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Abstract
This article examines the influence of kinship networks and clan-based social capital on Somaliland's post-conflict trajectory through a longitudinal comparative case study spanning 1991 to 2026. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork conducted in Hargeisa and the eastern Sanaag region during 2024–2025, documentary sources, and a systematic review of secondary literature, and applying social transformation theory as a comprehensive but not exclusive analytical lens, the article investigates how indigenous institutions — particularly the Xeer customary normative framework and the mediating authority of clan elders — function as adaptive infrastructures of peace. Somaliland's political order is resilient but conditional: while Xeer-based bonding social capital has been essential to governance resilience, its bridging and linking dimensions remain underdeveloped, generating structural exclusions that recent crises have made visible. Analysis of three contemporaneous developments — the December 2025 Xeer Ciise conflict in Awdal, where elders used diya (customary compensation) and boundary renegotiation to manage cross-lineage grievances; the October 2025 Erigavo peace conference in Sanaag; and Israel's December 2025 bilateral recognition of Somaliland — reveals both the adaptive capacity and the structural breaking points of endogenous peacebuilding. The article further interrogates the 2023 Las Anod war as a genuine hard case that challenges celebratory accounts of Somaliland's peace. It concludes that sustainable peace in hybrid political orders requires continuous negotiation of centre–periphery relations, inclusive reform of customary institutions, and formal representation of historically excluded groups, including occupational castes and women. The findings contribute to debates on hybrid governance and endogenous social transformation as pathways to locally led peacebuilding in post-conflict societies.

Introduction
Three decades after the collapse of Somalia's central government in 1991, Somaliland presents a remarkable but analytically complex anomaly in the Horn of Africa. Somaliland — the former British Somaliland Protectorate, populated predominantly by the Isaaq clan family, with Gadabuursi and Issa (Dir) communities in the western Awdal region and Dhulbahante and Warsangali (Harti/Darood) communities in the eastern Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn (SSC) regions — reconstituted political order after

state collapse without external state-building. Its state formation cannot be understood without the kinship structures through which that order was built: the Isaaq genealogical confederation supplied both the bonding solidarity that ended the war and the centre–periphery fault lines that continue to shape its limits.

This article examines how clan-based social capital supports accountability, resource distribution, and political accommodation, contributing to debates on post-conflict peacebuilding, hybrid governance, and locally grounded institutions in fragile environments (Mac Ginty, 2011; Donais, 2012).

While institutional weakness, prolonged conflict, and recurring foreign interventions continue to characterise southern Somalia (Menkhaus, 2008; Bradbury, 2013), Somaliland mobilised what Bourdieu (1986) termed social capital to sustain relative stability, peaceful transfers of power, and functioning governance without full international recognition (Hagmann & Hoehne, 2009; Walls, 2018). Yet a persistent problem of contested peripheries remains: the SSC regions in the east and Awdal in the west, whose non-Isaaq communities have experienced the Hargeisa-centred settlement as external authority rather than shared self-government, and whose consent was never secured on the same terms as that of the Isaaq core. These trajectories challenge conventional frameworks that privilege externally imposed state-building, neo-liberal institutions, and technical capacity-building as preconditions for peace (Paris, 2004; Mac Ginty, 2015; Richmond, 2011).

To manage post-war order, Somaliland's stakeholders innovated a largely Isaaq-centred hybrid governance of three interlocking institutions: the constitutionally recognised Guurti (House of Elders), which formalises customary authority; the Xeer customary legal framework, which governs inter-lineage obligation; and clan-based power-sharing, which distributes office among clan families — working through elder-led mediation, the negotiation of diya (compensation), and deliberation in the Shir (clan assembly). Social transformation theory offers a more comprehensive lens than approaches focused exclusively on state-building, though political marketplace theory, legal pluralism, and rational-choice approaches each illuminate distinct dimensions. The central argument is that clan-based social capital — particularly its bonding dimension of dense intra-clan trust, reciprocity, and obligation — was the primary infrastructure for reconstruction, substituting for the absent state in security, conflict resolution, and resource distribution (Putnam, 1993; Woolcock, 1998).

