

Peacemaking in Protracted Conflicts in Africa: Lessons from Somalia

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the challenges of peacemaking in protracted conflicts. Using the case of Somalia, the paper argues that conflicts characterized by shifts in actors, alliances, strategies and circumstances pose a serious risk of cyclical and self-perpetuating conflict. These conflicts can be exacerbated by mutual mistrust, international complications, entrenched grievances, emergence of non-state armed groups, war economy, history of conflict and socio-economic destruction. Studies on Somalia have focused largely on cause-effects of conflict, humanitarian crisis, governance, terrorism as well as international interventions. However, there is limited attention on the impact of the protracted nature of the conflict on peacemaking. The author adopts five concepts (concept, issues, relationships, outcomes and to analyse protracted nature of conflict in Somalia and to examine the vulnerabilities of the conflict resolution measures. The paper concludes that peacemaking in Somalia is likely to be hampered by a prolonged history of conflict, memory, re-emergence of *Al Shabaab*, climate change, the fragmented nature of federal states, the war economy, role of regional and international actors and socialization of different generations are negatively impacting the prospects for peace in the Horn of Africa state.

Keywords:

Protracted conflicts, peacekeeping, state building, Somalia

Introduction

The 21st century, like its predecessors, continues to be characterized by conflicts at the family, organisation, national, community and international levels (Beyer *et. al.*, 2022; Harris, 2024). While the means and methods of conflict has changed as a result of technological and strategic advances, conflict resolution is increasingly becoming much more difficult especially at the national/community levels. The challenge for peace advocates today is to keep up with the qualitative and quantitative nature of conflicts across the world. The frequency at which conflicts are experienced today perhaps justifies biological realist's assumptions that humans are naturally

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violent and acts of conflict are not necessary an exemption but the ‘ordinary’ nature of humans. This assumption is backed by the observations made by Winston Churchill who stated that “the story of the human race is War. Except for brief and precarious interludes there has never been peace in the world; and before history began murderous strife was universal and unending. But the modern developments surely require severe and active attention (Cooper *et. al.*, 2011). These concerns are even more important today given the prolonged nature of contemporary conflicts which despite several efforts to resolve them, continue to persist.

Such conflicts, mostly considered as protracted or intractable, are so problematic because over time they become mercurial, complex and malignant, to the extent that conflict resolution strategies such as mediation and negotiation on them become ineffective. According to the Rule of Law in Armed Conflict Online Portal (RULAC), there are roughly 110 active conflicts across the world as of 2023, which is an underestimation of global violence since the portal only covers conflicts that qualify under International Humanitarian Law and does not cover asymmetrical conflicts such as civil wars and terrorism. But the question in this paper is not about quantifying conflicts but examining the challenge of resolving these conflicts most of which are protracted in nature.

The threat posed by prolonged and protracted conflicts on the infrastructure, families, economy, psychology and social aspects of a given society cannot be underestimated. Given the trauma, dislocation, extreme violence and mass atrocities committed during these conflicts, the probability of renewed hostilities whether for revenge or otherwise is very high. Therefore, even though short-term peace can be achieved, the chances of societies that have been exposed to protracted conflicts being trapped in a cycle of violence is very high (Ogbu, 2022; Berhan *et. al.*, 2023; Etzold & Fechter, 2022). Of concern is that contemporary conflicts are increasingly showing evidence of lacking respect to national and international laws governing armed conflicts leaving a bigger trail of distraction and death. Thus, there is need to rethink conflict resolution in the contemporary setting and adopt more upstream prevention measures. Once a conflict has turned violent, it attracts so many actors, new issues emerge and given the age of digital communication, the speed at which fake news is able to spread all combine to undermine traditional peacebuilding efforts.

Focusing on the conflict in Somalia, this paper examines the enduring nature of contemporary conflicts despite extensive peacebuilding efforts. Somalia’s conflict, spanning over two decades of war and instability, represents one of Africa’s longest-standing disputes. Following its independence, Somalia enjoyed a brief period of vibrant peace and democracy, which eventually deteriorated due to rampant corruption and nepotism. This dysfunction led to a military coup in 1969, initially welcomed by a populace disillusioned with the civilian government’s incompetence (Ledesma, 2018; Nyadera *et al.*, 2020). The coup, led by Siad Barre, was characterized as a socialist movement, garnering support from the Soviet Union and enabling Somalia to build one

of Africa's largest armed forces at the time. However, this newfound regional power status ultimately precipitated Somalia's downfall and the ongoing troubles.

