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Economies of Access: Inter-Clan Alliances, Resource Gatekeeping, and the Architecture of Collective Security in Post-Conflict Hargeisa, Somaliland

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Abstract

Studies of clan-based order in Somaliland routinely credit inter-clan alliances with generating the economic cooperation and collective security on which the territory's stability rests. Drawing on an original corpus of 128 participants across 77 sessions in six sub-districts of Hargeisa, generated through in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions, key-informant interviews, direct observation and document analysis, this article reports a finding that complicates that consensus. The study examined how inter-clan alliances mobilise resources, sustain economic cooperation, and underwrite collective security in the city's post-conflict transformation. It began from the expectation, shared with much of the hybrid-governance literature, that alliances would be visible as cross-clan commercial partnerships. The corpus contains no such instance. What it documents instead is an economy of access, in which the object of clan control is not a good but a gate: alliances did not distribute resources so much as license who might approach them, and collective security was produced not by shared enterprise but by a negotiated order that made the withdrawal of protection its standing sanction. The operative mechanism, across mediation, credit, land and diaspora remittance, was permission rather than price, and access was governed by a genealogical standing that money could not purchase. Reading these data through the Negotiated Hybrid Stability Framework, and against Cooper's account of the gatekeeper state, Roy's account of informality as a practice of the strongest, Khan's political-settlements analysis and the social-capital tradition, the article theorises the gate in three dimensions, showing how it is constructed by tying goods to lineage claims, maintained by network closure and the asymmetry of conversion, and contested at the seams where those supports weaken. It argues that the alliances which stabilise Hargeisa systematically externalize their costs onto those without a genealogical claim, chiefly minority lineages, women, the young and the returned diaspora, and that this externalization is constitutive of its stability. Situating the case within the field of social transformation, the article concludes that Hargeisa's economy has stabilized without being transformed, and locates the site of transformation not in the volume of resources delivered but in the architecture of access itself.

Keywords: *clan alliances; economy of access; hybrid governance; collective security; gatekeeping; Somaliland; Hargeisa; peacebuilding*

1. Introduction

Somaliland is a peculiar object of study of post-conflict order. Unrecognised internationally, but stable for three decades, it forged its peace without outside intervention, but with clan conferences funded locally, and its resulting hybrid order in which customary power and elected institutions are deeply interwoven, is readily interpreted as a success story of endogenous peacebuilding (Bradbury 2008, Renders 2012). At the heart of that story is the assumption that cross-clan alliance underpins both collective security and economic cooperation; that the clans, having overcome differences, can co-operate, pooling resources and policing the peace. In this article I assess this assumption empirically using the third research question and argue that it requires modification; that whilst both co-operation and security are real, they are not distributed by cross-clan enterprise but by a gatekeeping order; an order whose object of control is a gate rather than a good, and whose medium of transaction is permission rather than price.

This argument rests on an absence. The research was conducted with the intention of tracing how cross-clan alliances mobilize resources, underpin economic co-operation and secure collective peace; and it expected, along with most hybrid governance literature, to identify cross-clan commercial partnership as the primary source of the order. Across a corpus of 128 participants and 77 sessions, no such partnership was found. All enterprise is financed along lineages, not between them; the cited cooperation is less a sharing of business than a managed negotiation of access to the goods each lineage controls. An earlier draft of the larger study declared with the certainty of the existing literature that trade crossed clans constantly. The corpus found no such pattern, and the claim was removed. This withdrawal proved more productive than any assertion, as it illuminated the gatekeeping order structure. The argument is that there is an economy of access in Hargeisa. It is access to, not distribution of, credit, land, mediation and physical security which is brokered across clans, access to each commodity lying behind a gate maintained by genealogically qualified lineages. Alliance, it is argued, does not give distribution of goods; it gives permission to approach, or not, each commodity. The question asked in each transaction is not what price would be paid, but whose authorization is needed. Genuine order indeed arises, since the strength of within-lineage ties militates against violence and enforcing claims; but it is systematically exclusionary, since the gate's value consists exactly in its ability to deny access to outsiders. Stability and exclusion, therefore, describe the same order, viewed from different sides of the gate, and those whose genealogical claims are weak or absent-minority lineages, women, the young and returned diaspora-are bearers of its costs.

The reading of a whole commercial economy, appearing as one of cooperation, as actually run by permission, may have significance beyond a descriptive account of one city. If customary institutions that are considered by development agencies as partners are actually gates rather than commons, then goods flowing through these gate-keeping institutions are distributed according to a logic of gate-keeping; an intervention measuring its success in terms of goods delivered could be in fact bolstering exclusion that it intended to alleviate. Therefore, this article's negative finding at its core is not merely a modification of the existing Somaliland literature but a caution for practice more broadly with regards to the use of customary authorities; and the mechanism to which this article points is exactly this caution.

