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Galkaio, Somalia: bridging the border

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ABSTRACT

A better understanding of 'local' agreements vis-a-vis national reconciliation processes is a strong current in policy and academic circles, with Somalia acknowledged as a relevant context with a rich history of such processes. This article examines a local agreement reached in Galkaio, a divided city where renewed violence had national implications around the formation of a new Federal system. It explores the role of external mediators, and strategies used to create buy-in at different levels in the process in order to forge an agreement that could end violence and address some underlying conflict drivers. It argues how experimentation with sequencing, linking and moving between levels helped ensure the viability and sustainability of the process. It contributes to the literature on mediating multi-level conflicts by focusing analysis on the role played by external mediators, demonstrating the importance of who mediates and how while providing insight into dynamic conflict mediation environments.

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1. Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, structural shifts in the global landscape of conflict and peace-making have prompted reviews of dominant approaches to managing and resolving violent conflict. Today's armed conflicts are characterised by complexity, the proliferation and fragmentation of actors, the mixture of political and criminal violence, intensified geopolitical and regional involvement, and the presence of ideological and identity-based conflict. These factors challenge linear approaches to conflict resolution, blurring traditional distinctions between 'inter-state' and 'intra-state' conflicts largely fought between two or more cohesive sides. While the 'local turn' in peacebuilding helpfully emphasises the need to engage with local actors, structures and dynamics, there remains a tendency to treat the 'local' as a bounded category and to overlook how local and global actors, processes and forces interact to shape and sustain intractable conflicts.¹ Understanding how these levels interact and how to design a multi-dimensional approach, is increasingly becoming an urgent challenge for political and diplomatic interventions.

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¹John Heathershaw, 'Unpacking the Liberal Peace: the Merging of Peacebuilding Discourses', *Millennium* 36, no. 3 (May 2008): 597–621.

Somalia provides a rich history of experience in peace-making at multiple levels. Since the collapse – or disassembly – of the state in 1991, there have been several national reconciliation conferences as well as un-counted numbers of sub-national peace processes.² This article examines the recent case of the Galkaio agreement, important in many ways, as Galkaio town represents a critical contemporary and historical boundary within Somalia, including within the current state-building project. It specifically explores the role that key external mediators played to influence the process and outcome and argues that their strategies created an inclusive process-oriented approach across multiple levels that successfully combined both Somali and international actors and resources.

This paper contributes to the growing literature on local agreements and larger debates on international mediation in several ways. First, it situates external mediation in the context of a local-level agreement-making process with clear inter-dependencies with the national state-building level. Despite the ‘local turn’ in the broader peacebuilding literature,³ scholarly literature on peace-making and external mediation focus on inter-state conflict and civil wars while largely ignoring peace-making in sub-national conflicts and their relationship to state building and state-formation processes. The case of agreement-making in Galkaio offers insight into the complex relationship between local and national levels, and the role that various mediators played to reach an agreement that not only ended conflict but addressed some of the underlying conditions driving violence. Second, the research adds to the limited literature on mediation that explores the relationship between individual mediator characteristics, approaches and outcomes. Such individual-level analysis demonstrates the importance of who mediates and how while providing insight into the constraints and opportunities afforded by the mediation context. Lastly, the paper seeks to add to existing documentation and knowledge on agreement-making processes in Somalia through insider accounts and experiences of external actors involved in supporting the process in Galkaio.

The article’s findings are based primarily on semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted in Galkaio, Mogadishu and Nairobi as well as remotely by the Somalia research team in the LSE’s Conflict Research Programme. In particular, it involved multiple in-depth discussions with one of the key mediators, a ‘diaspora’ Somali woman working as an advisor within the office of the SRSG who is widely recognised to have played an instrumental role in the peace process.

The paper does not claim to provide a comprehensive description and analysis of the process, which involved many actors and activities over many years. Nor does it suggest that external mediation was the determining factor to the success of the agreement (there were many contributory factors). Instead, it adds to previous learning and documentation on Somali peace-making by focusing on the role that external mediators played in influencing the process and outcome in Galkaio. The aim is to contribute to developing further the evidence-base on understanding, mediating and supporting local-level

²Mark Bradbury, ‘A Synthesis Report of the Peace Mapping Study,’ ed. Pat Johnson, Interpeace, the Academy for Peace and Development, the Center for Research and Dialogue, and the Puntland Development Research Center, 2008; Mark Bradbury and Sally Healy, ‘Whose peace is it anyway? Connecting Somali and international peacemaking,’ 2010, Issue 21. Accord, Conciliation Resources in collaboration with Interpeace

³See Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond, ‘The Local Turn in PeaceBuilding: A Critical Agenda for Peace,’ *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5 (2013): 763–783; Hanna Leonardsson and Gustav Rudd, ‘The “local turn” in peacebuilding: a literature review of effective and emancipatory local peacebuilding,’ *Third world quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015): 825–839.

agreements. We emphasise that while the Galkaio agreement represents a transformation of social relations across long-standing fissures, it is part of an unfinished process where wider political and security dynamics remain problematic.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first discusses the literature on international mediation and identifies the key elements that influence mediation processes and outcomes, more broadly and in Somalia in particular. The second section addresses both the broader Somali and Galkaio conflict context while the third considers the actors, strategies, and outcomes of the process. The conclusion reflects on how the insights from the study might inform mediation interventions.

2. International mediation in armed conflict and its characteristics in Somalia

International mediation as a conflict resolution tool gained prominence in the post-Cold War era and has generated a rich body of scholarship and practitioner guidance to better understand why, when, and how such processes are successful. The UN defines it as ‘a process whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements’.⁴ Its purpose is to address the drivers, dynamics and motivations of the various actors that lead to violent conflict.⁵

This section highlights key factors that influence mediation processes and outcomes, including context, mediator strategies, and mediator characteristics before briefly considering the rich history of Somali peace-making.

