

Transitional Justice Initiative as a Panacea for the Protracted Conflicts in Somalia. The case of Galkayo.

About the Author

Anwar Abdifatah Bashir. PhD. Candidate in International Studies at University of Nairobi and Senior Lecturer at Somali National University. Bashir is also, the Executive Director and CEO of the East African Institute for Peace and Governance.

It has been a quarter of a century since Somalia lost its statehood under painful circumstances, casting the nation into an extended period of isolation from the international community. Over the years, Somalia's name has sadly become synonymous with the concept of a failed state, and the term 'Somalization' has emerged in the 21st century as an analogue to 'Balkanization' (Kimenyi et al., 2010).

Somalia has endured significant instability and civil strife over the past three decades, profoundly affecting both its populace and its economic prospects (International Journal of Economics and Finance, 2017). However, since 2011, Somalia has shown encouraging signs of political, economic, and security improvement (Desei, 2019). Furthermore, the nation boasts a vibrant and prominent civil society that has filled critical gaps. Civil Society Organizations have played an unparalleled role within the country, facilitating reconciliation among communities, addressing humanitarian concerns, defending human rights, and undertaking various other essential tasks.

In this paper, we explore the transformative potential of Transitional Justice Initiatives in resolving the protracted conflicts in Somalia, with a focus on the specific case of Galkayo. Additionally, we will integrate valuable insights from the field of transitional justice and conflict resolution to provide a comprehensive analysis of the situation.

Can Somalia emulate this approach (Transitional Justice Initiative)?

The role of traditional, informal, or local mechanisms in transitional justice has become an increasingly prominent topic in both academic discourse and policy discussions (Peacebuilding Initiative). Many countries around the world, including Peru, Northern Uganda, Rwanda,

Mozambique, and East Timor, have grappled with conflicts, war, genocide, and mass atrocities within their societies, and they have implemented various forms of transitional justice mechanisms(Lundy & Mcgovern, 2008). However, a persistent debate surrounds the definitions of the terms 'traditional,' 'informal,' and 'local.'

Despite the ongoing disagreements over terminology, there is a shared understanding that these concepts refer to justice practices that emerge within a society. These justice processes often blend elements of retaliatory and restorative justice, aiming to hold those responsible for past crimes, such as human rights abuses, accountable(Cade, 2018). This accountability may involve imposing community-level penalties or compensation.

Transitional justice goals can vary widely depending on the local context, but some common characteristics persist. These include a fundamental recognition of the dignity of individuals and the importance of acknowledging past violations to prevent their recurrence(Somalia Stability Fund, 2021).The protracted civil war that plagued Somalia for over two decades has disproportionately emphasized the process of state-building over peacebuilding. This skewed prioritization has resulted in neglecting the critical aspects of peacebuilding, mutual trust, and coexistence within the Somali community.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to assess the suitability of transitional justice initiatives as a potential solution for the complex situation in Somalia, with a specific focus on the contested city of Galkayo. It heavily relies on secondary sources and an extensive document review. A qualitative research methodology has been chosen for its capacity to delve into the intricate dynamics of transitional justice within the Somali context. This approach facilitates an exploration of the nuances, perceptions, and experiences of various stakeholders involved in the transitional justice process.

A significant component of this methodology involves an in-depth review of secondary sources. These sources encompass academic articles, reports, policy documents, and pertinent literature that shed light on transitional justice practices, conflict resolution efforts, and the specific

challenges confronting Galkayo and Somalia as a whole. The comprehensive document review forms the basis of the analysis.

Transitional justice process in Somalia?

The transitional justice process in Somalia is a crucial endeavor aimed at addressing the significant human rights violations and injustices that have occurred, particularly since the outbreak of the civil war in 1991. To ensure a lasting and effective solution, it is imperative that transitional justice adopts a participatory approach, shifting from the traditional "top-down approach" to a more inclusive "bottom-up approach," where the voices of the marginalized and vulnerable are not only heard but also heeded (Lundy & McGovern, 2008).