The picture is not one of uninterrupted peace. The 2023 Las Anod war (discussed below), the SSC-Khatumo question, and the politics of contested peripheries including Awdal show that the Isaaq-centred architecture has not produced uniform peace. The article therefore proceeds from a compound understanding of peace, combining Galtung's (1969) distinction between negative and positive peace with Mac Ginty's (2011) 'everyday peace' — the routine practices through which ordinary people sustain coexistence. It does not assert unconditional durable peace; it argues that clan-based social capital has been a necessary but not sufficient condition for political order, and that its structural exclusions explain both the character of the stability achieved and its limits.

Full international recognition — admission to the United Nations and endorsement by the African Union — has not been obtained. Israel's December 2025 bilateral recognition, discussed below, is a meaningful but partial development: recognition by a single state does not constitute full de jure statehood, a distinction the article maintains throughout.

Somaliland's partial peace was not a residual outcome but a deliberately constructed one. The Burao Conference of 1991 and the Borama Conference of 1993 were neither engineered by international actors nor grounded in liberal-peace templates (Besteman, 1996; Bradbury, 2008). Convened by clan elders — principally from the Isaaq confederation together with the Gadabuursi and Harti

communities — using the traditional legal framework of Xeer, they produced a hybrid political order fusing customary authority with emergent governance institutions, most notably the constitutionally recognised Guurti (House of Elders) (Hagmann & Hoehne, 2009; Menkhaus, 2010; Lewis, 1961; Lederach, 1997).

The underdevelopment of bridging capital (cross-clan ties) and linking capital (vertical ties between communities and formal institutions), however, has generated the structural exclusions — of peripheral clans, occupational castes, and women — that recent crises have made visible. Scope conditions apply: the argument holds most strongly for the Isaaq-dominated centre and holds weakly, or not at all, in the SSC regions, Awdal, and other peripheries.

The article advances three arguments: that clan-based bonding social capital substituted for the absent state in the immediate post-conflict period (Menkhaus, 2010; Walls, 2018); that kinship networks enabled hybrid institutions combining customary and state authority (Hagmann & Hoehne, 2009; Bryden & Olonisakin, 2010); and that the continuity of peace has depended on the adaptive capacity of customary institutions — now under stress from the 2025 Xeer Ciise crisis in Awdal, the Erigavo initiative in Sanaag, and the legacy of the 2023 Las Anod war (Hashi, Abdi & Ood, 2025; AlBaksh, 2026).

Methodology

The article uses a longitudinal qualitative case study design to examine Somaliland's post-conflict trajectory from the 1991 Burao Conference to 2026, drawing on three categories of evidence. First, primary fieldwork in Hargeisa and Sanaag during 2024–2025: 18 semi-structured interviews with clan elders, civil society practitioners, officials, and community representatives, conducted in Somali, translated into English by a trained bilingual assistant, anonymised and transcribed verbatim, with member checking by six participants. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Tangaza University Graduate School, and all participants gave informed consent. Second, documentary analysis of primary sources, including clan agreements, Guurti deliberations, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) data, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) situation reports, and government statements. Third, a systematic review of secondary literature on Somali governance, customary law, and hybrid political orders (1990–2026).

Case selection is theoretically motivated. Somaliland is a prime case for testing the peacebuilding capacity of clan-based social capital: it is the African post-conflict setting in which the kinship governance architecture is most institutionalised and most studied. Southern Somalia provides an implicit counterfactual — a near-identical population among whom the same kinship system produced fragmentation rather than stability — confirming that kinship networks are necessary but not sufficient for peace. Within Somaliland, the article analyses three confirming cases (the Xeer Ciise crisis, the Erigavo conference, and Israeli recognition) and one genuinely hard case (the 2023 Las Anod war and the SSC-Khatumo dispute) to guard against unfalsifiability.