2.1. The context

The contextual environment in which conflict and peace-making occurs influences peace-making strategies and outcomes. Bercovitch and Kadayifci explain how ‘there is a contingent, reciprocal relation between the nature of conflict, the performance of mediators and conflict outcomes’.⁶ Any effective mediation process, whether at the local or national level, requires precise analysis and understanding of both conflict *and* peace dynamics. Local-level processes can be as multifaceted as the wider conflict complex: they share a number of complicating factors similar to the national level such as fragmentation, external patronage and financing, geopolitical and regional interests, and ideological and identity-based violence while adding an additional layer of local factors.

The complexity of local conflict contexts is mirrored in contemporary peace-making and mediation environments, including the multiplicity of actors and interests involved. Today’s peacemakers can include states, international and regional organisations, national actors, diaspora groups, private individuals, and so forth.

⁴United Nations, *UN Guidance for Effective Mediation* (New York: Mediation Support Unit, Department of Political Affairs, 2012), 4

⁵Oliver Richmond, ‘A Genealogy of Peacemaking: The Creation and Re-Creation of Order’, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 26, no. 3 (2001): 317–48.

⁶Jacob Bercovitch and Ayse Kadayifci, ‘Exploring the Relevance and Contribution of Mediation to Peace-Building’, *Peace and Conflict Studies*: 9, no. 2 (2002): 26.

These actors may also occupy multiple roles at once – as mediators, as parties to the conflict, and/or as signatories to the accord. The Oslo Forum, the leading network of conflict mediators, concludes that ‘creating coordinated synergies’ between levels and peace actors is critically important in today’s fragmented conflicts, so as to avoid problems such as incentivising ‘forum shopping’ among warring parties and working at cross-purposes.⁷ If coordinated and led by a credible actor/s, however, multi-party mediation can leverage the comparative advantages of various actors, including knowledge, insights, and resources, to the agreement-making process, increasing the likelihood of more successful outcomes. Other important features that comprise the mediation environment include mandate of mediator, resources available, and bureaucratic constraints.

2.2. Mediation approaches and strategies

Mediation can take many forms along a spectrum of interventions ranging from the use of directive and coercive instruments to more facilitative and relational approaches. Research suggests that how third parties mediate influences both the agreement’s content⁸ and the durability of the peace.⁹ Mediation approaches taken are not only shaped by context but also by the orientation and goals of the process and mediators themselves. These approaches can be roughly divided into two main categories: ‘settlement’ vs ‘peacebuilding’ oriented approaches.

The dominant body of literature on mediation, largely quantitative in nature, measures a successful process or outcome in its most minimal sense, namely reaching an agreement.¹⁰ Scholars within more ‘settlement-oriented’ perspectives draw on bargaining theories and emphasise the notion of the ‘leverage’ that can be brought to bear to reshape the incentive structure of warring parties and manage spoilers. Leverage here is widely equated with resources and material power, although access to information and prestige is also considered.¹¹ Studies within this perspective find that more coercive mediation approaches produce faster agreements and reductions in violence, and are associated with top-down approaches that privilege the brokering of power-sharing arrangements among armed actors over conflict transformation.¹² Since 2001, however, scholarship that extends the scope of analysis beyond reaching an agreement find that purely settlement-oriented approaches can come at the cost of quality and durability of

⁷Oslo Forum, ‘The End of the Big Peace? Opportunities for Mediation’, *Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue* (2018): 6.

⁸Isak Svensson, ‘Bargaining, bias and peace brokers: How rebels commit to peace’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 44, no. 2 (2007): 177–194.

⁹Kyle Beardsley, ‘Agreement without peace? International mediation and time inconsistency problems’, *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 4 (2008): 723–740; Kyle Beardsley, *The Mediation Dilemma* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011); David Carment, Yiagadeesen Samy, and Souleima El Achkar, ‘Protracted conflict and crisis mediation: a contingency approach’, in *International Conflict Mediation: New Approaches and Finding*, eds. Jacob Bercovitch and Sigmund Gartner (New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁰Allard Duursma, ‘A Current Literature Review of International Mediation’, *International Journal of Conflict Management* 25, (2014):81–98.

¹¹Tooval and Zartman 2001; Peter Carnevale, 2002. ‘Mediating from Strength’, in *Studies in International Mediation*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 25–40.

¹²See, e.g. Timothy Sisk, *International Mediation in Civil Wars: Bargaining with Bullets* (London/New York: Routledge, 2009); Beardsley, *The Mediation Dilemma*; Isak Svensson, *International Mediation Bias and Peacemaking: Taking Sides in Civil Wars* (London/New York: Routledge, 2014).

the peace.¹³ Indeed, many negotiated elite settlements fall apart or fail to stem renewed violence. A growing body of research emphasises the exclusive nature of these settlements, and strongly suggests that settlements are more durable when they involve a fuller range of stakeholders as participants, observers, or signatories.¹⁴

In contrast, studies of mediation efforts informed by peace-building and sociological approaches suggest that more facilitative and non-coercive styles tend to lead to more sustainable agreements and comprehensive solutions.¹⁵ These approaches consider the incentive structure of different actors but also the historic, emotional and symbolic roots of conflict.¹⁶ Adopting such a peace-building perspective, Bercovitch and Kadayifci argue, can achieve not only a settlement but facilitate a longer-term transformation of relations.¹⁷ The literature identifies factors that can contribute to more civic or peace-building processes and outcomes, including the relative inclusiveness of the process, enhanced coordination across different initiatives, and the range of resources third-parties can bring. In this context, resources are not simply financial and can include the legitimacy and credibility of an institution like the UN; the detailed knowledge of NGOs; and the involvement of community members who can help create an enabling environment. They also tend to involve processes that are lengthier, time-consuming, and messier for mediators.