The crisis began in 1977 when Somalia engaged in a conflict with Ethiopia over a crisis in the Ogaden region (occupied largely by people of Somalia identity), resulting in a defeat that exacerbated internal grievances. By 1988, Somalia faced another war, this time internal, between the Somali National Army and the Somali National Movement (SNM). The SNM, predominantly comprising members of the Isaaq clan, sought autonomy. When the government deployed military forces to the capital of the northwest region, Hargeisa, it resulted in a catastrophe, with approximately 50,000 people killed. The third war erupted in 1991 between government forces and a coalition of clan-based militias, culminating in the collapse of the Somali state (Ingiriis, 2016; Menkhaus, 2003). Prominent militias involved in the 1991 conflict include the Somali Patriotic Movement (Ogadeni clan), United Somali Congress (Hawiye clan), and the Somali Salvation Democratic Movement (Majerten clan) (Nyadera et. al., 2024).

In addition to these conflicts, the Siad Barre regime's other misconducts continue to influence the current conflict. These include the monopolization of state assets, resources, positions, and land by a small elite, and the manipulation of clan identities not only within Somalia but also across the region, which fuelled strong grievances (Korotayev & Voronina, 2024). Furthermore, the legacy of the Cold War era significantly impacted Somalia, as the country not only benefited from military support but was also torn apart by the ideological rivalries of the great powers. Following the collapse of the government in Mogadishu, the conflict in Somalia not only exposed the country into a prolong period of anarchy and violence, what began as a struggle for control of the government quickly deteriorated into looting, occupation of land, banditry and an all-out war pitting different clans. The most affected regions of the country were those that engaged in agricultural activities, plunging the country into serious famine in the 1990s. At the turn of the new millennium, new acts of violence including piracy, kidnapping, terrorism, human and arms trafficking and a booming war economy. A new front in the Somalia was opened as terrorist groups in the country externalize the crisis by attacking neighbouring countries and kidnapping foreign citizens thus drawing the attention of new regional and international actors. The first decade of the new millennium has seen new state actors involved in the situation in Somalia further complicating the conflict resolution efforts. The conflict is no longer limited to the boundaries of Somalia and external actors have come with new interests.

This choice of Somalia as a case study is significant because numerous attempts to address the Somali conflict have failed to achieve sustainable peace making it one of the longest prolonged conflicts in the continent. It also serves as a critical examination of the limitations of liberal peacebuilding strategies, as the actors in the Somali conflict openly displayed opposition to liberal approaches, adding another dimension to the complexity of peacebuilding efforts. The paper begins by reviewing some of the existing studies on Somalia before looking at the protracted nature

of contemporary conflicts and identifies five concepts that can distinguish protracted conflicts from other conflicts. It then applies these five concepts on the case of Somalia. The paper end with a conclusion that explores other emerging trends in the conflict and their implications on peacemaking.

Revisiting Existing Literature

Due to the prolonged, complex and impact of the Somalia conflict has drawn the attention of policymakers and scholars (Nyadera et al., 2024; Davies et al., 2023; Ahmed, 2024). This has resulted into a plethora of research and policy documents with different perspectives and findings. Despite the extensive studies, the conflict remains relevant even today as it has proved to be one of the most difficult to conflicts to solve. The question is why? Indeed, as a country, Somalia has unique socio-economic and political features that derail peacebuilding efforts. Even the highly glorified liberal peacebuilding efforts have not yielded many fruits in this particular conflict. Similarly, by looking at the existing studies in Somalia, there seems to be little consensus on the causes and dynamics of the conflict. And when the diagnosis of a conflict is that robust, then formulating an effective peace strategy is equally difficult.

Liberal peacebuilding approaches have been applied in Somalia with limited success and sometimes with devastating consequences. De Coning (2007) argues that “many liberal peacebuilding activities have been institutionalized in the work of the UN, international organisations, NGOs, and the numerous parties involved in conflict and post-conflict situations.” In Somalia, some publications (Bryden, 1995; Clarke & Herbst, 2018; Chopra, 1996) have shown that the deployment of UN officers for peacekeeping, which is a common response practice, did not have a significant impact in resolving the conflict. For example, 24 UN troops (mostly from Pakistan) were ambush ambushed and killed in June 1993. In October of the same year, a U.S led operation backfired resulting in the death of 18 U.S. Army Rangers and 300 more wounded. These events did not only reduce trust on the UN strategy, it also emboldened the warring parties to operate with impunity. Even after the withdrawal UN troops, the subsequent peacekeeping operations by the African Union and regional countries have also failed to deliver sustainable peace.