Given the scale of human rights violations during the conflict, the capacity of the government's judicial system alone is insufficient to address all these issues. It is in this context that the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) becomes indispensable. CSOs have played a pivotal role in facilitating and driving the transitional justice process forward (Somalia Stability Fund, 2021). The transitional justice process in Somalia encompasses a multifaceted approach that includes, but is not limited to, the following components:

1. The government levels.

The government serves as the highest authority in the country, responsible for safeguarding and ensuring the well-being of its citizens through the enforcement of rules and regulations, particularly when it comes to addressing crimes such as murder, torture, and other offenses. At the government level, various institutions have specific responsibilities:

Ministry of Justice: At the national level, the Ministry of Justice holds a pivotal role within the federal government of Somalia in addressing justice-related matters. However, its effectiveness is hindered by several factors. Somalia's federal structure means that some federal states may not fully implement or adhere to guidelines issued by the national ministry (Somalia Stability Fund, 2021). Additionally, certain districts remain under the control of extremist groups like Al-Shabaab, where the ministry has little to no presence. Despite these formidable challenges, the Ministry of

Justice retains its constitutional mandate to lead and fulfill its responsibilities, irrespective of the obstacles that may impede its functions.

- **State-Level Ministries:** At the state level, ministries such as the Ministry of Justice, Religious Affairs, Constitution, and Rehabilitation in Puntland State of Somalia also play a significant role in addressing justice-related issues. In alignment with their vision, these state-level ministries aim to "promote a peaceful environment through ensuring access to justice and equality for all Puntland people (Raballad et al., 2021).

It is important to acknowledge that Somalia's federal system presents unique challenges for the harmonization of justice-related efforts across the country. The success of these institutions relies not only on their commitment to their constitutional duties but also on fostering cooperation and collaboration between the federal and state governments, as well as addressing security concerns in areas still affected by extremism. Incorporating these revisions enhances the clarity and cohesiveness of the passage, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the roles and challenges faced by government institutions in Somalia.

Independent Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In accordance with Somalia's provisional constitution, particularly as outlined in Article 111I, the Independent Truth and Reconciliation Commission is entrusted with a critical role and a set of responsibilities. This commission is tasked with promoting national healing, fostering reconciliation within society, and fostering unity and solidarity among communities (Sanei & Omar, 2019). Additionally, it holds the vital responsibility of addressing issues related to the culture of impunity, reprisals, and various forms of violence through a legal and state-oriented process. It's worth noting that this commission operates independently, with representation from all federal states within the country.

However, despite its significant mandate and potential impact, the Independent Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been largely inactive. Several factors contribute to this state of inactivity and ineffectiveness (Somalia Stability Fund, 2021). These include deeply entrenched divisions and animosities within the communities, interference from the federal government, and the involvement of certain international actors whose interventions may not always align with the local context. These challenges have limited the commission's ability to carry out its duties effectively.

In light of the critical importance of reconciliation in Somalia, especially as the nation aspires to hold One-Person One-Vote elections in 2025, there is an urgent need for truth and reconciliation efforts. Unless the unresolved issues from the past are addressed and reconciled, achieving political consensus and stability remains a formidable challenge.

Human rights commission. Based on the Somalia's provisional constitution, as outlined in Article 111B, the Human Rights Commission operates independently and carries the weighty responsibility of upholding human rights in the country(The Federal Republic of Somalia, 2012). This pivotal commission is entrusted with several key duties including:

1. **Promoting a Culture of Human Rights:** Given Somalia's history of human rights violations, the commission's foremost responsibility is to cultivate a culture of respect for human rights within the nation. The country has grappled with frequent human rights abuses, including the targeting of journalists, recurring incidents of rape, and instances of Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The commission plays a crucial role in raising awareness and advocating for the protection of these fundamental rights.
2. **Monitoring and Evaluating Human Rights:** Operating at the federal level, the commission possesses the constitutional authority to oversee and evaluate human rights situations within the various regional states. This oversight enables the commission to assess the adherence to human rights standards and ensure that violations are addressed appropriately.

Despite the significant responsibilities assigned to the commission, its work remains less visible in practice. This is largely due to deeply ingrained traditional norms within the community that can be at odds with human rights principles. For instance, practices like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) persist in some communities, with some individuals considering them as cultural norms. These deep-seated cultural practices pose a substantial challenge to the commission's efforts.

Addressing Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) such as FGM requires a nuanced approach. Convincing communities, particularly in remote areas where such practices are prevalent, to abandon these harmful actions necessitates engagement, education, and the promotion of alternative practices that respect human rights and dignity (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2018).In

light of these challenges, the commission must persist in its efforts to raise awareness, promote dialogue, and advocate for the protection of human rights. It is imperative that Somalia work toward a society where respect for human rights is paramount, and the commission, alongside various stakeholders, plays a crucial role in achieving this goal as outlined in the provisional constitution of 2012.