While facilitative approaches may attend better to the characteristics and dynamics of contemporary mediation environments, Clement et al. argue that mediators must adopt multiple approaches sequenced appropriately to both end conflict while addressing the underlying issues driving violence.¹⁸ This is particularly the case in multi-level peace-making, which bridges the literature on different mediation approaches while also defining success more broadly.

2.3. Mediation actors: identity and characteristics

Research drawing on both bargaining theories and social-psychological theories point to how variations in mediator style, strategies and tactics matter for both process and outcome. Most existing studies that emphasise mandate, credibility and other characteristics, however, focus at the level of mediating organisations and states, despite the acknowledged importance of the individual mediator for the success of the process in the policy literature.¹⁹ The limited studies that focus on individual characteristics explore how personality, orientation, cultural similarities and profile influence strategies

¹³Mathilda Lindgren, 'Peacemaking up close: explaining mediator styles of international mediators' (PhD Diss, Uppsala University, 2016); For studies that extend scope of analysis, see Beardsley 2008 and 2011 on durability and Svensson 2007 on quality of the concluded peace.

¹⁴Anthony Wanis-St. John, and Darren Kew, 'Civil society and peace negotiations: Confronting exclusion', *International Negotiation* 13, no. 1 (2008): 11–36; Desiree Nilsson, 'Anchoring the peace: Civil society actors in peace accords and durable peace', *International Interactions* 38, no. 2 (2012): 243–266; and Thania Paffenholz, 'Civil Society and Peace Negotiations: Beyond the Inclusion–Exclusion Dichotomy', *Negotiation Journal* 30, no. 1 (2012): 69–91.

¹⁵Jacob Bercovitch, *Theory and Practice of International Mediation: Selected Essays* (London/New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁶Stuart Kaufman, 'Escaping the Symbolic Politics Trap: Reconciliation Initiatives and Conflict Resolution in Ethnic Wars', *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 2 (2006): 201–18.

¹⁷Bercovitch and Kadayifci, 'Exploring the Relevance'.

¹⁸Carment et. al, 'Protracted conflict and crisis mediation'.

¹⁹International Peace Institute, 'Mediation and Peace Processes', *IPI Blue Paper* No. 8, Task Forces on Strengthening Multilateral Security Capacity, New York, 2009.

employed and outcomes achieved. Several find that cultural similarities between mediator and disputants can have a positive impact on outcomes, because they are more likely to understand the complex social, political, and economic dynamics that drive conflict and can thus more effectively resolve conflict.²⁰ A recent study by Lindgren adds mediator ‘prestige’ in examining the relationship between mediator characteristics, orientation and strategies, and finds that higher profile mediators tend to adopt settlement-oriented approaches while low-profile mediators tend towards relational approaches, adapting strategies to fit context and displaying more commitment to transformative processes and broadening agenda items. Moreover, she argues how individual level analysis can also surface the constraints and opportunities created by the ‘mediation environment’ itself on the process.

2.4. Peace-making and mediation in Somalia

In Somalia, there is a long and rich history of peace-making at multiple levels, involving a diverse range of actors, including at the international, regional, national and local levels. Existing studies, particularly those by Interpeace and partners, provide insight into the key factors that have influenced and shaped divergent outcomes at local and national levels, while also creating a bank of knowledge and lessons learned. The comprehensive Interpeace study, led by Mark Bradbury, includes a volume on internationally mediated peace processes between 1991 and 2008 and a mapping study on Somali-led peace processes at local levels with 11 in-depth case studies of different peace initiatives. The result is a rich and complex overview of how Somalis make peace, which concludes with a synthesis report²¹ comparing national-level and local-level processes.

At local levels, the Interpeace study identifies more than 90 local processes in the Somali region,²² focusing predominantly on the role played by clan elders in brokering these, often short-term agreements. It develops an analytical framework that considers context, objectives and substantive issues, process and organisation, participation, financing, and outcomes in its examination of these processes. The cases illustrate the importance of a process-oriented incremental approach leading to the agreement and consensus-based decision-making; the need for inclusivity to bring in all stakeholders including women, youth, businessmen, media, and religious leaders as well as spoilers; an orientation towards social reconciliation as an end goal; and respected leadership in the committees that oversee the management of the process. What emerges as critical is the principle of collective responsibility for the conflict, highlighting how more successful processes involve community contribution to financing and logistics of the process, including from business and diaspora communities. The form of intervention often resembles facilitation and coalition-building as methods to generate the necessary buy-in and ownership of the process and agreement.

²⁰Jacob Bercovitch and Ole Elgström, ‘Culture and international mediation: Exploring theoretical and empirical linkages’, *International Negotiation* 6, no. 1: 3–23, 2001; and Peter Carnevale and Dong-won Choi 2000, ‘Culture in the mediation of international disputes’, *International Journal of Psychology* 35, no. 2 (2000): 105–110.

²¹Bradbury, ‘A Synthesis Report’.

²²Ibrahim Ali Amber ‘Oker’ and Su’aad Ibrahim H. Habibullah, *Community-based Peace Processes in South-Central Somalia*, Interpeace and the Center for Research and Dialogue, 2008.