Social Transformation Through Kinship: A Theoretical Framework

Kinship networks in Somaliland are foundational institutions through which conflict is arbitrated, resources allocated, and identity maintained — multifunctional rather than narrowly genealogical. In the segmentary-lineage tradition of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) and Sahlins (1961), kinship simultaneously performs jural (obligation and liability), political (representation and alliance), economic (pooling risk and resources), security (collective defence), and identity functions (locating the person within a genealogy). For the Somali, Lewis (1961) showed in his study of 'pastoral democracy' that the segmentary lineage system, expressed through patrilineal descent (abtirsi) and

the diya-paying group, supplies the basic units of both conflict and cooperation. This section situates kinship within debates on social capital and post-conflict reconstruction, and frames how it operates as an agent of change — and why its adaptive quality, not any static form, explains its relevance.

Social transformation denotes the fundamental restructuring of social relations, power, and normative structures (Mac Ginty, 2015; Boege, Brown & Clements, 2009; Buju, Mutinda & Akoth, 2026). Unlike conflict resolution, it involves deep-structural change: new patterns of cohesion, authority, and identity emerging from crisis. Lederach's (1997) framework works through four levels — personal, relational, structural, and cultural — via multi-track processes combining elite negotiation, civil society, and grassroots reconciliation. Galtung's (1969) distinction between negative peace (the absence of direct violence) and positive peace (the absence of structural violence and the presence of justice) is equally useful: Somaliland has achieved substantial negative peace, but the structural violence in Xeer's exclusionary dynamics — the subordination of occupational castes, women's limited juridical standing, and peripheral marginalisation — marks an incomplete positive peace. Richmond's (2011) post-liberal peace frames Somaliland as a hybrid case in which local legitimacy and external statehood remain in tension.

Social transformation operates across four mutually constitutive dimensions — institutional (the rules and organisations regulating social life), relational (how groups interact and rebuild trust), normative (the values that legitimise the order), and distributive (the allocation of resources and power) — producing emergent rather than linear outcomes. Critically, Xeer and the clan council system are not frozen forms preserved from 1991 but adaptive frameworks that have continuously responded to urbanisation, diaspora influence, and the pressures illustrated by the 2025 crises.

Social capital theory supplies the central analytical vocabulary. Bourdieu (1986) located social capital in durable networks of recognition that convert into economic and symbolic advantage; Putnam (1993) recast it as a civic resource and distinguished bonding from bridging forms; and Woolcock (1998) added linking capital, the vertical ties connecting communities to formal institutions. In Somaliland, bonding capital has dominated, enabling rapid mobilisation of clan resources for conflict resolution, resource-sharing, and security, while linking capital has remained underdeveloped, explaining the persistent governance gap between Isaaq-centred institutions and the peripheries. The negative social capital literature is equally important: Portes (1998) shows how strong bonding ties produce the exclusion of out-groups, the suppression of autonomy, and the enforcement of conformity — visible in Xeer's treatment of occupational castes, women, and minority clans.

The moral quality of these obligations is best captured by Lonsdale's (1994) distinction between moral ethnicity and political tribalism. Moral ethnicity names the internal civic argument within a clan community over the reciprocal duties owed among members of unequal status who nonetheless understand themselves as one moral community; political tribalism names its external face, the mobilisation of that community as a bloc against others. The moral economy of clan relations in Somaliland is an instance of moral ethnicity: it generates dense, accountable obligation within the lineage even as the same idiom, turned outward, hardens the boundaries that marginalise occupational castes, women, and peripheral clans. This double character — cohesion within, exclusion without — is the analytical hinge of the argument that follows.