Conflict Resolutions, Human rights and Peace-building Organizations: Since the dissolution of the central government in 1991, civil society organizations in Somalia have played an increasingly pivotal role in various aspects of the nation's development. Among these organizations, those dedicated to advocating for human rights and conflict resolution have been at the forefront of fostering positive change in the country(Hared, 2020). Prominent examples include the Center for Research and Dialogue (CRD) and the Puntland Development and Research Center (PDRC). These organizations have not limited their activities to the capital city of Mogadishu but have extended their reach to regions and districts across Somalia.

Over the years, civil society organizations have been instrumental in resolving numerous conflicts within communities. Their efforts have not been confined to local conflicts alone; they have also played a crucial role in mediating conflicts among former warlords in Somalia(Hared, 2020). More recently, civil society has actively participated in efforts to bridge divisions and political disagreements between the federal government and its regional states (Peripherals).

Transitional justice programs, aimed at addressing past human rights violations and injustices, have often harnessed the extensive networks of civil society organizations(Somalia Stability Fund, 2021). These programs involve collaboration between civil society members and the national judicial system, creating a comprehensive and unified community dedicated to safeguarding human rights.

The role of civil society in reconciliation, human rights defense, and amplifying the voices of marginalized populations cannot be overstated. Presently, a multitude of civil society organizations continue to volunteer their time and efforts to promote reconciliation and forgiveness within Somali society(Hared, 2020). They serve as the nucleus of the transitional justice initiative, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity among the population.

Media: In this modern technological era, the media plays a paramount role in shaping public perception and disseminating information. However, Somalia's experience with media has been a complex journey. In the past, media outlets in Somalia were often instrumentalized, exacerbating the conflicts and clan divisions within the nation (Stremlau, 2020). Former warlords would utilize their own radio stations to vilify rival warlords and exaggerate their own influence, resulting in the escalation of violence and the deepening of animosities among communities. During this period, the media's primary function was to propagate propaganda on behalf of various warlords, further fueling the flames of discord. News reports from the media were frequently marred by distortion, misinformation, and manipulation, driven by vested interests.

It is crucial to recognize that the media can be a double-edged sword, capable of both positive and negative impacts. In Somalia, where a significant portion of the population remains illiterate, media outlets, particularly radios and televisions, serve as the primary sources of information. As such, the media wields significant influence and trust among the public (Stremlau, 2020).

In recent years, there has been a transformative shift in the role of media in Somalia. Recognizing its potential as a powerful tool for conflict resolution and reconciliation, media outlets have started to play a pivotal role in mitigating societal conflicts (Stremlau, 2020). For instance, broadcasting media, including television and radio, have been used to disseminate messages of peace and reconciliation, especially to conflicting parties. Programs such as "**CAFIS IYO ISKU GARNAQID**" (Forgiveness and Confession) have emerged to facilitate the dissolution of long-standing hostilities and enmities among different segments of society.

In summary, media holds immense potential to contribute to truth and reconciliation efforts in Somalia, especially in the lead-up to the eagerly anticipated One-Person One-Vote elections in 2025. While the history of media in Somalia has been marked by misuse and manipulation, its evolving role as a conduit for peace and conflict resolution underscores its significance as a catalyst for positive change in the nation's path towards stability and unity.

The role of poets: The role of poets: Somali poems had the leading role when it comes to transitional justice discourse. For instance, the Somali poet Salaan Carabey says "TOLOW COLKA JOOJA" which means my clan please stop the war. Moreover, he was deterring to fight

each other's. Apart from that, the poet has positive and negative impacts to the society (Barkhad M. Kaariye, 2016). In the negative side, when they want to create conflicts among the clans, they narrate through poetry negative histories among the two tribes, so this negative story freaks out one clan, and ignites a fresh conflict among the clans. Same, when they want to create a peaceful environment, they narrate via poetry some impeccable and splendid stories among the clans, so the two-parts receive a mutual-reception. So, during the transitional justice process, poets are vitally important. Because, they have peerless and exquisite position in the community, and their messages are easily acceptable among the society.