I defined three terms used throughout the article. A clan: a patrilineal kinship group as defined by the relevance of its size and membership in any specific transaction, extending from clan-family to diya-paying lineage; Economy of access: a system in which goods are accessed based on prescribed status rather than price; Externalization of costs: The distribution of the expenses inherent to the order among those denied access based on ascribed membership status.

This argument is of wider import beyond Hargeisa, as the mechanism identified (gate-keeping based on descent) can occur anywhere there is informal authority to deny access in the absence of state power, and this has implications for intervention design and the belief in providing benefits to "the community" through the use of customary intermediaries. In section 2 I provide a brief contextualization of Hargeisa, section 3 a review of the relevant literature, section 4 the Negotiated Hybrid Stability Framework, section 5 a summary of the research methods, section 6 presents the results in six headings, section 7 is dedicated to a discussion of the argument in relation to Hybrid Governance theory, social transformation, political settlements and design of intervention, and section 8 is a conclusion.

2. Hargeisa in Somaliland's Post-Conflict Order

Hargeisa is the capital city of Somaliland, and it is where both its demise and subsequent rise to prominence were located. Destroyed in 1988, the city was rebuilt by means of a process that the clans managed entirely by themselves after 1991: a sequence of clans financed clan conferences, with the Borama conference in 1993 in particular achieving a sustainable peace without external endorsement (Bradbury, 2008). The settlement it produced is marked in two ways that serve as premises to this paper. First, it was produced by and was a matter, in a more literal sense, of clan: at the founding level, the unit of account was the lineage, the lineage being its fundamental constituent, a point of distinction between Somaliland and the externally constructed settlements to the south where an arrangement the clans agreed between themselves would still have lacked the legitimacy, to name but one issue, of an imposed agreement on lineage balance (4.5).

The second is that, in a more restricted but more critical sense, the settlement was a deal that certain clans made among themselves: the lineages which presided over the founding assemblies went in as author while others, notably the lineages who constitute the occupational minorities known as the Gabooye, the minor clans who did not have a seat at the table, and in effect the women of every lineage went in as objects. The second fact is more critical: The establishment of the order took a series of self-funded conferences, and the fact it was made by and paid for by the clans is critical to both its legitimacy and to the subsequent analysis: the Sheekh (1992) and Borama (1993) conference established the structures, the Hargeisa conferences of 1996 and 1997 the buildings, and the subsequent referendum in 2001, a landslide victory for endorsement of the system, preceded elections in 2003 and 2005 and brought the peace to a conclusive point which, once established in this way, would not yield to pressure from external parties and which, from its inception and ever since, has not considered the clans as having made concessions in giving any outsiders a role within its structure. A third aspect of the clan structure that relates to the topic of economy more directly relates to the size of the remittance economy in relation to almost everything else in Hargeisa. Money, and money from abroad in particular, financed the restoration of the city, the enterprises that now contribute to its economy, and the payment of mediators and peace brokers at a level where external players might easily become involved (Osman, 2017). Given the significance of external money, one would be tempted to assume that the providers of these remittances exercise equivalent control over what they are used for.

The present paper analysis of Hargeisa is devoted to refuting exactly this presumption in respect of three domains which, in important ways, demonstrate the endurance of the clan order: Mediation, which is concerned with the process by which Xeer makes judgments and elders mediate mediated decisions: for instance, dispute resolution is often settled through compensatory mechanisms such as diya; loans, in the sense that the lenders, more often than not external lenders of various kinds, finance individuals rather than organisations or business enterprises which, even when established, exist as extensions of individual lineages; and, for

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this study, property, whether owned in terms of tenure or transacted in terms of title, ownership always being anchored in the clan and thus being property owned by a lineage. The security system in place relies not so much on the state as it does on a lineage, which can, or the capacity of a lineage to answer for its members, deter those who might threaten such individuals. All of the areas the study examines depend for their operation on the same governing principle: access; and in all of them, access depends not on the purchasing power of money but on the more secure and far more valuable commodity of social position, membership and influence conferred by lineage status.

Each domain presents some specifics: for example, access in mediation is mediated through the power and discretion of the clan elder; for loans it is determined through the ability of a leader of the lineages who would be involved to lend a certain authority for a particular loan applicant, it is a matter of lineage approval; in the area of property access depends on a recognised lineage link to the territory and for security on membership of a lineages the retaliation capability of which is great enough to serve as an effective deterrent; so what it is distributed are not goods or money, rather, access to these, mediated through position determined not by wealth, rather through descent.