African-centred social transformation scholarship contributes a decolonial perspective: transformation as a shift in power within human relations and material conditions, founded on critical awareness and decoloniality and oriented towards mutual recognition and collective prosperity (Buju, Mutinda & Akoth, 2026). It foregrounds the ethical economy of diya (compensation) and the

deliberative logic of the Shir (clan assembly) as governance forms with their own internal rationality, complementing rather than supplanting Lederach, Putnam, Ostrom, and Galtung. When state institutions are weak or absent, kinship networks function as adaptive structures of transformation — embedded in accumulated reciprocity, relational rather than administratively enforced, and holistic in integrating material circulation with moral solidarity — and are thus suited to post-conflict reconstruction in ways imported state institutions are not.

Endogenous social transformation, as used here, denotes a process in which (i) the primary agents of change are internal community actors rather than external state-builders; (ii) the legitimating frameworks derive from indigenous normative systems rather than liberal templates; (iii) outcomes are measurable as reduced inter-clan violence, restored trust, and functional resource-sharing; and (iv) it is distinguishable from non-transformation by institutionalised change, not merely temporary ceasefires. This distinguishes it from Mac Ginty's 'local turn' (a critique of international peacebuilding) and Boege et al.'s 'hybrid political orders' (a structural outcome). The falsification condition is explicit: where violence recurs, exclusions persist, and governance remains contested, the claim of endogenous transformation fails or applies only partially — as in the 2023 Las Anod war.

Evaluated against Ostrom's (1990) criteria for robust common-pool institutions, Xeer presents a mixed record. Its strengths — clearly defined boundaries, rules congruent with pastoral conditions, collective choice through the Shir, graduated sanctions through diya, and a low-cost, restorative logic — are offset by one decisive weakness: it fails Ostrom's requirement that all affected parties hold recognised roles in rule-modification, leaving occupational castes, women, and peripheral clans bound by rules they cannot shape and the process open to capture by the strongest party. Xeer is thus an effective commons institution for those it enfranchises and a generator of exclusion for those it does not.

Somaliland's governance exemplifies this complexity, the hybridity posing a theoretical question rather than a settled description. The Guurti formalises customary authority within a bicameral legislature that coexists with multi-party elections and emerging bureaucratic institutions, producing an order in which legitimacy is stratified across three registers — traditional authority, performance-based governance, and democratic participation — that do not always reinforce one another (Rakaab, 2026; Hagmann & Hoehne, 2009). 'Hybrid' is itself an analyst's category — advanced by Boege, Brown and Clements (2009) and applied to the Somali territories by Hagmann and Hoehne (2009) — not a self-description by Somaliland's actors, who speak of dawlad (state), beel (community), and Xeer. Recent crises show that sustaining this order requires continuous negotiation between customary and state institutions, whose failure produces the structural violence Galtung identifies as Somaliland's outstanding deficit.

Historical Emergence: From Collapse to Hybrid Order

The Collapse and the Catalytic Moment

The collapse of Somalia's central government in January 1991 was simultaneously a catastrophe and a catalytic moment for the northwest. The Somali National Movement (SNM) had waged guerrilla warfare against the Siad Barre government, which retaliated with systematic violence against Isaaq civilians; Hargeisa was destroyed, tens of thousands were killed, and mass displacement followed. Institutionally bankrupt and deeply traumatised, the region faced a governance vacuum in which kinship relations were revived as infrastructures of peace, exhibiting the relational and distributive dimensions of social transformation (Lederach, 1997; Lewis, 1961).

This vacuum reads as a geography of power. With the state extinguished and no external actor positioned to fill the space, authority devolved to where social resources lay — the lineage, the elders'

council, and the locality — so that the Isaaq-majority centre around Hargeisa and Burao accumulated the institutional density the peripheries did not. The Siad Barre regime's attempt to suppress clan and regional identities had failed, and its collapse produced a spiral of violence across Somalia (Warsame, 2024). In Somaliland, communities mobilised previously suppressed kinship structures as adaptive infrastructures for peace, showing how crisis can catalyse endogenous transformation under specific scope conditions: strong pre-existing bonding capital, a shared experience of external violence that unified the dominant clan, and the absence of competing external governance offers (Buju, Mutinda & Akoth, 2026).