In Somali culture, poets have historically held a prominent and influential position, particularly in the discourse surrounding transitional justice. One can observe the significant impact of Somali poetry in shaping the narrative during times of conflict and reconciliation (Barkhad M. Kaariye, 2016). For example, the renowned Somali poet Salaan Carabey encapsulated the essence of his message with the simple yet powerful phrase "TOLOW COLKA JOOJA," which translates to "My clan, please stop the war." Through his poetry, Carabey effectively dissuaded conflict and encouraged cooperation among clan members.

However, it is important to acknowledge that poetry in Somali society, like any form of art, can have both positive and negative impacts. On the negative side, poets, when motivated to sow discord, may employ their art to recount negative histories between clans. These narratives can stoke fear, mistrust, and animosity, leading to renewed conflicts among communities (Barkhad M. Kaariye, 2016). Conversely, when poets aim to foster peace and reconciliation, they use their craft to narrate uplifting and inspiring stories of cooperation and mutual respect between clans. These narratives have the potential to encourage mutual understanding and reconciliation between conflicting parties.

During the transitional justice process, poets occupy a vitally important role. Their unique and revered status within Somali communities allows their messages to be readily accepted and embraced. Poets serve as conduits for conveying messages of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation to the public (Barkhad M. Kaariye, 2016). Their ability to influence public opinion and emotions makes them invaluable in bridging divides and promoting unity.

Peace and Justice discourse.

In contexts marked by conflicts, war crimes, and pervasive human rights violations, a fundamental question arises: Should peace or justice take precedence? This question often triggers debates and leaves individuals pondering whether it is possible to achieve peace without addressing justice issues first. Should peace agreements be signed before holding individuals accountable for their actions? Does justice play a role in the pursuit of peace? These dilemmas often place the rights of victims in the midst of negotiations. For instance, one prevailing argument suggests that achieving peace necessitates engaging with perpetrators of crimes at the negotiation table. Consequently, the idea of simultaneously achieving both peace and justice becomes a daunting challenge (Lundy & McGovern, 2008).

As Justice Goldstone aptly emphasizes, it is essential not to equate "lasting and effective 'peace'" with simply "making peace." In other words, signing a peace agreement does not necessarily encompass addressing justice concerns (Nagy, 2020). Nevertheless, proponents of justice as a means to attain peace argue that the goals of justice and peace are intrinsically intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

Transitional justice emerges as a critical tool within the broader reconciliation efforts. It seeks to rectify the scars of a tumultuous past by encouraging the acknowledgment of past violence, documenting historical atrocities, ensuring accountability for wrongdoers, and, importantly, reconstructing fractured social relationships (Nagy, 2020).

In situations of conflict where war crimes, crimes against humanity, and grave human rights violations have been committed, the dichotomy of peace versus justice presents a myriad of challenges. The crucial questions persist: Can peace truly be realized without justice? Should a peace agreement precede accountability measures? Can justice actively contribute to the attainment of lasting peace? These questions reflect the complexity of the issues at hand and the need for careful consideration.

At times, the rights of victims are thrust into the negotiation arena. For example, some experts contend that engaging with perpetrators is an unavoidable aspect of peace negotiations. Under this

perspective, pursuing both peace and justice simultaneously appears incompatible. The prosecution of leaders in a court of law may seem implausible during the delicate process of negotiating a peace agreement.

In the case of Somalia, Salim Lone's words from 2007 remain relevant: "This is the most lawless war of our generation." He highlights the pervasive illegality and violation of international norms that characterize conflicts like Somalia's. In such contexts, addressing the tension between peace and justice becomes even more challenging.

In proposing a transitional justice model for Somalia, it is essential to acknowledge the myriad challenges inherent in achieving justice. While the proposed model may not be perfect, it is arguably the best approach attainable under the prevailing circumstances. This model blends two mechanisms—namely, an ad hoc tribunal and the utilization of Xeer, the informal Somali justice system. Together, these mechanisms offer a path to pursue both retributive and restorative justice (Margherita Zuin, 2008).

The discourse surrounding peace and justice in Somalia is fraught with complexities, reflecting the unique challenges of transitioning from conflict to stability. Striking a balance between these two essential pillars—peace and justice—is a formidable task, yet it remains critical in the pursuit of a harmonious and just society.