Some scholars have argued that the nature of conflict in Somalia is partly to be blamed for the challenges being experienced with the attempts to resolve. Issues such as patronage networks and coercion strategy used by different actors have featured in several studies yet such factors sometimes are not addressed during the peacemaking process (De Waal, 2020; Hagmann, & Stepputat, 2016). The war economy produced following years of conflict has also been presented as a key factor undermining peace in the country. Beneficiaries of the war economy are resistant to any possibility of resolving the conflict as it would undermine their influence and interest.

Study Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach to analyse the protracted nature of the conflict in Somalia and its implications for peacebuilding. The methodology is designed to capture the complexity of the conflict by integrating qualitative sources such as scholarly literature, historical records, and empirical data. The research is structured around five key conceptual categories—context, relationships, issues, processes, and outcomes—which are used to systematically analyse the factors driving the protracted conflict in Somalia. The study employs a case study research design, focusing on Somalia as a representative example of a protracted conflict environment. The case study method is particularly useful in this study since it allows for an in-depth assessment of the social, historical and political dynamics that have contributed to the protracted nature of the conflict for decades.

The research is divided into three phases: the first phase reviewed existing literature from policy documents, existing scholarly works, and historical records on Somalia's conflict using the PRISMA model. In this phase gaps were identified paving way for the establishment of a theoretical foundation for the study. In the second phase the author embarked on collection of secondary data the main sources in this phrase include conflict reports, historical records and statistical data on poverty, violence, and governance in Somalia. The third phase involved analysis of the collected data. This data was subjected to five conceptual categories (context, relationships, issues, processes, and outcomes) to identify trends, patterns, and causal relationships which illustrated the protracted nature of the conflict.

Protracted Conflicts: A Conceptual Framework

Over the years, researchers have increasingly focused on the study of protracted conflicts (Brecher, 2016; Coleman et al., 2006; Policinski & Kuzmanovic, 2019). This research has gained prominence due to the necessity of distinguishing between intractable and tractable conflicts and identifying the unique factors that create such distinctions. Protracted conflicts are characterized by what Christie et al. (2001) describe as “a complex, nonlinear, dynamic system with a core set of interrelated and mutually influential variables.” A crucial feature of protracted conflicts is that their variables require concrete and systematic analysis. However, these variables often defy such analysis due to their highly reactive and malleable nature, posing the risk of oversimplification. Nonetheless, concrete and systematic analysis is essential to clearly identify the key variables of the system and establish boundaries that differentiate protracted conflicts from more tractable ones. Therefore, borrowing from the works of Fisher & Keashly (1990) on stalemate and conflict escalation as well as previous theoretical frameworks on intractable conflicts by Pruitt & Olczak, 1995; Kriesberg et al., (1989) and Bar-Tal, (1998) we can identify the difference between intractable conflicts and other tractable conflicts based on five categories (*see table 1*). These

include, context, relationships, issues, processes, and the outcomes. In terms of historical contexts, protracted conflicts are different from other conflicts when there is a history of injustice and oppression. Similarly, protracted conflicts tend to appear in the context of rapid change which compromises institutions and norms, creates anarchy, ambiguity and power shifts.

When looking at issues, protracted conflicts are likely to occur when there are dialogic poles such as denial, discounting and differentiation. Also, when there are complicated interconnections of issues such as beliefs, truth and ideologies then the conflict is likely to become intractable. On relationships, if there are exclusive structures that are inescapable and are at risk of destruction as well as collective identities that are polarized, exclusive or constructed then the conflict in question is likely to be protracted. In addition, the relationships that constitute internal dynamics can also produce protracted conflicts especially when such internal dynamic include hidden agenda, unconscious needs, intergroup factions and divisions. In terms of the process, conflicts with intense emotions, deprivation, humiliation, loss, and when dignity and loyalty are central then there are high chances that the conflict will be protracted. Equally if the conflict is characterized by moral exclusion, escalatory spirals, structural and psychological changes then it is likely to be protracted. More importantly under the process category, if the conflict is multilevel, mercurial, has high degree of complexity and is multiparty/multi-actor then the result will be a protracted conflict. In the fifth category we have the outcome. Here the conflict is likely to be protracted if the outcome of the conflict leads to community or individual trauma, broken trust, destructive norms, lasting commitments to violence as well as intergenerational perpetuation.