The Conference Era, 1991–1997

The foundational constitutional moment came in May 1991, when clan elders convened in Burao under the SNM's political wing and the senior Isaaq sultans and aqils and declared Somaliland's withdrawal from the 1960 union with Somalia. Burao established the template for what followed: a social contract produced through inter-clan consultation rather than military fiat, grounded in the recognition that northern clan unity was the only alternative to the chaos engulfing the south. It created a transitional administration while leaving many questions unresolved, showing the provisional but indispensable role of customary authority in the initial post-conflict order.

Two years later, the Borama Conference of 1993, convened by the Guurti of national elders and chaired by senior figures of the Gadabuursi host community in Awdal, drew clan elders, religious leaders, and intellectuals into four months of deliberation. It produced consensus-based power-sharing that distributed executive authority across the prominent clans and brought Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal to the presidency. Most significantly, Borama constitutionalised the Guurti as a council of elders entrusted with mediating disputes, overseeing security, and advising the executive — the normative dimension of endogenous transformation: legitimacy produced through deliberative dialogue rather than coercive imposition (Hashi, Abdi & Ood, 2025; Lederach, 1997).

The Constitutional Settlement and Its Limits

The settlement was completed through a popular referendum rather than a further conference: in May 2001, Somaliland's electorate approved a constitution intended to curb the overt clanisation of politics by establishing a three-party system and universal suffrage. The outcome was a formally democratic superstructure laid over pre-existing clan arrangements. Presidential, parliamentary, and municipal elections have generally been assessed as credible by international observers, and transfers of power have been peaceful. Yet because the constitution superimposed electoral systems onto clan-based arrangements, clan identity remained the primary determinant of representation, resource access, and service distribution (Massoud, 2021; Samatar, 1989).

This format generates both strengths and structural vulnerabilities. By positioning competing clans relative to one another it limits single-group dominance but perpetuates the marginalisation of smaller clans and peripheral regions. The Isaaq clan family has retained dominance in political and economic decision-making, while the Gadabuursi and Issa remain under-represented despite their stabilising cross-border roles (Hashi, Abdi & Ood, 2025). Crucially, the eastern peripheries entered on unequal terms: the Dhulbahante and Warsangali had been only thinly represented at Borama, and their grievances — marginalisation, the contested status of Las Anod, and under-representation in resource allocation — were carried forward unresolved from the founding moment rather than arising later. These historically rooted exclusions are the constitutional limits that periodic crises expose.

Mechanisms of Kinship-Based Social Capital

Kinship networks in Somaliland generate social capital systems supporting accountability, resource distribution, and political representation. As anticipated above, these mechanisms are jural, political, economic, and relational at once — culturally grounded and adaptive, but uneven in their distributional effects, as the 2025 crises demonstrate.

Accountability operates through the moral economy of clan relations. As Musa and Horst (2025) show, these systems — particularly in collective responses to disasters such as drought — are relational rather than contractual, grounded in reciprocity and shared obligation. Bonding capital produces tight intra-clan accountability: leaders are expected to meet their duties to kin, and failures meet social censure, withdrawal of cooperation, or customary sanction. But, as Portes (1998) and Fukuyama (1995) document, the same bonding ties that enforce accountability within groups exclude outsiders. In Somaliland, Xeer's accountability mechanisms thus operate most effectively within clan and sub-clan boundaries and least effectively across those separating dominant Isaaq sub-clans from peripheral communities.