The challenges of implementing transitional justice

Despite the different models of transitional justice that have been proposed, there are numerous challenges that need to be addressed in order to implement these models successfully. Some of these challenges include:

1. **Lack of Dominant Legitimate Legal Structures:** Somalia, while making strides toward recovery, still grapples with the aftermath of past conflicts. Although the government was recognized as permanent in 2012, state institutions remain fragile and ill-equipped to handle the complex task of implementing transitional justice initiatives (Somalia Stability Fund, 2021). The challenges of restoring and establishing a robust legal infrastructure are compounded by the ongoing conflict with the Al-Qaida-linked terrorist group Al-Shabaab.

The government's limited capacity and resources are often diverted toward security concerns, leaving insufficient attention and resources for transitional justice efforts.

2. **Clannism:** The pervasive influence of clan-based identity and loyalties poses a significant obstacle to justice institutions. Clan affiliations often take precedence over legal norms, leading to situations where individuals accused of crimes may find protection and concealment within their clans. This has resulted in increased human rights violations, especially during the civil war, and has undermined the state's ability to hold criminals accountable for their actions(Somalia Stability Fund, 2021). Customary laws, such as "xeer," have sometimes taken precedence over formal justice systems.
3. **Role of the International Community:** While the international community has played a critical role in humanitarian aid and peacebuilding efforts in Somalia, there have been instances of human rights violations associated with these interventions. Historical reports, such as those from Human Rights Watch (HRW) in 1995, document incidents of human rights abuses committed by international actors. More recently, under AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia), there have been allegations of harm to civilians and sexual abuse. As part of transitional justice initiatives, it is imperative that all individuals responsible for crimes, regardless of their identity or affiliation, are held accountable.
4. **Systemic Violence Against Minorities and Women:** Somalia's societal structures are patriarchal, with women often marginalized and subjected to gender-based violence. The civil war exacerbated these issues, leading to numerous reported cases of sexual abuse and gender-based violence. Additionally, minority clans and marginalized groups have faced systemic discrimination and violence(Lundy & Mcgovern, 2008). These structural inequalities have contributed to the magnitude of crimes committed, with women and minority clans disproportionately affected.
5. **Divergent Narratives on the Past:** Somalia's prolonged civil war has given rise to different narratives about key figures, including warlords. What one clan may consider a hero; another may view as a villain. These contrasting narratives have made it challenging to document past crimes comprehensively, identify responsible parties, and establish a shared historical record. Resolving these differing perspectives is essential for achieving a coherent approach to transitional justice(Somalia Stability Fund, 2021).

Overall, while transitional justice is essential for Somalia's path to reconciliation and stability, addressing these multifaceted challenges is imperative. Building robust legal structures, countering clan-based loyalties, ensuring accountabilities for all actors, addressing gender-based violence and discrimination, and reconciling diverse historical narratives are essential steps in achieving meaningful transitional justice in the country.

Mudug Agreement

The Mudug Peace Agreement, inked on June 4th, 1993, in Mogadishu, marked a significant milestone in Somalia's tumultuous history. It brought together two key figures: the late President of Somalia, Abdullahi Ahmed Yusuf, who also formerly served as the President of Puntland State of Somalia, and the late General Mohamed Farah Aideed, Chairman of the United Somali Congress (USC). At that time, President Yusuf chaired the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF). This landmark peace accord played a pivotal role in mitigating, to some extent, the long-standing enmity between local communities in Galkayo, a city that had been a hotspot for internecine communal violence since the collapse of the military government in 1991 (Majid, Nisar, & Abdirahman, Khalif, 2020). This violence was primarily driven by factors such as the scarcity of water and competition for natural resources (Obsiye, 2017).

Mudug, particularly Galkayo, has been a region plagued by frequent conflicts, with the disputes between the Majeerteen of the Daarood clan and the Habar-Gidir of the Hawiye clan spanning decades. Mudug, situated at the confluence of diverse Somali communities and clans, serves as an economic hub, connecting the southern and northern regions of Somalia (Majid, Nisar, & Abdirahman, Khalif, 2020). Its geopolitical importance and rich resource potential have historically contributed to conflicts and tensions among the various groups residing there.

The objective of this research paper is to explore the potential of "transitional justice" as a viable option for addressing the protracted conflicts in Somalia, with a particular focus on the disputed city of Galkayo (Majid, Nisar, & Abdirahman, Khalif, 2020). Transitional justice offers a comprehensive framework for addressing historical grievances, reconciling warring factions, and establishing a foundation for lasting peace and stability. In a region marked by complex clan dynamics and resource competition, transitional justice initiatives can play a crucial role in

promoting reconciliation, accountability, and the rule of law. By examining the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms in the context of Galkayo and Mudug, this research aims to provide insights into how such processes can contribute to resolving conflicts and fostering a more peaceful coexistence among Somalia's diverse communities.