The larger synthesis report highlights the relative success of local peace initiatives and the failure of international ones, noting critical differences in orientation, objectives, and local ownership. The case studies, however, illustrate the difficulty of separating analytically local and national processes²³ but provide useful lessons for analysing the Galkaio agreement, which departs from previous processes in several ways. Firstly, while the Galkaio conflict is coloured and rooted in traditional conflict drivers and long-standing competition between two clans across the border, the context is transformed by the introduction of a new federal system and involvement of new actors, conflict drivers and dynamics. Secondly, this paper focuses its analysis on the role played by external mediation, including UN actors as well as hybrid third-party actors from organisations such as Interpeace, rather than clan elders.

3. Background to the conflict and border area (conflict drivers)

3.1. Somalia

The collapse of Somalia and its civil war took place between approximately 1987 and 1992.²⁴ Over the course of the 1990s, a series of peace and reconciliation conferences took place in northern regions of the country, which led to the creation of Somaliland, in 1991, and Puntland in 1998, as larger, autonomous self-governing entities, which have since had a continuity and coherence not seen elsewhere.²⁵ These two polities, although significantly different in character, can be contrasted with conditions in central and southern Somalia, where a more entrenched conflict environment and war economy has remained.²⁶

Central and southern Somalia have been through different periods of relative peace and varying degrees of violence and conflict since the early 1990s, and since the mid-2000s the militant Islamist group Al-Shabaab has become a major actor in the country.²⁷ Following internationally supported peace conferences, an internationally recognised Federal government was notionally established in 2012.

Within this environment, competition for control of the state and its institutions is a key driver of conflict and political contestation, with the state bringing access to external resources through relationships of ‘extraversion’.²⁸ Clan or identity-based politics provide a further layer of conflict, especially where underlying grievances can be instrumentalised by political entrepreneurs.²⁹ Commercial competition between business groups and interests as well as religious ideology and competition for resources add further layers to the underlying conflict environment.³⁰

²³Ibid., 103.

²⁴Alex de Waal, ‘The prairie fire that burned Mogadishu: the logic of clan formation in Somalia’. 2018, Conflict Research Programme, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK (The_Prairie_Fire_that_burned_Mogadishu_final_1.pdf (lse.ac.uk))

²⁵Mark Bradbury, *Becoming Somaliland* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008); and Markus V. Hoehne, *Between Somaliland and Puntland: Marginalisation, militarisation and conflicting political visions*, 2015, Rift Valley Institute.

²⁶Tobias Hagmann. and Markus V. Hoehne, ‘Failures of the state failure debate: evidence from the Somali territories’, *Journal of International Development* 21, no. 1 (2009): 42–57

²⁷Ken Menkhaus, Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Somalia Case Study, report produced for the UK Stabilisation Unit, 2018.

²⁸Tobias Hagmann, ‘Stabilisation, Extraversion and Political Settlements in Somalia’. Rift Valley Institute. Political Settlements Research Programme, 2016.

²⁹See note 21 above.

³⁰Ibid.

3.2. The Galkaio border

Galkaio town marks a border at multiple levels, including between two of the four major Somali clan families, the Darod and the Hawiye.³¹ In the early 1990s, two of the main military insurgent groups, the USC (United Somali Congress) and SSDF (Somali Salvation and Democratic Front), who first fought against the Siad Barre regime and then against each other, agreed to a cessation of hostilities, which became known as the 1993 Mudug (Peace) Accord.³² This Accord effectively divided northern Somalia from the centre and south, enabling the area now known as Puntland to pursue a reconciliation process that concluded with its inauguration in 1998.

This Accord mitigated the threat of large-scale conflict for over 20 years but is best characterised as a truce or ceasefire as it did not involve deeper reconciliation processes.³³ The border involved a physical barrier with guarded checkpoints but is also imbued with social and psychological dimensions, reflecting the troubled history of the area and its unreconciled character, which continues to be animated by public and social media.³⁴ While trade continued across the border, other forms of social interaction, such as inter-marriage and everyday social intercourse had not been taking place.

A key underlying tension within Galkaio town has been the uneven pace of development across the border. In the northern area (Puntland) of the town, considerable diaspora and business investment has taken place while the more turbulent southern portion has seen little investment as populations from there have invested in Mogadishu instead. This unevenness has been replicated and exacerbated by the unequal presence and distribution of aid resources, which has favoured north Galkaio due to its greater security and infrastructure. This imbalance was a catalyst in the two major outbreaks of violence during the period in question and reflects the problematic incorporation of aid into Somalia's political economy.³⁵

The more immediate context of conflict and agreement-making of concern to us took place between 2014 and 2017 and coincides with the emergence of the Federal system in Somalia. This political arrangement required the creation of new Federal Member States. Galmudug became constituted as an amalgamation of Galgadud and southern Mudug regions, while Puntland was fully incorporated into the new Federal system.

The agreement to form and recognise Galmudug immediately provoked the Puntland leadership, who removed their MPs from Parliament in Mogadishu in response. One of the major underlying rationales for this reaction was that the incumbent leadership of Puntland feared that the close relationship between Somalia's national President, Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud, and the first Galmudug President, Abdikarim Guled, might influence the next Federal election, due in early

³¹See: Ioan M. Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics Among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*. (London: James Currey, 1961, 1982). Somali society is described for its segmented lineage structure, a patrilineal system. Although interpretations as to its salience as an explanatory factor are varied and not without controversy, it remains an important dimension of analysis.

³²Interpeace, Centre for Research and Dialogue, *Community-based Peace Processes in South-Central Somalia*, 2008.

³³Ibid.

³⁴See Interpeace and PDRC, *Galkacyo Conflict Assessment December 2016 – March 2017*, 2017.