The central juridical mechanism of kinship-based social capital is Xeer, the customary law of inter-clan relations, governing compensation (diya), resource access, marriage, and dispute resolution through principles, precedents, and orally transmitted procedures. Analysed through Ostrom's (1990) polycentric commons framework, it satisfies several criteria of robust common-pool institutions while failing the requirement that all affected parties hold recognised roles in rule-modification. The December 2025 Xeer Ciise crisis arose precisely at this fault line: the dispute over cultural-heritage recognition mobilised claims that rule-modification had been captured by one party (the Issa) at the expense of another (the Gadabuursi). According to Massoud (2021), Xeer functions in parallel with sharia, integrating religious and customary law — itself contested when the two systems diverge.

A serious gap in celebratory accounts of Xeer is the exclusion of those it does not equally protect. The occupational castes — the Gabooye, including the Madhibaan, Tumaal, and Yibir — occupy a subordinate position Xeer reproduces. Lewis (1961) and Eno and Eno (2009) document the juridical inferiority of sab groups: their diya entitlements are a fraction of noble clans', their testimony carries reduced weight, and their access to pastoral resources is constrained. Gardner and El-Bushra (2004) and Declich (2010) document the gendered dimensions: women are represented through male kin, compensation is negotiated among men and binds them without consent, and their property and divorce rights are more constrained under customary than statutory law. These exclusions are constitutive of Xeer, not incidental; any account of it as peace infrastructure must ask whose peace it produces, and at whose expense.

Resource-sharing and collective security are likewise governed by kinship: clan alliances organise grazing, water, and trade routes, formalised through Xeer agreements. Awdal's strategic position and cross-border Djibouti-Issa networks show that kinship networks operate within contemporary political economies, and the Xeer Ciise crisis illustrated how local resource conflicts intersect with regional strategic interests — and why their adaptive capacity is what allows them to retain legitimacy and sustain peace.

Political representation and power-sharing constitute the institutionalised face of kinship-based social capital. The hybrid system recognises clan representation through the Guurti, whose members are appointed by clan elders rather than elected, so customary authority directly shapes governance on security and constitutional matters. Yet, as Hashi, Abdi and Ood (2025) document, clan-based power-sharing can entrench exclusionary dynamics and produce governance deficits. The clearest illustration deserves stating plainly: the Guurti's repeated self-extension of its mandate — in 2017, 2021, and 2023,

absent elections or any renewal process — is a democratic accountability deficit of exactly the kind Galtung's structural violence identifies. Persistent inequities in representation confirm that kinship networks, however effective, require continuous adaptation and genuine responsiveness to the communities they claim to represent.

Kinship-based social capital in Somaliland thus constitutes a multi-dimensional network of accountability, law, resource-sharing, and political representation — relational, culturally grounded, and adaptive — enabling order in the absence of consolidated state institutions. Its limitations are equally constitutive: exclusionary logic, contested authority, and vulnerability to external influence. Sustainable transformation therefore depends on balancing the strengths of kinship networks with mechanisms for inclusivity, negotiation, and adaptive resilience that bridge customary and contemporary governance (Massoud, 2021; Musa & Horst, 2025; Warsame, 2024; Hashi, Abdi & Ood, 2025).

Contemporary Challenges, Hard Cases, and Adaptive Responses

The 2023 Las Anod War: The Hard Case

The 2023 Las Anod war is the case any account of Somaliland's peacebuilding must confront directly. Its trigger was specific: on 26 December 2022, Abdifatah Abdullahi Abdi, a popular Waddani politician known as 'Hadrawi', was assassinated leaving a mosque — the latest of several unresolved killings in the city. His death detonated grievances accumulated since Somaliland took Las Anod in 2007. After security forces fired on demonstrators, in February 2023 the Dhulbahante elders proclaimed the SSC-Khatumo administration and engaged Somaliland's army in sustained urban combat. According to ACLED (2023), the conflict caused over 250 deaths and displaced roughly 185,000 people. Somaliland lost control of Las Anod, and SSC-Khatumo has since consolidated alternative governance under the Dhulbahante and allied Harti clans, sustained by Darood-Harti kin in Puntland and anchored in its alignment with the Federal Government of Somalia — the same kinship-based mobilisation that built Somaliland, bonding capital turned outward against the centre.