3. Clan Political Economy, Hybrid Governance and the Political Economy of Access

The literature that addresses the third objective falls under three broad themes. The first is the literature that descriptively portrays Somaliland's establishment and sets out the standard account of how local fundraising conferences generated a stable order. Bradbury (2008) provides the canonical account, whilst Renders (2012) analyses the interaction of clan elders with formal institutions to describe the hybrid's functioning in detail, with Hoehne's (2013) on borderlands, and Phillips' (2020) case for Somaliland's peace on a self-reliance narrative as notable qualifications of the success story. Together, this body of work documents a truly hybrid, truly stable order; but it characterises the customary as a support for inclusive ordering, a premise to which the article offers a counterpoint. The second body of work is that which explores the idea of hybrid governance, under the rubric of which this article falls. Boege and colleagues (2008) formulated political orders of hybrid form as an alternative to the liberal-peace concept that legitimate government must follow a Weberian model, and offered evidence for the coexistence of customary, religious and formal institutions, with such hybridity an element of resilience. When this model is applied to Somaliland, it yields a fruitful avenue for inquiry, although the model has faced strong criticism from within, chiefly from Meagher (2012) for an essentialising treatment of informal institutions and mistaking durability for inclusivity.

The third and most important theme is that of political economy and access. Cooper's (2002) portrayal of the gatekeeper state in Africa provides the primary organising model. Many postcolonial states have gained power through occupying the junction of the economy of a state and the world outside, with the function of that intermediary being to impose taxes and licence trade that occurs within it; they gained power not from transforming society, but by intercepting what crossed the border between domestic and external markets. In Somaliland, in the absence of a formal state, a clan alliance is able to serve an equivalent function at a sub-district and transaction level. Roy (2009) uses a study of urban informality to refine the concept by showing that informalities are typically exercised not by the poor and excluded but by the powerful in order to govern exceptions by reserving discretion over which rules should be applied to whom. Together, the analyses in this literature focus not on goods that are exchanged, but on the conditions that regulate access. The article draws institutional detail from the literature on Somali customary law, namely the notion that Xeér is a negotiation, not a code of agreements between patrilineal groups; that this body of agreements, expressed through the elders, is

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enforced by the paying-blood group; and that it takes the patriarchal grouping as its basis both of liability and rights (Lewis, 1961; Le Sage, 2005).

The Cooper model closely but imperfectly matches the material presented for Hargeisa; yet, this difference is revealing. Whereas Cooper's gatekeeper state sits at a border and intercepts trade goods between an external world and a national economy, in Hargeisa the gates are not border crossings but the junction of every transaction that requires a clan's intervention; in other words, not a state, but a descent order guards access. Re-conceptualising the gatekeeper role away from a border crossing and toward the site of exchange brings into view something the article already observes but cannot yet label-the fact that the customary order operates to manage access, rather than the production of goods. An effect observed at the state level, this paper identifies it at the scale of family and sub-district.

Two other bodies of work flesh out the framework. Political-settlement analysis provides the framework for linking the detailed account of Xeér to a distribution logic: Khan (2010), for instance, defines a political settlement in terms of the distribution of holding power that accounts for the legitimacy and durability of certain institutions, and argues that for such institutions to endure, they must accord with this distribution. The literature on social capital, beginning with Putnam (2000), Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1986), generates the language with which the mechanism can be detailed: the closure necessary for obligation and enforceable social relationships, with the distinction between bonding (strong ties within groups) and bridging (weak ties between groups) and the mechanism by which social relations can be translated into economic gains or privileges. De Waal (2015) places Somaliland's economy of access in the context of the Horn's political marketplace, and shows how it diverges from more generalized modes of political interaction. Similarly, studies examining the broader scale of Somaliland's political economy (Elder, 2021; Norman, 2026) confirm that returns to access and recognition concentrate in a tight, transborder elite. This study explains how these macro-level observations are brought to life at the sub-transactional level.

4. Theoretical Framework: The Negotiated Hybrid Stability Framework

A larger companion project uses these resources to build on this analysis and develop an original analytic framework-the Negotiated Hybrid Stability Framework- to describe how clan alliance brings about order in Hargeisa. This framework downplays and organizes the project’s three analytic borrowed theories-Lederach's (1997) conflict transformation, Boege and colleagues' hybrid governance, and the social-capital tradition-into a single relational process. They become its three-respectively-relational, institutional, and evaluative-faces, rather than independent analytic perspectives. The framework asserts five propositions, three directly related to the present objective.