³⁵Laura Hammond and Hannah Vaughn-Lee, 'Humanitarian Space in Somalia: A Scarce Commodity'. HPG Working Paper, April 2012. London: ODI.

2017.³⁶ Such tensions between central and regional actors include a recognition that Somalia's political elite act within a political marketplace that involves competition and movement between regional and national levels.³⁷

Puntland's own elections, due in 2018, added further layers, with incumbent President Abdiwali viewed by some as a weak diaspora leader unable to defend its territory. On the Galmudug side, tensions were in part driven by Galmudug politicians attempting to assert their new political identity and statehood.

3.3. *The immediate conflict and agreement-making context*

Any analysis of mediation efforts requires understanding the contingencies of the context and its effects on mediator strategies. The Galkaio agreement, signed in December 2017, was the outcome of a two to three-year period of underlying tensions, two major outbreaks of violent clashes, and several processes of conflict mediation and ceasefire arrangements. Three general periods are identifiable, the last of which is the focus of this paper.

The first period began with the inauguration of President Guled of Galmudug on 14 July 2015 which generated a strong reaction from Puntland, threatening the nascent state-building project.³⁸ Tensions ensued for four months before violent clashes broke out in November 2015, leaving 20 dead and more than 90,000 people displaced.³⁹

The second period ran between December 2015 and October 2016. Following the November violence, a truce was negotiated in early December. Mediation during this time involved national and international actors.⁴⁰ It included three points: the withdrawal of all forces two kilometres from the frontline, the creation of a ceasefire monitoring group, and an agreement to restart state-level discussions to resolve the dispute more fully. However, these discussions did not materialise.

This second ceasefire held for 10 months and did not involve further reconciliation efforts. Instead, a local political economy emerged around the ceasefire arrangements, including a smuggling economy. Al-Shabaab, also active in the area at this time, took advantage of these tensions and committed assassinations, allegedly at the behest of both sides, whose forces also committed their own revenge killings while blaming Al-Shabaab. Moreover, Galkaio remained a major arms trading centre in Somalia, and local media was very active in politicising and perpetuating the underlying frictions. This period also coincided with a drought, and disruptions to trade and aid due to the insecurity;

³⁶ICG, Galkayo and its dangerous faultlines, Commentary, 14 July 2015. See: <https://staging.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/galkayo-and-somalia-s-dangerous-faultlines>

³⁷Alex De Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa. Money, War and the Business of Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).

³⁸ICG, Galkaio and its faultlines; Goobjoog News, UN Envoy for Somalia welcomes Inauguration of Galmudug Interim Administration President, 23 July 2015 (<https://goobjoog.com/english/un-envoy-for-somalia-welcomes-inauguration-of-galmudug-interim-administration-president/>; <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/un-envoy-somalia-welcomes-inauguration-galmudug-interim-administration-president-0>)

³⁹ICG, The Islamic State Threat in Somalia's Puntland State, Commentary, 17 November 2016 (The Islamic State Threat in Somalia's Puntland State | Crisis Group); Hiiraan Online, Despite Ceasefire Deal, fears of fighting persists Galkaio town, 25 November 2015 (Despite ceasefire deal, fears of fighting persists Galkayo town (hiiraan.org)).

⁴⁰Diplomat News Network, International Community Welcomes Peace Agreement in Galkaio, Somalia, 3 December 2015 (<https://diplomat.so/2015/12/03/international-community-welcomes-peace-agreement-in-galkayo-somalia/>).

significant levels of population displacement was taking place.⁴¹ At the same time, key individuals, particularly on the Puntland side, began making economic investments in contested areas of the town. Some Puntland officials, for example, financed an animal-holding area in a contested part of Galkaio town.⁴²

The third period, which is the focus of the following section, began with another major violent incident that prompted the involvement of different agencies of the United Nations together with the peace-building agency, Interpeace and its long-standing local partner, the Peace and Development Research Centre (PDRC) alongside many other local actors and which eventually led to the signing of the Galkaio Agreement, in December 2017. The incident took place in October 2016, the catalyst being Puntland's construction of a police station and the livestock market in the contested parts of western Galkaio.⁴³

4. Support and engaging in agreement-making

The actors involved in developing the agreement in Galkaio were many and operated at different levels and combinations of levels in some cases (see [Section 3.1](#)). The following sections focus on the process and role that mediators played from external organisations, particularly from the SRSG's office, Interpeace and PDRC.

4.1. Acting at different levels

The importance of addressing the national-level dynamics affecting the Galkaio conflict and agreement-making process was widely recognised. A meeting convened somewhat opportunistically in Mogadishu led to the drafting of a simple agreement that the Presidents of Puntland and Galmudug were willing to sign. They were persuaded to sign this agreement in front of the cameras in order that it could then be broadcast to a wider audience. This was considered one of the 'breakthrough moments' of the whole agreement-making process by one of the key mediators – Ilham Gassar – and when described in detail, required a recognition of the opportunity of the moment and considerable enterprise and skill in drafting and filming it immediately.

The signing of the agreement in the capital, Mogadishu, was ostensibly meant to signify follow-up talks by the respective Government offices, particularly the offices of the Interior at the Federal and State levels, in Galkaio itself. However, this was considered unlikely to take place with the result that the SRSG's office assigned staff to follow-up on the ground; Ilham Gassar, an advisor to the SRSG, was one of those mandated to do this. Gassar, a British Somali woman with limited experience in mediation, became a crucial figure, as part of the coalition of individuals driving and facilitating the agreement-making process.