The Las Anod case challenges the thesis that clan-based social capital produces sustained peace, and the article advances three responses. First, scope: the argument for endogenous transformation holds for the Isaaq-dominated centre but not the peripheries, where the hybrid architecture is experienced as Isaaq hegemony rather than shared governance. Second, the failure mechanism: Las Anod illustrates the prediction of the negative social capital literature (Portes, 1998) — strong bonding capital within the Isaaq core generated insufficient bridging capital to bind peripheral clans to the centre. Third, structural exclusion: SSC-Khatumo grievances trace to the founding settlement's power-sharing formula, which the eastern clans experienced as under-representation from the outset. Las Anod is therefore not an anomaly but a structural outcome of Xeer's exclusionary architecture — falsifying the unconditional-peace claim and confirming the qualified one.

The December 2025 Xeer Ciise Crisis in Awdal

The December 2025 Xeer Ciise crisis in Awdal is a further stress test, its roots historical as much as contemporary: it reactivated the Issa–Gadabuursi tensions over precedence and cross-border alignment that the founding settlement left unresolved in the west. It exposed several fault lines at once — centre–periphery tension, inter-clan rivalry, contested cultural recognition, and the limits of ad hoc balancing absent institutionalised settlement. Somaliland officials initially endorsed the Xeer Ciise cultural festivity to accommodate Issa interests but reversed under Gadabuursi pressure, and the inconsistency triggered inter-clan violence. According to UN OCHA (2026), at least 18 people were

killed and more than 100 injured, while cross-border fighters from Ethiopian-Somali and Djibouti-based networks heightened the risk of regional escalation (AlBaksh, 2026; ACLED, 2025).

Despite the severity, traditional mediation proved resilient. By February 2026 a ceasefire was brokered through government-supported reconciliation in which elders deployed two instruments to contain the cross-border escalation: diya (compensation) agreements providing structured restitution across lineage boundaries, and formal boundary renegotiation reaffirming contested access rights. Embedded in Xeer procedure but applied to a contemporary geopolitical crisis, these mechanisms enabled a comprehensive peace agreement among the relevant elder councils. As Hashi, Abdi and Ood (2025) observe, however, clan-based power-sharing can produce nominal inclusion without addressing structural inequity — visible here in that the Gadabuursi and Issa held formal representation but lacked genuine leverage over the central decisions that triggered the conflict.

The October 2025 Erigavo Peace Initiative

The October 2025 Erigavo peace initiative in eastern Sanaag — the highland zone straddling the contested boundary between Isaaq (Habr Yunis and Habr Jeclo) and Harti (Warsangali and Dhulbahante) communities — represents the adaptive potential of endogenous peacebuilding. Convened under President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdillahi (Irro), who took office after the November 2024 elections, it framed peace not as the absence of hostility but as the proactive cultivation of mutual respect, joint accountability, and trust, with elders deploying customary mediation to resolve inter-clan tensions and produce a settlement grounded in reconciliation, conflict prevention, and cooperative development.

Official accounts described the initiative as inclusive, involving elders, sultans, youth, and civil society. That description must be weighed against the realities of segmentary-lineage governance, in which peace conferences are typically dominated by primary-lineage elders whose authority derives from genealogical standing rather than a representational mandate. While the Erigavo conference formally included youth and civil society, substantive decision-making — over compensation formulas, territorial demarcation, and monitoring — was held by primary-lineage elders, with women and minority groups present in advisory and ceremonial capacities rather than as principals. This limitation is systemic rather than incidental, reflecting the broader pattern in which formal inclusion coexists with substantive exclusion.