Using the five categories as highlighted in Table 1, we can identify examples of contemporary conflicts that can be described as protracted due to their complexities, longevity and resistance to conflict resolution. The Syrian Civil War that started in 2011 continues to show how perceived historical injustice, abuse of power, domination and severe imbalance can trigger a cycle of violence that metamorphoses into a complex conflict (Melkonian, 2022; Kešeljević & Spruk, 2024). The Israeli Palestinian Conflict that started in 1948 is another contemporary example of a protracted conflict that has increasingly become complex and resistant to traditional conflict resolution mechanisms (Westfall et. al., 2023; Wambrauw et. al., 2024). The situation in Afghanistan is also a protected conflict that dates back to the Saur Revolution in 1978. Since then the conflict has transformed from a war of liberation to an invasion, counter-terrorism, war on drugs and gender based violence (Roberts, 2003; Ewans, 2004).

Table 1*Categories and Features of Protracted Conflicts*

Category	Sub-category	Features
Context	History	Perceived injustice, bad governance and oppression, victimisation, marginalization.
	(In)stability	Power shifts, anarchy, change, evolving aspirations.
Issues	Social & human polarities.	Dilemmas such as denial, differentiation, discounting or dialectical responses.
	Meaning and Symbols.	Complex interconnections of issues, meaning embedded within basic beliefs, assumptions and ideologies.
Relationships	Destructible and inescapable relations. Polarized group identities.	Structures are exclusive, previous relationships are destroyed and new ones emerge. Identities created around arbitrary dimensions of conflict; they are exclusive, frozen and monolithic.
Process	Emotionally intense.	Deprivation, humiliation, rage and loss, loyalty is central. High intensity, moral exclusion, escalatory spirals, psychological and structural changes, violent atrocities.
	Broken social processes. Complex processes.	Multiparty, multilevel, high complexity, mercurial.
Outcomes	Trauma	Community and individual trauma; splintered trust, repressed or unaddressed.
	Memory	

Source: Author (2024)

The crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has left the country in conflict since 1996. What started as the First and Second Congo wars that were largely interstate to complex intrastate conflicts characterized by insurgencies, rebel groups counterterrorism, resource conflicts, structural violence and ethnic conflict (Samset, 2002; Denisova & Kostelyanets, 2023). The protracted conflict in Yemen that started as a civil war 2014 has significantly transformed into different forms of conflict (Furlan, 2022). From a civil war to regional proxy war between Saudi and Iranian forces to an international conflict that has seen the Houthis targeting international shipping in the Red Sea drawing responses from the USA and United Kingdom. What is disturbing about Yemen is that the country remains the location with the world's worst humanitarian crises with widespread disease, famine, and displacement (Guha et. Al., 2022). Yet given the protracted nature of the conflict, it is very difficult to attain sustainable peace.

These examples are a reflection of the growing nature of protracted conflicts across the world. While this should be a great concern for peacebuilders, it offers an opportunity to rethink the need to examine the compatibilities and limitations of contemporary conflicts. For much older conflicts such as the one in Somalia, examining how the protracted nature of the conflict undermines peacebuilding in the country is a good step towards finding new and innovative solutions. In the next section the author examines the factors driving the protracted conflict in Somalia.

Protracted Conflict in Somalia

Somalia has endured conflict continuously for over half a century. This has not gone unnoticed as researchers have sought to explore the dynamic, causes and logic behind the prolonged conflict in the Horn of Africa nation. Some studies have indeed applied the Intractable Conflict Theory (ICT) on the Somalia conflict (Menkhaus, 2007; Lindley, 2011; Foulds, 2016; Frazer, 2012) while others have applied theories such as the structural-processual analysis (Rosa & Arrey, 2021). Both these approaches have given interesting and useful dimensions of understanding the conflict in Somalia but remain limited in capturing other dimensions of the conflict. Those who have applied the ICT mainly focused on the psychological dimension and do not cover other influential categories such as outcomes and process. The structural-processual analysis does focus on the process and relationships but does not cover the psychological and emotional aspects of the conflict. This paper seeks to add on to the debate by combining five categories to explain the crisis in Somalia.