First, the proposition of Negotiated Order asserts that the Hargeisa order is not non-violence but managing ongoing conflict, through a settlement whose rules are laid down by descent. Second, the proposition of Genuine Stabilisation argues that this order indeed entails violence and is obliging, and is therefore not an illusion that should be demolished, but something that needs explanation. Third, the proposition of Externalized Costs shows that the order generates a stability that someone pays for: someone has to be excluded by the settlement of descent for this to work; and the condition for this exclusion is not collateral damage of stabilisation but some of the material conditions which make this possible. The other two propositions in the framework, namely the proposition of Inverse Coupling (explaining a trend that deeper stability implies narrower exclusion) and the proposition of Contingent Decoupling (explaining when the two can be pulled apart) are developed in the project on Representation, and are referenced only in so far as they help to test the hypothesis with the aid of the economic

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data. What is useful for the present argument is to transform a description of this order, namely the customary order in Hargeisa is stable and exclusive, into an explanation: the order stabilises because it regulates access on ascriptive terms, with all the exclusion this entails (and cost of exclusion that someone else incurs).

5. Methodology

The data for this analysis is drawn from an original qualitative corpus produced in Hargeisa during six rounds of fieldwork conducted in mid-2026: 128 participants drawn from eight strata; 77 sessions and 197 recorded attendances, covering six of the city's eight sub-districts; and generated by means of in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), participant observation and document analysis using the same instruments piloted in the proposal stage. All sessions were conducted in Somali and/or (when participant preference indicated) in English and were audio-recorded (with consent), transcribed and, when needed, translated, although translation was back-checked with the original Somali regarding the analytically relevant terminology (Xeer, diya, nabadoon, Shir Beeleed, tol). Participants are identified by an anonymised session code specifying instrument, number, date and venue, such as P-FGD-02 for the second focus group and P-IDI-07 for the seventh in-depth interview. Coding was inductive during a first pass and deductive during a second, when an emerging category was tested against the analytic framework.

A couple of points regarding rigour are worth mentioning. Firstly, the study adheres to the rigorous discipline of evidence, making no claims about customary ordering which are not evidenced in the corpus; when earlier versions of the wider study suggested that trade habitually flowed across clan lines, that conclusion was abandoned when the evidence proved inadequate. Indeed, the article presents its abandonment not as a cause for embarrassment, but as the crucial impetus behind the argument here, the fact that trade did not do what was claimed to have emerged as the organisational principle of ordering in this instance. Secondly, the study was carried out under an approved ethical protocol with the informed consent and a harm-minimisation plan suitable for a context where clan identity is a sensitive issue, with reports by participants of being excluded being handled particularly sensitively so that the reporting of those reports could not itself reinforce the marginalisation documented.

6. Findings

6.1 The Cross-Clan Economy That Was Not There

The third objective was formulated as the logic of economic cooperation, and it was expected to take the form of cross-clan commercial partnership, either joint venture, co-ownership or business pool of capital across lineage lines. There is no such case in the corpus. In response to questions on how enterprises are funded, participants from all social segments replied by speaking of capital raised within the lineage, by relatives and kin of other members of the same clan, and never from beyond the barrier of would-be partnership. Whenever capital crossed the clan line, it did so as remit-tance, as repayment of a debt, as a settlement of claim and never as co-investment.

The cooperation implied by inter-clan alliances within the alliance is real in its consequences, peace being preserved and the city functioning, yet not arising from co-enterprise. It arises from an order where each lineage dominates the approach to goods under its dominion and where alliances define the terms of such access. To questions as to why enterprises did not stretch beyond clan boundaries, interviewees said it was not due to hostility, but to the problem of enforcement of agreements. Obligations within a lineage could be met by sanctions stemming from the very intimacy of a close community, but agreements across

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lineages lack any shared authority to impose penalty on a defaulting partner belonging to another clan. Thus, capital is concentrated where it could be safest, i.e., within the kinship groups, and the co-enterprise that the cooperation theory forecasts could have no foundation.

Cooperation among clans therefore means mutual toleration of respective gate-keepers' access, and agreement about means of access, not combined enterprises. Facing negative findings of this type, one might feel tempted to interpret them as gaps, evidence of an economy crossing clan barriers, unperceived in the course of the study. But in this corpus, this absence is patterned rather than random: it is consistent from one segment of the social hierarchy to another, from one sphere of activity to another, and throughout the fieldwork, and it is accompanied by an unsolicited statement on how the goods are in fact accessed (by permission, not partnership). Therefore, rather than arguing that this study did not identify cooperation, I claim that it revealed a different logic at play, a logic of access, which is clarified in the remaining analysis. And interpreting this absence as mere accident would have left intact the cooperation thesis and would have failed to identify the gate-keeping mechanism.