The Gacaca court system as a good example for Galkayo's ceaseless conflicts.

The Gacaca court system in Rwanda stands as a remarkable example of a community-based approach to addressing deep-seated conflicts and achieving reconciliation. In 1994, Rwanda endured the harrowing experience of the genocide, during which hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives and countless others were severely affected. In response to this catastrophic event, the Rwandan government initiated the Gacaca system, drawing upon traditional community court practices (Majid, Nisar, & Abdirahman, Khalif, 2020).

Under the Gacaca system, local communities elected judges to preside over cases involving individuals accused of crimes related to the genocide, with the notable exception of planning genocide. What sets the Gacaca courts apart is their emphasis on reconciliation and community involvement. These local courts offered a pathway for individuals accused of crimes to engage in a process of truth-telling and accountability. Importantly, if the accused were willing to confess their role in the genocide and express genuine remorse, the Gacaca courts often showed leniency (Majid, Nisar, & Abdirahman, Khalif, 2020).

The Gacaca trials, conducted through more than 12,000 community-led courts, managed over 1.2 million cases throughout the country. Beyond their role in dispensing justice, these trials played a crucial role in fostering reconciliation among communities deeply scarred by the genocide. They also served as a means of informing families and relatives about the fate of their loved ones who had been victims of the genocide (Majid, Nisar, & Abdirahman, Khalif, 2020). Furthermore, the Gacaca process encouraged perpetrators to acknowledge their actions, express regret, and seek reconciliation with their communities. This emphasis on acknowledging wrongdoing and facilitating repentance was central to the broader aim of rebuilding trust and unity within Rwandan society.

In the context of Galkayo's ceaseless conflicts, the Gacaca model offers valuable insights. By emphasizing community participation, truth-telling, and accountability, transitional justice mechanisms inspired by the Gacaca system could provide a framework for addressing grievances, promoting reconciliation, and healing deeply divided communities (Majid, Nisar, & Abdirahman, Khalif, 2020). The experience of Rwanda demonstrates that community-led processes can be instrumental in not only delivering justice but also fostering long-lasting peace and social cohesion. Exploring the adaptation of such mechanisms in Galkayo may hold promise for addressing its protracted conflicts and promoting a more peaceful coexistence among its diverse communities.

Galkayo Community Trials (GACOT).

The concept of Galkayo Community Trials (GACOT) represents a compelling and locally driven approach to address the ongoing conflicts in Galkayo. Given the challenges facing the existing formal court system in Somalia, an alternative mechanism is needed to address the multitude of cases effectively. GACOT envisions the active participation of respected individuals within the local communities, including religious leaders, traditional elders, and individuals with a strong moral standing, who would serve as judges or mediators (Peace Rep, 2023).

The primary rationale behind GACOT is the recognition that the current court system in Somalia faces significant limitations and constraints, rendering it incapable of handling the volume of cases arising from the ceaseless conflicts in Galkayo (Somalia Stability Fund, 2021). As a result, local communities must step in to fill this void and take a proactive role in facilitating reconciliation and conflict resolution from the grassroots level.

Some programs which are related to Transitional Justice Initiative and led by Civil Society (Galkayo city)

In Galkayo, a pioneering and transformative program, initiated by the local organization known as the Somali Disaster Resilience Institute in collaboration with international partners such as Oxford University and Albany Communication Trust, unfolded in 2018. This program represented a groundbreaking effort aimed at fostering reconciliation within the local community, particularly

among those who shared the same geographic space(Peace Rep, 2023). Galkayo, like many parts of Somalia, has been marred by numerous conflicts, protracted wars, and grave human rights violations. Several underlying factors have contributed to these conflicts, including the coexistence of different clans in the region and resource scarcity, particularly concerning water resources, given the Somali reliance on livestock.

In response to this complex and deeply rooted situation, civil society organizations, in conjunction with international partners, initiated pilot projects that aimed to promote reconciliation within the community. Galkayo was chosen as the epicenter of this pioneering effort and hosted by Galkayo University (GU). The program involved a diverse spectrum of participants, including academicians, lawyers, journalists, government officials, traditional elders, youth organizations, women's organizations, and research institutions(Peace Rep, 2023). Their collective mission was to engage in dialogue and exchange ideas on the pressing issue of transitional justice.