Historical Context to the Protracted Conflicts in Somalia

Understanding the nexus between protracted conflict and history of injustice and oppression is essential. The history of post-independence Somalia is replete with instances of injustice and oppression that cumulatively precipitated the collapse of President Abdirashid Shermarke's civilian government and subsequently the military regime of Siad Barre. These injustices have left a lasting legacy of mistrust and fragmentation, contributing to the protracted nature of the conflict in Somalia. From the outset of the 1969 coup, it was evident that clan politics would play a significant role in the new junta regime. The Siad Barre-led Supreme Revolutionary Council, a group of military and police officers who seized power from the civilian government, was conspicuously unrepresentative. Key clans such as the Digil/Mirifle were entirely excluded, while Barre's Daarood clan was overrepresented with ten members.

The Hawiye clan was allocated six slots, the Isaaq clan four, the Dir clan three, and one each for Somali Yemeni and Tumaal representatives. This inequitable representation did not stop there. Merely a year after the military assumed power, members of the Hawiye clan were systematically removed from influential positions, with notable figures such as General Ahmed Mohamoud-Adde, General Gabeyre, and Colonel Bashiir Yusuf Elmi being dismissed. These actions entrenched a deep-seated mistrust and further fragmented the nation along clan lines. The exclusionary policies and practices of Barre's regime not only marginalized significant portions of the population but also sowed the seeds of enduring conflict. This historical context of injustice and oppression is critical in understanding the prolonged and complex nature of Somalia's contemporary conflicts.

Use of excessive force by the government especially among members of the Isaaq clan also created a wide rift in Somalia that continues to haunt the country's unity to date. The crackdown mounted in Hargeisa against suspected members of the Somali National Movement (SNM) left between 50,000 and 60,000 dead though the numbers could be higher since women and children are believed to have been killed. According to Khadar Ahmed, head of a local War Crimes Investigation Commission in Somaliland, the extent of the operation left "everybody is missing a relative. Fathers, mothers, brothers, cousins." Similar sentiments are also raised by Yusuf Mire, a local resident of Hargeisa who states that "My relatives were taken from the house to be slaughtered... We want recognition that genocide took place in Somaliland. We will send this to the UN and get the right to be separated from the rest of Somalia." These sentiments are at the core of challenges in resolving the Somalia conflict since the question of the status of Somaliland, which declared independence sometime in 1991, remains contentious.

Apart from the brutality of the said barre regime, the government was also incompetent, corrupt and practiced nepotism. A good description of the situation at the time can be derived from the sentiments of Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan published by the New York Times on March 5, 1982 days before Siad Barre made a tour to the United States:

The corruption that the regime was to stamp out has become a way of life. The nepotism and tribalism that Mr. Siad Barre promised to stem have reached enormous dimensions. Almost all key Government positions are now held by his clan and in-laws, though most of these officials are considered inept. In 1969, there were only four officers from his clan in the armed forces; it is now estimated that more than 60 percent of the officers are clan members. (Bulhan, 1982)

The people of Somaliland have remained adamant of their desire to become independent and not be included as part of Somalia. Even after the collapse of Siad Barre's regime, the country was under the control of war lords for decades who did little to instil confidence over accountability and transparency (Nyadera et al., 2024). More recently, the government of former president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud a surge in corruption, theft of public property and land grabbing. Ultimately the history of oppression, bad governance and injustice has eroded faith on the central governments in Mogadishu thus undermining the chances of forming a national government which is a central component of liberal peacebuilding.

Protracted Conflict in Somalia-driven by Emotionality and High Degree of Complexity and Pervasiveness

Processes, especially those that provoke high levels of emotions can lead to protracted conflicts. Scholars such as Gurr (1974) explored such possibilities with his relative deprivation theory and concluded that when feelings of extreme frustration caused by unjust feeling of what they have relative to others can lead to conflict. The nexus between relative deprivation and protracted