6.2 Permission, Not Price: The Operative Mechanism

The mechanism at work was permission, not price, and the credit was only the sharpest of proofs. In one focus group with five practitioners (three women) in the training room of an international NGO in the 31 May sub-district on 29 June 2026 (P-FGD-02), the participants related a 2023 programme that provided loans to women, including women from minority-clan lineages. On the programme's own terms, it was a success; the loans were delivered and repaid, and a success was recorded.

But what it changed, according to the practitioners, was another story.

"It wasn't possible to get a loan if your lineage group is a minority, like it's not possible to even take one," one of them said, as "those who traditionally decide who can borrow" had raised objections: "the permission to receive [the loan] wasn't really gained by the person," "if they got the loan it wouldn't affect their standing," and "it didn't bring changes as it was expected." Another practitioner commented on how "the loan was a success on paper, but we had the same inequality on the ground." The minority-clan women who were eligible and received the loans thus experienced a "borrowing success that came without standing" (one practitioner).19 The loan programme was "an access transaction" rather than a "price transaction" and illustrated the crucial role of standing: standing cannot be bought. As a focus group participant put it, "standing has no price tag." A land transfer, more starkly than the loan transaction, demonstrated this.

Participants had described "a land transfer that was more a matter of gaining consensus from the relevant lineage group than of payment" and "a buyer with cash and without a recognized lineage claim" could "not complete the land transfer" while "a person with standing could." Payment played a role, but it was a role contingent on having been granted entry and was therefore determined by one's status: "The market ... Operates within the gate, rather than the gate within the market."

The practitioners distinguished clearly between what the loan program achieved and what it did not. While several women utilized the credit to initiate or expand small businesses, the "decision to whom one may lend, to whom to grant credit and by whose authority minority clan women would be allowed to get credit" remained firmly in the hands of lineage leaders whose own standing had not been altered. The loan programme thus "moved money but not standing" and by proving "that one could move money without moving standing," had in fact "cemented the existing disconnect between them that is the principle of the gate."

Mediation was "mediated by elders," and a claimant could be denied a place in the mediation process if they "had no lineage with standing to make themselves responsible." Physical security "is a privilege afforded to members of lineages sufficiently credible that aggressors do not pose a threat to them as members of the group," rather than a good for sale. In every domain, the same "pattern in access is evident: a particular good to which one gains access through making a claim the system will honor, a system of claims mediated by alliance". In short, "the economy of access: access at each crossroads where entry is made possible only by permission."

6.3 Collective Security as Negotiated Order

The third question also asks not about resources, but collective security, and on this score, the evidence also rewrites conventional wisdom. Security is not guaranteed, in Hargeisa, by a monopoly on force, but constructed by negotiated settlement, whose sanction is the withdrawal of protection. Since each lineage answers for each of its members and each is made responsible for and compensated by their behavior, the credible threat that an organized lineage will be held liable for members and may be left to satisfy a claimant if they venture too far out of the terms of the settlement ensures the avoidance of conflict more reliably than a police force. Collective security, on this account, is the accumulation of all such deterrent relations: it is not an excellent produced by the clan cooperating in concert with others; it is an equilibrium produced by the fact that the lineages individually have an interest in holding their members within the terms of the settlement. Inter-clan alliance doesn't pool security as much as align the interests of two parties in non-defection.

The machinery that produces this order is familiar from studies of Xeer. Elders acting as nabadoon, singly or collectively in a Shir Beeleed(clan assembly), hear disputes and attempt to reach negotiated compensation guaranteed by the group that pays diya. The crucial contribution here is that access to that machinery is determined by standing. A claimant, with a lineage that stands behind them and is made to answer for it, presents as a principal whose claim will be adjudicated. A claimant who has no lineage behind them is present, if at all, as a supplicant, whose grievances depend upon a patron's willingness to take it upon themselves to present them to an assembly. The system produces security, but it produces it for those the settlement says count, and the production of security is inextricable from the distribution of standing the same system enforces at the gate.