During this dynamic learning event, a wide array of topics was discussed, and a multitude of recommendations were put forth. As a participant in this pilot project, serving in the dual capacity of researcher and journalist, I was able to witness the enthusiasm and eagerness of the participants for truth and reconciliation within their society. The choice of Galkayo as the focal point for this program was deliberate. The city is characterized by the coexistence of several different tribes, and it has been a frequent battleground for wars and conflicts among them. Furthermore, the city has been the subject of territorial disputes between regional governments, namely Puntland State and Galmudug State, each considering Galkayo as integral to its territorial integrity. These tensions led to military confrontations that resulted in the loss of lives and the displacement of numerous inhabitants. In response, the federal government of Somalia deployed troops to mediate and eventually established a federal military presence along the border between the two administrations. While the city has achieved a degree of stability, underlying disagreements and tensions persist.

During the discussions at the program, numerous brilliant and innovative ideas were proposed. Participants displayed a genuine eagerness to pursue truth and reconciliation efforts. One noteworthy example shared during the program involved a high school located on the border

between the two administrations in Galkayo. This school intentionally enrolled students from both parts of the city, fostering a sense of unity and forgiveness among the youth.

Another compelling narrative emerged during an interview with Asha Gelle, a prominent figure in Somalia who has served as the Chairwoman of the Independent Constitution Review Commission and as the Minister of Women in Puntland State. Presently, she is an activist for women and children's issues. Gelle shared a deeply moving story of her own family, where five of her six sisters are married to men from the other side of the town. She expressed profound sadness and concern about the impact of conflicts on her family, as any harm or loss suffered by individuals on either side of the divide would directly affect her.

Gelle's account resonated deeply, highlighting the interconnectedness of the community and the shared desire for peace and reconciliation. Her tireless advocacy for women and children's rights underscores the urgent need to address issues such as gender-based violence, rape cases, and domestic violence that persistently afflict the region.

During my participation in this pilot project, I gleaned invaluable insights through tacit knowledge and experiences shared by the community members. It became evident that the community yearned for truth and reconciliation, recognizing the devastating toll that ongoing conflicts had taken on their collective spirit and well-being. Conflict had left scars on their souls, and they were united in their conviction that a path toward healing and reconciliation was imperative.

In a nutshell, the Galkayo Community Trials (GACOT) initiative and related programs represent vital steps toward addressing the deeply entrenched conflicts in Galkayo. These initiatives harness the wisdom and dedication of local leaders and stakeholders to forge a pathway toward peace, reconciliation, and sustainable coexistence. By actively involving the community in the reconciliation process and focusing on unity and forgiveness, GACOT and similar efforts hold the promise of restoring trust and harmony within a divided society.

CAFIS (Forgiveness Program)

The CAFIS (Forgiveness Program) represents a remarkable and groundbreaking initiative that took place in 2018. This program was orchestrated through media campaigns and was spearheaded by Somali-Finnish journalist Wali Hashi, with the support of other prominent journalists, including Abdalla Ahmed Mumin, an award-winning freelance journalist and human rights defender. On a historic Thursday, June 28th, the program was launched simultaneously across various regions of Somalia, including Mogadishu, Kismayo, Baydhabo, Galkayo, and even Nairobi. Notably, the event drew the participation of approximately five thousand guests from diverse segments of the community, comprising government officials, clerics, poets, traditional elders, musicians, journalists, women, members of the Somali diaspora, and representatives from the business community(Nur Gedi, 2020).

The overarching goal of the CAFIS program was to initiate a community-led campaign aimed at fostering forgiveness within the Somali community. Concurrently, it sought to catalyze and amplify the ongoing reconciliation and healing processes among the people. The program received widespread acclaim and recognition from the community, extending its influence not only throughout Somalia but also to neighboring countries. The media played a pivotal role in disseminating information about the program, dominating news coverage during those days. Furthermore, as a testament to its enduring impact, June 28th was officially recognized as "CAFIS Day" (Day of Forgiveness) within the Somali community(Nur Gedi, 2020).