conflict is when those with a sense of feeling unjust see the situation as intense and chronic and violence offers them an opportunity to narrow the deprivation gap, then continuous conflict will be inevitable. In a country like Somalia where the processes of conflict have ravaged economic and social activities there is a tendency to find that the gap between the rich and the poor is very wide. According to a 2023 National Poverty Report, published by the Somalia government through its National Bureau of Statistics, indicates that an average of 65% of the population are poor. This leaves a small minority above the poverty line creating a class rivalry that can prolong conflicts. In terms of malignant social processes, protracted conflict tends to have moderate and high levels of violence as opposed to other conflicts which tend to witness low to moderate violence. Over time a combination of moral, cognitive and behavioural processes such as self-fulfilling prophecies, stereotyping, ethnocentrism, cognitive rigidity and selective perception fuel dehumanisation and deindividuation of the opponents or members of the out-group. In Somalia such suspicions are prominent around accusing others of leaning to the ‘west’ or being less Islamic with the case of *Al Shabaab* and even less patriotic given that majority of leaders in Somalia hold dual citizenship. These suspicions combined lead to a cycle of violence that is difficult to resolve (Nyadera & Ahmed, 2020).

Moreover, when analysing the complexity and pervasiveness of the protracted conflict as part of the broader process, the situation in Somalia which is now protracted presents a distinct case compared to tractable conflicts (Nyadera et al., 2020). Tractable conflicts have well-defined boundaries separating the issues, areas of engagement, and principal antagonists while the Somali conflict is characterized by its fluid and multifaceted nature. This evolution has permeated various facets of both community and individual life, rendering the boundaries of the conflict increasingly indeterminate. For instance, what initially emerged as a struggle to overthrow an authoritarian regime rapidly escalated into multifarious confrontations, involving warlords, terrorist factions attacking both domestic and regional entities, and pirates engaging in kidnappings, which precipitated a multinational counter-piracy effort along the coast of Somalia (Nyadera et al., 2019). Additionally, the conflict has entangled criminal networks involved in arms trafficking, money laundering, and human trafficking, further complicating the landscape. The situation is exacerbated by secessionist efforts from Somaliland, maritime disputes with Kenya and Ethiopia, and geopolitical competition, particularly from Gulf states, which collectively compound the complexity of the conflict. These dynamics render traditional liberal peacebuilding frameworks inadequate for addressing the intricate interplay of issues, processes, and actors inherent in the Somali context.

Paradoxical Nature of Social and Human Polarities in Somalia’s Protracted Conflict

Unlike tractable conflicts, which have finite starts and ends or issues that can be resolved to the satisfaction of a majority of the conflicting parties through mediation, negotiation and facilitation, protracted conflicts are often characterized by some of the key dilemmas of social and human

interaction (Nyadera, Islam & Shihundu, 2024). These dilemmas are not only complex but capable of reproducing violence making them less likely to be resolved using traditional approaches. Most polarities that feature in protracted conflicts tend to be based on opposing tendencies, needs, processes or principles which tend to react against any attempt to resolve them. In Somalia, one of the key obstacles to peace is the dilemma between change and continuity specifically on the issue of democracy or Islamic sharia laws as the governing principle in the country. For example, *Al Shabaab* which loosely translated means the “Youth” was formed in 2004 as the military wing of the Islamic Courts Union, a federation of clan-based Islamic courts is one of the most active actors in Somalia’s conflict and has been outrightly opposed to liberal and western style governance in the country. The group advocates for a more extreme version of Sharia law system and areas under its control have seen the introduction of measures such as stoning, beheading and amputation for those considered to have acted in un-Islamic manner (Joseph & Maruf, 2018). *Al Shabaab* was also opposed to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia that was a product of mediation among different warring parties. Their opposition to the government was mostly based on the group’s dissatisfaction with the liberal nature of the TFG which did not conform to the Sharia governance system (Shire, 2021).

The second issue in Somalia is the dilemma of power sharing as the country is torn between achieving inclusion or efficiency. While Somalia is seen largely as a homogenous society, the country is troubled by problems of exclusion in the past and during peace processes. For example, during the previous peace conferences, some leaders refused to acknowledge and abide by the agreements because they felt that they were not represented in the negotiations. Furthermore, the issue of gender is increasingly becoming a challenge in the country as mediators insist on inclusion of women while other extremist groups such as *Al Shabaab* are not keen on ensuring gender balance. Young people in Somalia are increasingly demanding a place on the negotiation table and their continued exclusion makes the peace efforts ineffective (Mugi, 2020). Also crucial is the dilemma between short -term verses long -term goals. Given the years of conflict and destruction, citizens have increasingly become impatient with government promises of long-term solutions. In turn, groups such as *Al Shabaab* have become proactive to fill in the gap in areas where the government has been unable to offer solutions. Today, *Al Shabaab* boasts of several hospitals, relief food donations to thousands as well as building schools and rehabilitation centres (Harper, 2019). Such actions have reduced the legitimacy of the central government with more people supporting non-state actors.