⁴¹OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin, October 2016. (Microsoft Word – OCHA Somalia Humanitarian bulletin October 2016 (humanitarianresponse.info))

⁴²The export of livestock is the largest source of foreign exchange in Somalia and Galkaio is an important hub in the movement of animals from central regions to Bosasso port in Puntland.

⁴³Garowe Online, Somalia: Puntland accuses Somali government of backing Galmudug, 11 October 2016(<https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/puntland/somalia-puntland-accuses-somali-government-of-backing-galmudug>); Hiiraan Online, Puntland and Galmudug Forces Clash, 7 October 2016(https://hiiraan.com/news4/2016/Oct/118077/puntland_and_galmudug_forces_clash.aspx).

The SRSG's office worked in close partnership with Interpeace and PDRC at the Galkaio level; this provided a capacity and authority to act at the national and state capitals, with donors, as well as in Galkaio.

4.2. Multiple mediator identities and proving credibility

The ability of external mediation to influence a peace process and shape the incentive structure of different parties is often contingent on the leverage they can bring to the process, which, in addition to material power, includes the credibility of the mediators. According to Reid, mediators with 'credibility leverage', which 'refers to the influence mediators wield with information, contextual knowledge of the conflict, and a perceived commitment to the peace process', often 'shape the mediation process in ways that generate more durable peaceful outcomes.'⁴⁴ In Somalia, the credibility of international actors has been deeply problematic.⁴⁵

Working through the SRSG's office, Ilham Gasser became widely recognised for the instrumental role she played in the process. Ms. Gasser is a relatively young Somali woman, from the UK diaspora, and from one of the clan families on the Galmudug side of Galkaio. While her position with the UN lent her authority and access, her background immediately raised the possibility for tension and suspicion, given the patriarchal nature of society, her age, a clan identity from one side of the border, and underlying tensions that often exist between local and diaspora populations. From the start however, Ms Gasser worked to prove her credentials to local actors and her commitment to a peaceful and sustainable resolution to the conflict. She described, for example, being in a meeting of elders and being asked later, privately, for her opinion of the meeting by the same elders. She explained that the meeting was a sham, disguising the real interests. They were surprised and impressed and from then on took her seriously.

Interpeace brought a long history of engagement in the Puntland-Galmudug environment, in terms of research and facilitation, including through two of its local partners, PDRC and CRD; PDRC in particular had long-standing connections to and relations in Galkaio. Several staff members of these agencies, with a long history of peace-building work in the country and in these regions played key roles as mediators on specific moments of blockage/impasse as well as throughout the process. This comprised of Somali nationals mainly as well as a Somali-speaking senior Swedish staff member; the point being these individuals represented a credibility beyond their organisational affiliations, that we argue was crucial.

As well as partiality and vested interests, international organisations are encumbered by bureaucratic and security procedures. These factors can create a separation between international and local actors (including for the Somalis working for them), which in turn can be interpreted as a lack of commitment and credibility by local populations, long used to aid's problematic positioning. This tension raises real questions as to the ability – the moral authority and credibility – of international actors to engage in mediation activities locally. Menkhaus questions the quality of mediation efforts in national

⁴⁴Lindsay Reid, 'Finding a Peace that Lasts: Mediator Leverage and the Durable Resolution of Civil Wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 7 (2017): 1401–1431.

⁴⁵Tobias Hagmann, 'Stabilisation and Political Settlements'.

reconciliation conferences but this can equally be applied to local-level mediation. Emphasising this point, several interviewees – Somali and non-Somali – who worked for international and local actors, provided examples of how the breaking or bending of security and bureaucratic rules was critical in order to pursue the agreement process, as their commitment meant they were not willing to let such rules limit momentum and progress.

4.3. Reframing the interests of spoilers and understanding financial interests

While the conflict in Galkaio is rooted in the long history of underlying local grievances, the two to three-year period of unrest and sporadic conflict between 2014 and 2017 created new dynamics and vested interests, including opportunities for financial profit, as roadblocks were set up (and ways around them created with their own taxation points), the arms market flourished and investments in disputed land were made by elites.

Understanding these interests and how to reframe them to those involved or influential became another critical element of the process. This was discovered by Ms. Gasser, in large, part by talking to the security guards of her UN compound. The Puntland authority's tax revenues which were previously collected at the main Galkaio border crossing had been affected by the roadblocks. They were now being captured by other groups who managed the smuggling points. Through her informal investigations, she calculated that the revenue previously collected at the official border crossing should have been higher than the Puntland authorities in the capital Garowe were receiving. Ms Gassar used these calculations as leverage with key government figures, including some located in Garowe, where more of the hardliners were located, to help them re-think their position on the potential benefits of an agreement.

4.4. Coordination, network building, and strengthening existing local mechanisms

There is a tendency for conflict settings to attract a range of donor funds and projects that can serve to confuse and crowd out a consolidated mediation space, while undermining or supplanting local mechanisms.⁴⁶ Recognising this, the SRSG's office attempted to coordinate and impose principles and order on the various aid actors and projects in the town. A key objective was to ensure the process was locally-owned, and not perceived as an external project. One such simple measure was to remove or reduce the payment of per diems for meetings; this long-standing aid practice, with adherents and opponents, is often associated with undermining the credibility and participation in an event, attracting those more motivated by financial rewards. Applying this in practice was not straightforward or consistent but illustrates tensions around international engagement and norms.