The CAFIS (Forgiveness Program), therefore, stands as a shining example of a community-driven initiative that successfully harnessed the power of media and collective determination to promote forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing. Its widespread acceptance and impact underscore the vital role that such programs play in the ongoing journey toward lasting peace and justice in Somalia and beyond(Nur Gedi, 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pursuit of peace by local authorities in both sides of Galkayo, and the enduring divisions within the town's communities, represents a formidable and arduous endeavor. It necessitates unwavering dedication and extraordinary efforts. As aptly expressed by Christopher J. Le Mon in 2006, this quest is marked by the challenging tension between the imperative to reconcile a deeply divided population and the moral and legal duty to hold accountable those who sought to erase an entire people. The initiatives discussed throughout this paper, including the Galkayo Community Trials (GACOT) and the CAFIS (Forgiveness Program), exemplify the resilience and collective determination of the Somali people to heal wounds, bridge differences, and work toward a brighter and more harmonious future. These endeavors underscore the crucial roles played by civil society, media, and community-driven efforts in advancing the cause of transitional justice in Somalia. While the challenges are formidable, the commitment of individuals, organizations, and communities to pursue truth, reconciliation, and forgiveness remains a beacon of hope in the ongoing journey toward lasting peace and justice. The dichotomy that has persisted for years can be transformed into an opportunity for building a more inclusive, united, and prosperous Galkayo and Somalia as a whole. It is a mission that demands continued diligence, cooperation, and the collective will of all stakeholders involved.

Policy Recommendations

- 2. Promoting Reconciliation and Healing:** As the old Somali proverb wisely states, "The Best Bed That a Man Can Sleep on is Peace." This timeless wisdom should guide our efforts in Galkayo. Reconciling the divided communities on both sides of Galkayo must be the paramount priority. To achieve this, local authorities and community leaders should actively engage in dialogue and reconciliation processes. Reconciliation initiatives should aim to heal the wounds of the past, foster forgiveness, and build bridges among the communities. Encouraging cultural and social exchanges, such as the high school program that brings together students from both sides, can be instrumental in building trust and unity.
- 3. Community-Based Trials:** To address the lingering concerns and conflicts within the community, pioneering and promoting community-based trials is essential. These trials

should be conducted at the grassroots level, involving respected figures such as religious leaders, traditional elders, and individuals with strong moral standing within the community. The purpose of these trials should be to address grievances, resolve disputes, and seek restorative justice. By exonerating the government from the responsibility of handling all cases and allowing the community to play a role in conflict resolution, a sense of ownership and empowerment can be instilled among the people.

4. **Strengthening Local Governance:** Local governance structures should be strengthened to play a more active role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Efforts should be made to empower local authorities and institutions to effectively manage and mediate conflicts within their communities. Training programs and capacity-building initiatives for local leaders can enhance their ability to facilitate dialogue, mediate disputes, and promote peaceful coexistence. Strengthening local governance will not only contribute to peace in Galkayo but also help build resilience against future conflicts.
5. **Promoting Media for Peace:** Recognizing the influential role of media in shaping public perceptions, media outlets should be encouraged to actively promote messages of peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Journalists and media organizations should be trained in conflict-sensitive reporting to avoid perpetuating divisions and tensions. Media campaigns, similar to the CAFIS program, can be utilized to engage the public in discussions about peace and reconciliation. By harnessing the power of the media, we can create a more conducive environment for peacebuilding.
6. **Engaging Civil Society:** Civil society organizations, particularly those with a track record of advocating for human rights and conflict resolution, should continue to play an active role in Galkayo. These organizations can act as intermediaries, facilitating dialogue and reconciliation processes. They can also provide support to victims of past conflicts and advocate for the rights of marginalized groups, such as women and minority clans. Engaging civil society is essential in ensuring that transitional justice initiatives are inclusive and participatory.
7. **International Support and Partnerships:** The international community should continue to provide support and partnerships for peace and reconciliation efforts in Galkayo. International organizations, NGOs, and donor agencies can offer technical expertise, funding, and resources to strengthen local initiatives. Collaboration with international

partners, including neighboring countries, can enhance the effectiveness of peacebuilding programs and promote regional stability.

Achieving lasting peace in Galkayo requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes reconciliation, community-based solutions, strengthened governance, responsible media, civil society engagement, and international support. By implementing these policy recommendations, we can work toward a more peaceful, united, and prosperous Galkayo and Somalia as a whole.

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