This rewrites the collective security thesis as it applies to clans. What we may see, at first glance, is clans cooperating in their efforts to maintain peace; but we should look more closely, and we will see that what we are seeing is clans policing themselves within a shared sanction: a stable, genuinely negotiated, but not cooperative order in the way the cooperation thesis envisions. We should indeed take a moment to ponder what it means for two clans to be in alliance. They are not, after all, partners in some sort of joint provision of goods. They have instead made a standing agreement concerning the terms on which each of their gates will be kept and the individuals under the protection of that gate will be held accountable. This is real, indeed, and does important work, but the work it does is in the maintenance of a particular distribution of standing rather than the construction of joint provision or common enterprise. Security is gained, like credit, like land, at the gate, and the gate is held by descent.

6.4 The Externalisation of Cost: Money Without Authority

If the order then holds steady by maintaining a gate, the costs of that holding are borne by outsiders and are best witnessed by those in the diaspora layer who finance much of what is done in Hargeisa, and for that reason wield far less of the authority the literature might lead one to expect money to bring with it. A man in his fifties who had lived for twenty-five years

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in Britain explained during an in-depth interview on 21 June 2026 in the Mohamoud Haybe sub-district (P-IDI-07) that he had funded the mediation of a land dispute at the cost of about fifty thousand dollars, and he made it unequivocally clear, about his standing in the settlement to which he had contributed the fifty thousand, what his role was: the diaspora are donors, they are not deciders; they send money, but they do not send their authority. Remittances cross the gate; the authority to command what happens on the other side does not. This is the externalisation of cost par excellence and it lays bare the asymmetry on which the whole order depends.

Genealogical standing can be readily translated into economic and security goods; belonging means being protected, being borrowed, being heard. But economic capital cannot be converted back into standing. The 50,000 provided by the diaspora financier, the earnings of the repatriated entrepreneur and the income of the woman on loan cannot be exchanged for the position that would grant authority over their expenditure because, in this order, standing cannot be bought. Externalisation is not an incidental feature of the stability of this order but one of its foundations: the settlement is cheap to those who are counted within it precisely because its costs - the postponement of authority, the refusal of standing, the rendering of what is contributed as a gift rather than a claim - are borne by those who are counted without. Money pours through the gate and the distribution of standing is left unaltered.

The diaspora financier is merely the most visible bearer of these costs, his wealth demonstrating the asymmetry clearly, and the same pattern applies to others with even less capacity to represent it. The woman who borrows without the authority to employ it, the young man whose support for a household is of no value for status within a lineage and the trader of a minority-clan who can trade but cannot direct a dispute are in the same relation to the gate as he. Their resources cross the gate; their status is retained behind it, and these retained resources amount to the affordability of the settlement for those who are included within it. The process of externalization is not a leakage in the system but the channel through which its stability is financed.

6.5 The Bonding Trap: Social Capital Rich in Ties, Poor in Bridges

These findings could be restated in the vocabulary of social capital and doing so highlights why the cooperation thesis went wrong. Putnam's distinction between bonding capital which tightens connections within a group and bridging capital which builds connections between groups matches the data closely. The corpus is steeped in bonding capital; connections within the lineage are thick and bonds enforceable and closure which Coleman thought essential for enforceable trust is near total-precisely the thickness that allows the diya system to operate and explains the true stability the study concludes. However, the cooperation thesis is about the demand for bridging capital, connection across lineages on which business could be shared. Of this, the corpus is notably short. There are no partnerships between clans since there are no bridges across which a partnership can be founded and there are only gates on which passage is bargained. Bourdieu's description explains why the gate acts to prevent any conversion: by allowing the strong to benefit economically from social position whilst ensuring that wealth is unable to derive social benefits from economic position.

This leads to what I am calling the bonding-trap. A system high in bonding and low in bridging capital is stable, as dense inner bonds keep violence off and obligations enforceable but this is in the sense that the system reproduces its boundaries, rather than breaks them down, since the very social capital keeping the peace also keeps the gate in place. This is the basis for why any enthusiastic interpretation of hybrid governance, where the assumption is that customary institutions which are dense with social captital provide a resource for inclusive

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orders, gets the type of social capital wrong. Bonding capital is both the condition for order and for inclusion; in Hargeisa, these are the same phenomenon. Akoth's (2026) finding that Somaliland's Xeer-based bonding capital generates resilience whilst the poor provision of bridging and linking capital provides the source of structural exclusions, is a result derived independently and thus further confirms the bonding-trap reading without the support of this data corpus.