Another issue that could be impacting the protracted conflict in Somalia is what Lazarus (1988) identifies as coping verses adoption. In this category, when individuals turn to coping mechanisms (like suppression, denial, justification and projection) intended to protect them from psychological stress of protracted trauma can impact their ability to effectively function or process information. In turn, their capacity to make rational and sound decisions such as the benefits, costs and consequence of the conflict is likely to be impaired. Instead, people are likely to turn to modes of

coping with the conflict through denial of costs, dehumanization of the other or even glorification of violent strategies thus undermining their motivation to seek alternative conflict. Years of conflict in Somalia has subjected generations to protracted trauma, almost normalising violence as a common phenomenon. This experience makes it difficult to marshal a significant number of people to push for peace leading to the protracted conflicts.

Protracted Conflict in Somalia as a Result of Destructive and Inescapable Relationship between Social Structures and Issues

In this category, I begin by examining how the limitations posed by social and geographical factors has shaped the relationships between parties involved in the conflict. Indeed, while the majority of people in Somalia share the same myth of a common origin, religion, language and identical customs, socially constructed in-group and out-group identities have distorted relationships over the years. There are four clans considered as the majority, these include Hawiye, Dir, Rahanweyn and Daarood. There are also other clans considered as minorities such as Gaboye and Yibir. The minority Bantu clans often face discrimination, prejudice, violence, stereotyping, and presented as the enemy the majority clans. Even in the wake of the ongoing violence, a study by Hoehne (2015) established that members of the minority clans are constantly victimised and discriminated against. They are reminded in Somali saying that *Looma ooyaan* (no one will weep for you) and *Looma aaraan* (and no one will avenge for you) (Leimsidor, 2010). Such stereotypes have isolated members of minority clans from national discourse and peacebuilding process which undermines efforts to have an inclusive peace and sustainable peace. Even the clan structure in Somalia is in such a way that the minorities can hardly escape from the discriminatory status. This is also embedded in law as Somalia uses the 4.5 formula to share positions including in the executive and legislature. It means the four slots for the dominant clans and 0.5 slots for the minority clans.

Beyond the minority clans, discrimination among majority clans concerning public office appointments and resource allocation is extensively documented (Hinds, 2013; Webersik, 2004) and persists as a significant challenge. This persistent discrimination has engendered widespread mistrust, leading to serious fragmentation of the country and secession threats from local government authorities towards the federal government. Given the rigidity of ethnic identity, individuals often find themselves confined to their clan groups, necessitating a continuous struggle for recognition. Similarly, federal state boundaries, predominantly delineated along clan lines, hinder effective interaction among different groups. Consequently, such demarcations facilitate the manipulation of individuals through stereotypes about other clans. In addition to clan affiliations, various other divisions exist, including generational (youth versus elders), gender (men versus women), and the Somali diaspora, all of whom actively seek to influence national issues and outcomes. Often, the interests of these diverse groups are discordant and may conflict with one another.

Outcomes: The Role of Trauma and Memory in the Protracted Conflict in Somalia

Perhaps one of the most significant consequences of conflict is trauma and memories of atrocities, violence, human suffering, loss of relatives and friends, economic collapse and fear caused by anarchy. In protracted conflicts, these outcomes only serve to reproduce a new cycle of violence, one that can be without remorse, a sense of justification and desire for revenge. In a study conducted by Carney (1994) after the Rwandan Genocide revealed that 90% of the survivors who responded to the questionnaire exhibited signs of psychological trauma. From children who became orphaned from the war and recruited as child soldiers to adults who were exposed to violence, betrayal by neighbours, sexual abuse, loss of property and witnessing murder left traumatized. It can also be caused by prolonged hunger, torture, deep hatred, and committing murder and mass atrocities. Trauma, which also means ‘wound’, can be manifested in different forms, shapes and intensities and can sometimes be undetected. Some of the main symptoms include hopelessness, regular nightmares, demoralization, suicidal thoughts, helplessness, somatic illnesses, anxiety, sleeplessness, depression, meaninglessness and feelings of isolation.