Secondly, external actors adopted an approach that was facilitative and supportive, serving as a link to other levels, actors and resources in support of local mechanisms and initiatives. This was reflected in the organisation of the process. Following the public signing of the elite-level agreement in Mogadishu, Galkaio became the hub for many

⁴⁶International Peace Institute, 'Mediation and Peace Processes'.

months of discussions. This process took place through two mechanisms or platforms, the official Joint Ceasefire Committee (JCC) and an informal network working behind the scenes. The JCC had been set up as a response to the first outbreak of violence at the end of 2015, and consisted of 9 members from either side, including the respective Mayors and Governors as well as business representatives and elders. This committee was maintained and, crucially, enlarged to include a wider representation of actors from the local context, including the smaller lineages that are often excluded from political dialogue and who were involved in some of the new smuggling routes and the arms market. Civic actors active in supporting dialogue and reconciliation were also included for the first time in the JCC. Beyond the benefits of a more inclusive and representative committee, expanding the JCC was also seen as pragmatic; considerable work was required to create the conditions for reconciliation and the JCC set up different task forces, including a communications and outreach group that would take the outcomes of discussions to the rural areas.

Alongside the formal and expanded JCC, an informal network evolved to support the work of the JCC and the agreement-making process. This network included key stakeholders across the peace-making landscape, including some members of the JCC itself, Somali staff from PDRC and Interpeace, Gassar from the SRSG's office, senior security figures from Puntland, Galmudug and Mogadishu, as well as from businesspeople and prominent women and youth groups active in the city, all of whom were motivated to end the violence and develop a meaningful reconciliation. This informal network acted behind the scenes, troubleshooting and advising.

4.5. Key elements of the agreement

4.5.1. Stopping violence and rebuilding trust and social relations

The importance of reconciliation – of rebuilding social relations – has been emphasised in analyses of peace processes in Somalia, especially at the local level. Negotiation and settlement of disputes in Somali society typically takes place through customary law, known as 'xeer'.⁴⁷ Xeer was not part of the 1993 Peace Accord or subsequent iterations of it as these were more accurately defined as truces and ceasefires.

The lack of trust and mutual antagonism between the two major communities on either side of the Galkaio border cannot be over emphasised.⁴⁸ While the 1993 Accord had limited large-scale conflict for many years, populations on either side of the border had developed a culture of disrespect; social or physical interaction was very limited across the town's internal border and public and private discourse was commonly aggressive and derogatory. This in part reflected the different political trajectories on either side of the border, where Puntland had achieved a measure of internal reconciliation and economic development that contrasted with the much more unstable and fragmented situation to the south. One consequence of the creation of the state of Galmudug was that it brought incentives and pressures for this nascent polity to organise itself with elites that had long since moved to Mogadishu or abroad now motivated to develop a coherent polity under the new state-building project. Building trust required

⁴⁷Lewis, 'A Pastoral Democracy'.

⁴⁸See Interpeace and PDRC, 2017, op cit.

firstly that political actors in Galmudug demonstrate a willingness and ability to engage in meaningful talks and secondly, for Puntland's political elite to recognise this and respond accordingly. A prominent elder from south Galkaio explained, '*As I said before, I had to build confidence. By this time, Puntland saw that I was serious about peace. They admitted to me that they never thought that I will be that serious about peace, accepting all the faults on their side and showing a lot of confidence in my resolve to achieve peace. I put a lot of pressure on commanders and politicians. I went to the militias on both sides to convince them of peace. Things started to improve.*'

Re-establishing social relations meant re-establishing *xeer*. This, however, was done incrementally. Membership of the JCC included elders from all of the clans living in Galkaio. The payment of 'diya' – blood money – is one of the core elements of *xeer*, and elders decided to guarantee to pay compensation for transgressions personally as broader inter-clan reconciliation would take time.

4.5.2. Opening up the town and toning down the language

The act of physically bringing together protagonists, from military groups as well as the wider population across both sides the border, was a critical aspect of the agreement making process. Neutral venues had to be identified and secured as neither side was comfortable meeting within another's territory due to the prevalence of revenge killings that had been taking place and general environment of tension and uncertainty.

Rebuilding social relations took place through other forms of organised social interaction. Prominent women and youth groups active in the town played a particularly important role in bringing people together. The role of youth and women was an instrumental part of the overall peace-building process, which sometimes challenged customary norms and Somali patriarchy.⁴⁹ International Women's Day took place on the 8th March in 2017, and a celebratory event involving 50 women from either side of the border was organised. A football match was another event that was organised to bring young men together from either side of the border. These initiatives demonstrated the value of external support as tensions existed between the role and authority of customary leaders vis-à-vis women and youth in leading the peace process.

Somalis are major consumers of the media, though local radio, websites and social media is associated with a high level of clan partisanship.⁵⁰ During this period local radio stations in particular were playing a detrimental role in the propagation of hate speech in Somali media and outlawing this was another important initiative in reducing tensions; the authorities of both Puntland and Galmudug agreed to ban hate speech on local radios.

4.5.3. Creating joint security forces

Joint military and joint police forces were created as part of the agreement-making process. A special joint military force was created to ensure security in the market area which had always been contested and insecure. This force is comprised of security forces from Puntland and Galmudug and paid for by the Federal Government in Mogadishu. This force has remained active and effective since its creation, in partially because salaries

⁴⁹Interpeace and PDRC, 2017 op cit.; Interpeace and PDRC, *Galkacyo Peacebuilding Entry Points Focus Group Discussions*, 2018.

⁵⁰Isse Salwa, 'The Internet and the Diaspora'.

are covered from Federal resources. A joint police force was also established whose role is traditional law enforcement, including, for example, the retrieval of stolen goods. This force has been active and examples of the successful return of goods have taken place however it is not considered as reliable or successful as the joint military force, with reports suggesting that salaries are not reliably paid. The JCC and later Joint Police and Military Forces were symbolic in overcoming the separation across identity groups that was part of the long-standing tensions in the area, bringing antagonistic parties together. These forces remain practically and symbolically important today but are not sufficient to fully maintain security and the rule of law, given the wider political and security environment.