6.6 The Gate in Three Dimensions: How It Is Built, Held and Contested

One way to sum up the findings is to conceptualize the gate as an institution with three dimensions: the terms on which it is built, how it is maintained and the points where it is subject to challenge. The gate is built anywhere a good is attached to a claim of lineage; its building blocks are the order of precedence which Lewis (1961) discovered where membership follows descent and claims to protection, credit, land and arbitration follows membership and, in effect, an invitation is sent to genealogical rather than monetary claims (goods, but not access, can be turned into standing); Xeer supplies the terms for this transaction and the diya-paying group is simultaneously the group responsible for a wrong and entitled to recompense for it. It is held up by three support pillars. These are: closure, the dense set of ties that makes the sanction of the withholding of protection credible; the asymmetry of conversion where standing buys goods but goods cannot buy standing, resulting in an accumulation of cash at the gate without any of that cash being able to open it (P-IDI-07); and naturalization, a presentation of this structure of descending kinship as natural or inevitable, so that someone denied access not only faces closed ties but also a discourse of inclusion and exclusion that portrays her marginalization as an event within the order of things.

The gate's immutability owes itself to the fact that these three supports are not discrete, but rather form a virtuous circle where one support buttresses another: closure is based on naturalization's representation of descent as given, and is itself necessary for naturalization to maintain the representation as, when someone is dependent for protection, how can one contest what provides for that protection; naturalization strengthens closure's hand in that a natural exclusion will not create an equally strong backlash as a deliberate exclusion; and the asymmetry of conversion ensures that wealth is no longer the key to standing and so closes the gateway against the intrusion of outside money and its capacity for transformation; only access is what matters. It is, in short, not the specific act of exclusion that needs addressing but the enduring process that reproduces exclusion. The gate is therefore where the different pillars weaken; the body of evidence registers the pressure even where it does not register an opening: excluded women speak about access in terms of 'tol', lineage membership, rather than prices, and explain that they do not receive protection because of a lack of standing rather than a shortage of goods. Thus, the intervention involving women's loans (P-FGD-02) provoked strong opposition from elders because it allowed a good to be claimed without prior establishment of standing; its subsequent sub Sumption as a 'special case', rather than as a 'precedent', shows how effective a particular support can be. Where excluded groups begin to build other forms of social institution-cooperatives, associations, savings circles-these are to be understood as the opening of counter-gates; the eventual crossing of the established lineage boundary, however, remains an open question that this study cannot resolve; nevertheless, identifying this question along these three lines will specify the conditions under which it might be resolved.

7. Discussion

The article yields three general interest claims. The first, theoretical claim is that the economic cooperation and collective security attributed to inter-clan alliance are better

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understood as the outputs of a gatekeeping order than of a cooperative one. A cooperative order produces goods through joint enterprise and distributes them by the terms of the enterprise; a gatekeeping order produces order by controlling approach and distributes by the terms of the gate. The two can look alike from a distance; both yield stability, both bind actors into a settlement, but they differ in their distributive signature: a cooperative order can in principle be inclusive, whereas a gatekeeping order is exclusionary by construction, because the value of the gate is its capacity to exclude. Hargeisa as a gatekeeping order explains what the cooperation thesis cannot: the co-presence of genuine, valued stability with systematic, resented exclusion, which are the same order seen from opposite sides of the gate.

This comment on the critical literature on hybrid governance offers to fill a gap in relation to two important contributions. Meagher's (2012) is a more general argument about how the celebration of customary institutions can mask elite capture as legitimacy. It functions at the level of the field rather than naming the particular device through which an order captures its inhabitants. Hoehne's (2013) is more specific, distinguishing between multiple forms of hybridity within the Somaliland context, showing how braiding customary and statutory authority can entrench certain elders behind the curtain of tradition. The present argument builds on these two concerns but adds a specifying mechanism. It does not suffice to show that hybridity can mask capture, or that Somaliland's hybridity entrenches particular elders; the argument explains how this occurs via the gate-that access is keyed to descent-and what the cost of that capture is, and for whom, externalizing that cost onto the ungenealogical. The capture is not a corruption of an order that might otherwise be inclusive but rather the order's governing logic; the gate is not a defect in the operation of customary institutions, but their purpose.

The article's account of Hargeisa locates the town within a regional political economy without simply collapsing it into such an order. While De Waal's (2015) political marketplace describes a system where security and loyalty are transacted for cash, and Hargeisa's economy of access is similarly transactional, its central feature is not a market but a gate. Its currency is permission, not price, and permission cannot be purchased at any price: as illustrated by the diaspora financier's offer of $50,000. An order of descent, rather than a market in goods, is Hargeisa's ordering mechanism. In Hargeisa's genealogical political economy, money passes through, but cannot buy, social standing. This may explain why Somaliland's governing order is more stable than many market arrangements further south: while a market in loyalty is unstable because loyalty goes to the highest bidder and there are always higher bidders, an order whose standing terms are based on kinship is very hard to destabilise, despite its inequities.