Israel's December 2025 Bilateral Recognition

Israel's December 2025 bilateral recognition of Somaliland represents a meaningful but partial shift in its international standing. Recognition by a single UN member state does not constitute full de jure statehood, which requires UN admission and African Union endorsement — neither of which Somaliland has obtained. What it demonstrates is that functional governance capacity, combined with strategic positioning, can generate incremental gains outside formal UN processes. The recognition has enhanced Somaliland's diplomatic visibility; reported statements of recalibration from the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Ethiopia appear in Somaliland government press releases (Somaliland MFA, 2026), though independent confirmation of their scope remains ongoing.

The recognition also introduces structural risks. External actors may pursue agendas that disrupt domestic peacebuilding; allegations of UAE-facilitated divide-and-rule dynamics around Somaliland's port negotiations have been reported (Africa Intelligence, 2025), though causal attribution remains disputed, and Massoud (2021) cautions that institutions imposed without grounding in indigenous systems risk illegitimacy. Locally grounded legitimacy and external recognition operate on different bases: where aligned, recognition reinforces the endogenous

settlement; where they diverge, external engagement can erode it. Whether Israeli recognition strengthens or destabilises Somaliland's peace will depend on whether it is articulated with, rather than substituted for, the processes that produced stability.

Underlying the Awdal crisis, the Erigavo initiative, and the Las Anod war is the structural predicament of centre–periphery relations as a geography of power: Somaliland's hybrid order is weighted towards the Isaaq-dominated centre, leaving peripheral regions in an ambiguous governance space where unresolved grievances and under-representation sustain the perceptions of marginalisation that periodically escalate into crisis. Resolving these inequities requires reform beyond clan-representation formulas; Hashi, Abdi and Ood (2025) recommend public accountability, civic education, accountable service delivery, and genuine power-sharing reform as pathways to integrating peripheral communities into the settlement.

Conclusion

Somaliland's experience illustrates both the resilience and the structural limits of hybrid governance rooted in kinship-based social capital. Since the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, communities have mobilised endogenous institutions — clan elders, customary law (Xeer), and reciprocal kinship networks — to sustain cohesion, exercise accountability, and resolve conflicts, showing that social transformation can be sustained through trust, moral economies, and culturally grounded jurisprudence rather than imported institutional models.

The 2023 Las Anod war and the December 2025 Xeer Ciise crisis are not anomalies in this account; they are its structural consequences. Xeer is at once peacemaker and conflict generator — a peacemaker within the boundaries of strong bonding capital and a source of conflict where bonding capital has not generated adequate bridging or linking capital. This is not a contradiction to be explained away but the central finding: the same mechanism that enables peace within produces exclusion without. Galtung's framework captures it precisely — Somaliland has achieved substantial negative peace but incomplete positive peace, and the conflation of the two in celebratory accounts is the conceptual error the 2023 and 2025 crises have made untenable.

Looking ahead, Somaliland will require not merely resilience but transformative resilience — the capacity not only to absorb shocks but to reconstitute the political settlement on more inclusive terms. Endogenously, this requires broadening the Guurti's representation beyond primary-lineage elders so that women, youth, and occupational-caste, Gadabuursi, and Issa representatives hold substantive authority; developing formal cross-border dispute-management protocols that ad hoc elder mediation, as the Xeer Ciise crisis showed, cannot reliably provide; and clarifying the constitutional relationship between the Guurti and elected institutions to close the accountability deficit exposed by repeated term extensions. Exogenously, it requires managing recognition dynamics — of which the Israeli precedent is the first instance — and external actors' interests so that they reinforce rather than fracture the domestic settlement.

Somaliland ultimately demonstrates that sustainable peace in hybrid political orders requires continuous negotiation between contemporary state-building and customary institutions. The effectiveness of hybrid governance lies in developing endogenous institutions responsive to shifting political, social, and economic forces — and in extending the relational legitimacy of those institutions to the groups they have historically excluded. This balance among relational legitimacy, customary norms, and formal institutions is the analytical paradigm for understanding social transformation under state failure, and explains why locally grounded solutions are necessary for long-term stability.



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