In Somalia, three decades of conflict, insecurity gender and social inequality, environmental degradation and natural disasters have combined to expose the people into prolonged suffering that could affect the psychologically. For Somalis who witnessed the four months of violence between December 1991 and March 1992 have described the events as *Burbur* (a Somali word meaning ‘catastrophe’). During the four months of fighting, an estimated 25,000 people, the number of people who were internally displaced reached 2 million while 1.5 million became refugees in neighbouring countries. In the following months, the consequences of the war and climate change, worsened by destruction of social and economic infrastructure, looting and destruction of agricultural farms in the south led to the death of over 250,000 people. Similarly, a large number of people have lost their lives through terrorism and piracy activities have also reduced the country’s access to imports especially of essential goods.

These experiences have indeed left a psychological impact on many people in Somalia with a report of the World Health Organisation indicating the suicide rate in Somalia is at 11.5 per 100,000 individuals which is higher than the global average and can be attributed to trauma (WHO, 2020). According to a study by Ibrahim et al., (2022), since 60% of the population in the country are people below the age of 25, this generation has been born during the war and are yet to experience any form of sustainable peace. The limited access to mental health services due to the ill-equipped and fragile health services also means that those experiencing trauma are not able to get help. Trauma has an impact on physical and behavioural health conditions of an individual. It can lead to substance and drug abuse as revealed by Odenwald et. al., (2007) that over 35% of young people use drugs such as Khat. These drugs can push one into violence leading to the protracted nature of the conflict we are witnessing.

Furthermore, in the context of protracted conflicts, it is difficult to disentangle conflict from memory. Memories often evoke old scars, resentments, grievances, and hatreds, leaving a profound impact on both individuals and communities, which can undermine reconciliation efforts. These memories are not only potent for those who experienced the events first-hand but can also be transmitted to subsequent generations through narratives. The impact of narrated grievances and hatred can be nearly as significant as that of direct experiences. This phenomenon helps explain the steadfast position of Somaliland in its refusal to reunify with Somalia. The collective memory of the attack by the government in Mogadishu in 1990/1991, which resulted in thousands of deaths and the destruction of the region's infrastructure, remains deeply embedded in the consciousness of Somaliland's residents. This traumatic historical memory continues to influence the region's political stance and community cohesion.

Conclusion

The study looked at Somalia's protracted conflict which represents one of the world's most complex and enduring crises in the contemporary peacebuilding. The author adopted five categories context, relationships, issues, processes, and outcomes to assess the multifaceted nature of the conflict. The application of this framework allowed the author to unearth a number of critical drivers that perpetuate the conflict. These include clan-based politics, historical injustices, the re-emergence of Al-Shabaab, the war economy and the consequences of climate change. The study finds that these factors interact in complex way, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of violence that has proven resistant to traditional conflict resolution strategies.

At the core of this paper is its contribution to the nexus between the above factors. For example, there is a strong relationship between deep-seated mistrust among clans and the historical context of marginalization and oppression. In turn, these prolonged hostilities fuel the war economy and create a fertile ground for extremist groups like Al-Shabaab to thrive. Similarly, decades of trauma and loss have contributed to hyping the emotional intensity of the conflict, creating a society where violence is normalized, and peacebuilding efforts are often met with scepticism.

The policy contributions of this analysis are significant. First, the author argues for the inclusion of issues that can address structural inequalities in any peacebuilding effort. This includes examining 4.5 clan power-sharing formula and reforming it in order to economic grievances are addressed and greater inclusivity achieved. This will have a far-reaching impact in resolving the drivers of the war economy. Second, the study advocates for localized peacebuilding initiatives avoids the top-down approaches and engages communities at the grassroots level. Finally, there is need for a coordinated and coherent approach by regional and international actors as a way of prioritizing long-term stability over short-term security gains.

This paper also proposes gaps that future research can address on several fronts. First, the psychological impact of protracted conflict on the society, particularly on younger generations who have grown up in an environment of violence. Second, a comparative studies examines and compares how other countries have managed to transition from protracted conflict to sustainable peace is also needed. Overall, the protracted conflict in Somalia should not only be seen as a local or regional issue but an international challenge as well. This means, it requires interdisciplinary and innovative approaches to address. By understanding the complex interplay of historical, economic, social, and psychological factors, we can begin offer more effective peacebuilding strategies for Somalia and other countries experiencing of protracted conflict.

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