerns. And that the hereafter is more important. All the time, there was one group that took control of the city, then it was another one. But regardless, that is how I participated. Giving peace speeches and educating about religion.

In those sermons, we used to raise awareness about the problems related to the conflict. It is bad in this world and in the hereafter. There are no benefits for both the person who dies or the one who kills for the clan. Both will join the community of Hell. And that to be involved in conflict would not lead you to have some reward in the hereafter. We are Muslims. We shouldn't urge our-

Weligay biyo uma geyn
dadka dagaallamaya,
aakhirana la ii qabsan
maayo. Mar kasta waan
diidi jiray in aan ka
qaybgalo dagaallada oo
Allaan ka cabsanayaa.
..... mar kasta waxaan
dhaleecayn jirey
Soomaalida is dileysa,
sababtoo nah dagaal
wiil kuma dhasho ee
wiil baa ku dhinta.

selves into conflict because we are the community of the unique. You know, the majority of Somalis say they are religious people but they don't understand we shouldn't rush to engage in conflict. We know about Holy War. We are Muslims. We may engage in Holy War against non-believers who want to harm us but we are not allowed to enter into conflict with other Muslims.

We convinced many women like this, who then started wearing the veil. We even opened a Qur'anic school for women. Many women ended up joining and our Qur'anic school became bigger. We didn't open it for a clan or in the name of a clan, nor for any single group. Children and women participated. A school opened by us—women, traders, good women. We had a little coffer every Friday, when everyone who came that day could donate what they could afford, sometimes SOSH 1,000, SOSH 2,000 or SOSH 4,000.²⁶ Every other Friday, we would open the coffer with all the money we had collected and help women who had participated in the Qur'anic school whose fire had been off [meaning she could not light her stove because she could not afford the ingredients to cook a meal]. We were religious women and that is how we participated. We used to work for religion. ...

There were many women who were ignorant about Islam; who didn't wear the veil, who used to encourage the fighting. We offered them classes in the Qur'anic school. In the end, we felt that they had taken on board the religious teachings. ... In the end, they thanked us. They said, 'My sisters, may God reward you! You are good mothers. What we did in the past was wrong.' In the past, these women used to run and bring water to the fighters when there was conflict. ... They used to be people who were Muslim only on the side and didn't even know about religion. But now they understand. ... A God-fearing person can differentiate the good path from the bad one. That person can notice when the war that is initiated is a clan war. That this person isn't religious. That engaging is to take part in an ignorant war. ...

Throughout these years of conflict in Kismayo, many people were killed. ... Once, I ran outside after my little son, who had gone out. I thought I should go after him to bring him back home before gunfire hit him. Once outside, I saw a man's dead body lying on the ground and women standing on it, shooting at his mouth. I was shocked. I quickly invoked God's protection. Then I called to the women and asked them, 'Are you not afraid of God? Are you not Muslim? Who allowed you to put your feet on a dead body?' Although shocking, this had become something common. After there was fighting at night, dead bodies would be lying on the ground the next day. Out of ignorance,

26 Half a US dollar, or 50 cents, is equivalent to approximately SOSH 11,000.

women would run towards the bodies screaming, 'Free the way for me! I will hit him with my fists!' Out of bitterness, they wanted to mutilate the dead bodies. ...

Me, if I talk about myself, the conflict has affected me terribly. I arrived here having no one and knowing nothing about this land, raising children alone. The loss of my husband was one of the worst things to happen. Then my only belongings and savings were looted. But even with all of this, I have never violated the rights of anyone. I behaved according to the teachings of our religion. I love to tell people about the right way. I have never carried water to a fighter and this will not be something I will have to deal with on the Day of Judgment. I have always refused to participate in fighting because I fear God. ... I have always detested that Somalis kill each other because sons have only died in wars and not been born of it. Conflict is something bad. ...

Since the government of Jubbaland was born in 2013, a lot has changed. ... You feel there is change in peoples' minds. That they have started to behave normally. They have started to understand the meaning of 'throw away the gun and take the pen'. ... We cannot live without government. I used to work for the government of Siyad Barre. That state used to be secular. It was not a religious one ... but even in its secularity, it used to be a just one. Then conflict started. I am among the people who studied under the Siyad Barre government, and who then worked for its government, too. I was a nurse and I used to work in the ministry of health. When I remember the way people were together, I think there will never be a government like the one of Siyad Barre in Somalia anymore. There are people whose minds will never understand how it was at that time. Their mind is locked. But Somalis say that a bad state is better than no state. ...

To me, there cannot be peace without justice. If the state does not behave justly, there would be many things missing from it. Justice is about having justice as the head of the people; that Jareer and Jileec [literal translation: kinky hair and soft hair, respectively; this is an expression meant to refer to all clans] are equal. That people have equal access to employment. That they can have equal opportunities in life. That they can go to the same schools. If you cannot give justice to the people and you are the leader of the government, you cannot have a state. Justice should be our first priority. Then there should be a state that works for the security of the people, justly.

It is wrong to assume that because you are a religious person, you are against the government. If we are not supporting each other, we cannot build a

government. The man who does not support the building of a state is the man who wants to loot the people. He wants to kill, to rape women, loot their properties, to afflict people to live in famine and with other suffering. ... For him, life is the blood of people. But for the people, that is not a life. So, without a state that governs the schools, how would people learn about respect and put aside the clan? That is injustice! If girls and boys who graduate from school are told, 'The girl is from this clan so give her this job', that is injustice. That is done by a man who refuses life. The state governs the people. It should work with the people and the people should work with the state. That is how we will reach justice.

The young ones, al-Shabaab. They are wrong. They fight in the name of religion but people should not hide behind religion. The religion is the justice of God and our prophet is His messenger. In my view, the war of the clan warlords has been transformed into one where clans hide behind religion. Because they couldn't say we fight for a clan, they switched it completely to the other side. That is my view.

Today, I still have two sons. My daughter died. I gave birth to six children. Two died when I fled. And one of my sons, who was a bit older, was killed by the Ethiopians at the time of the Courts.²⁷ My two remaining sons live here with me. They are doing well. One has finished university now. They are religious men who have never participated in conflict nor fought for a clan. Thank God.

²⁷ This refers to the time that the Ethiopian army, with the backing of Western allies, ousted the Islamic Courts Union from power in December 2006.

Women's Life Stories

The study report, 'Women, Conflict and Peace: Learning from Kismayo', seeks to understand how women have been affected by armed conflict in Somalia, exploring their roles in building peace, and the ways in which they contribute to the continuation of violence. In doing so, the study aims to identify new means of enhancing women's participation in peace processes, and to advance policy and practice on peacebuilding in Somalia and the broader region. The findings provide powerful, hitherto overlooked evidence of women's role in constructing and producing intra- and inter-clan conflict.

Field work undertaken for the study included discussions with 10 women who shared extensive narratives on their individual experiences of conflict. These women, in their teens to late sixties, were not taken through structured interviews, only being asked to think back over the years since 1991. These intensely personal, often graphic, accounts allow the reader to participate in individual journeys that highlight the profound impact of war on those living through it. The women's recollections testify to their extraordinary resilience to conflict, and the personal change that takes place as a result, often leading to new ways of thinking about oneself or others. All of the included Life Stories demonstrate the gendered nature of clan conflict in Somalia, and the ways in which women navigate deeply entrenched patriarchy.

Six Life Stories are contained here, in full and in the women's own words. Their names have been changed in order to preserve anonymity, while clan and sub-clan affiliations have been replaced with generic descriptors. This collection accompanies the full report.



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