5. Discussion and concluding remarks

This article set out to gain insights into some of the key factors that helped facilitate a complex agreement-making process at the local level in Galkaio, specifically examining the role that external mediators played in influencing the process and outcome. With today's increasingly complex and intractable conflicts, there is a need to focus more academic and policy attention to understanding this class of agreements and the strategies employed to forge them in ways that can reduce violence and, in some cases, create the space to strengthen broader state-formation processes. While every external mediation process and conflict context has its own particularities, the limited literature on these processes and agreements, and their implications on larger peace and conflict dynamics makes thinking through how best to support these processes more challenging for peacemakers. The article's findings highlight several dimensions that have important implications for how external actors might support these processes.

First, the Galkaio agreement, although it has received little public attention, can be considered a major success story in Somalia's social and political history both from a process and content perspective. Its inclusive approach created widespread buy-in and involvement, with the agreement signed by a range of political, military, customary and civil society figures, including prominent women in Galkaio as well as the highest customary authority. Its content is more far-reaching than previous agreements and includes provisions on the norms and rules for resolving further disputes and demonstrated the value of provisions such as banning media hate speech. It built on existing structures and led to further international investments across the town, as peace dividends. As a consequence, it began a process where social relations across the border could be repaired, evidenced by further inter-clan agreements forged in 2020. Even so, there remains an absence of authority to fully enforce it, highlighting its potential fragility.

Secondly, while the success of the agreement can be attributed to many factors local and non-local, the relative importance of which is beyond the scope of this paper, they highlight the contingent nature of peace-making and mediation. Resolving conflict is a dynamic process that involves a mix of subjective and objective factors which can change over time, creating opportunities for different strategies and interventions. For example, the overall process to reach an agreement in Galkaio became significantly smoother in May 2017 when a new President was elected to Galmudug, and Somali businesses provided substantial resources, particularly for transportation and security.⁵¹

Another factor was the significant Somali public and international pressure to resolve the crisis, given their shared interests to maintain and strengthen the new Government and political system, after three decades of its absence.

Third, the mediation approaches and strategies adopted a peace-building orientation with their emphasis on facilitation, coordination and coalition-building. These approaches sought not simply to end violence but also to restore social relations and address economic and social drivers of conflict at different levels. From the start, there was deep appreciation of how different layers inter-related and interacted, due to the involvement of long-standing actors such as Interpeace and PDRC as well as the sensitivity, skill and personal commitment of newer figures such as Ms Gassar. There was an appreciation of the need to encourage an elite-level agreement in order to create the space for local efforts to be supported. Experimentation with different approaches to sequencing, linking and moving between the multiple layers helped ensure its viability. With regard to the multiple external actors involved in peace-making, the UN SRSG's office took a leading role to better support a locally owned process and reduce perverse incentives such as forum-shopping.

At the same time, political economy analyses utilised by external actors like Ms. Gassar enabled her to understand and incentivise key stakeholders and potential spoilers, whether by facilitating access and networking or reframing problems as opportunities, while also being part of the building of coalitions of civic-minded and peacebuilding-oriented individuals to counter some of the logic of the political marketplace. The approach adopted by the informal peace network and the individuals highlighted, working for the respective agencies, could be described as an 'activist' approach. Recognising the symbolic power of women activists and youth groups that were already playing a role in peace and bringing them in to the official process were all symbolic of extending the reach of discussions from military figures to civil figures and participation. The ascendancy of personal and transactional relationships over institutional norms in such contexts can be plied to the mediating world where *civic/peace-building activists can be contrasted with political entrepreneurs*; both are acting in the same environment but following different agendas and norms.

Fourth, through this study, we sought to highlight the importance of personal mediator characteristics and identities and their relationship to the strategies employed and outcomes achieved. Key personnel in the SRSG's office, in Interpeace and in PDRC had a deep commitment and knowledge, as well as the capacity to network extensively with a wide range of figures across clans, from the military to civil society, and at elite levels as well as local levels. The role and history of Interpeace, with its partners, is a critical aspect to this story, and its engagement reflects its own history and continuity in Somalia, institutionally and through key individuals; Interpeace had a stability of leadership, staff and partners for many years, and an impressive participatory research model. The organisation has drawn upon expertise from the research and academic world as well as from Somalis themselves.

However, unpacking the identity of so-called 'international' actors is important. Several interviewees for this paper point out the importance of a 'passion' and commitment of those involved in the mediation and intervention process, that appears to go far beyond the institutional position they hold. For Ilham Gassar, this was a deeply personal

project. She was not part of previous mediation or peace-building processes but was committed and highly capable.⁵² She was attentive to her positionality, utilising her different identities and affiliations skilfully.

Work in the mediation and peacebuilding environment is inevitably highly political and sensitive and much less easily reduced to the technical dimensions that aid engagement is often associated with; in short, these become very personalised initiatives for many involved who see the value of their input as potentially leading to transformative change in the local environment, and a matter of life and death. These dimensions cannot be under-estimated as they demonstrate a credibility to local interlocutors who are living the conflict environment. These commitments are reflected in the acceptance and willingness to bend or break organisational rules and draw upon their own resources to pursue peace. This raises difficult questions about the compatibility of international institutional engagement in volatile local contexts. Sufficient flexibility, decentralised decision-making, and an increased appetite for risk-taking might enable more successful mediation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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⁵²This local appreciation was witnessed in person by a researcher for this study who accompanied her to Galkaio for another piece of work, in August 2020.