Finally, a methodological point flows from the nature of the evidence. The core finding upon which this argument rests is an absence-a striking lack of cross-clan commercial activity within a data set designed to find precisely such interactions-and the handling of this absence illustrates a much-neglected mode of scholarly analysis. The original formulation of this argument relied, as often is the temptation, on the available literature to establish the prevalence of inter-clan commercial exchange; the data corpus would not support this claim and so the claim was removed, proving crucial to identifying the order's operative principle. When working with customary institutions where the temptation is strong to read in one's theoretical commitments via sympathetically drawn narratives, the negative result is often the most significant finding; the ability to retract an argument when evidence does not support it is essential for observation.

7.1 The Economy of Access and the Problem of Social Transformation

The conclusions also situate the article within the area of social transformation in which it is embedded. Social transformation, as defined by Castles (2010), is a profound change to how a society is ordered, distinct from any order's inevitable step-by-step adjustment, asking in relation to any post-conflict order what that order has done to, rather than simply stabilized, the relations through which conflict played itself out. Polanyi's (2001) argument for embeddedness gives us the other coordinate: whereas his great transformation was a disembedding of a self-regulating market from social relations, the post-conflict Hargeisa economy offers an obverse – one never disembedded, where credit, land and protection flow from genealogical standing, not from price. Read from this perspective, the economy of access, then, is an example of stabilization without transformation: the order has stabilized the exchange relations by binding them to descent, which provides their stability, but to bind the two forecloses transformation because it makes access distribution a function of an order price cannot reshuffle.

Transformation would not be increased flow because money flows past the gate without moving it but transformed relations of access. Named in this discourse, the article contributes to the literature on social transformation by illustrating, at the level of the loan and mediation, how the economy stabilizes without transformation and where a possible transformation lies, in social structures of access, rather than flows of resources. Akoth (2026), applying the same frame to the Somaliland post-conflict era, calls this "the underdevelopment of bridging and linking social capital relative to bonding capital" as the basis on which the exclusion system operates. Transformation would thus not be flow, but rather a conversion of the bonding closure that seals the gate into bridging relationships across which cooperation can occur, a slow, difficult social-rather than resources-based transformation that no aid programme can bring about.

7.2 The Gate and the Political Settlement

The gate is the transactional surface of Hargeisa's political settlement, and the political-settlements literature points to the channel. Khan's (2010) work defines settlement as the distribution of holding power upon which a society's institutions are founded, and argues that formal rules are only stable to the extent that they accord with this distribution. Otherwise they are " absorbed as exceptions. The economy of access" is this proposition at the point of transaction: each gate is the point where the settlement's distribution of holding power among lineages is actually realized – one loan, one dispute, one title, one appointment at a time. It is the settlement's reluctance to permit a rule to enforce itself against the lineages upon which it relies, rather than some abstract rule, that turned away the minority-clan woman; and the loan initiative was welcomed, not resisted, to the extent that it could be treated as a legitimate exception. Roy's informality-from-above fills in the other gap in the story: the unenforced minority-protection rule is not a failure to penetrate but an exercise of discretion-an "unofficial" rule kept on the books to be selectively disregarded whenever its enforcement would "be too costly or time-consuming." This can even be seen at scale. Indeed, recent macro-scholarship has demonstrated how these dynamics produce concentrated access in a thin cross-border elite (Elder, 2021; Norman, 2026), who we document here have enforced this logic on a transaction-by-transaction basis. The meeting of the political-settlements framing and the gatekeeper story also helps resolve a puzzle left unresolved by the latter. Cooper's work explains the gatekeeper's position but not how or why he has power to hold it. The political-settlements approach, meanwhile, explains the source of the gatekeeper's power, in terms of his or her political settlement's distribution of holding power, but offers less on how it is expressed in practice on transaction by transaction. Put together, the two approaches help explain not just the gate but why its guardians can secure it.

The gate is the site on which a settlement's political distribution of holding power can be effectively translated into real and tangible allocation of land, credit, jobs, security, and voice. And for that reason, the order cannot be reformed piece by piece. For any piece which is passed out via the gate passes it out under the settlement's terms, and the only thing which could alter these terms is alteration of the terms themselves – a change to who is held to possess the holding power to bring it into effect.

7.3 Working on the Terms of Access: Implications for Intervention Design

The practical claim is one about intervention design, and rests on a distinction between working through the terms of access, and working on them. Working through is to deliver some good, credit, title, training, a seat at a mediation by way of the existing gatekeepers on the presumption that reaching community means filtering the good through the customary authority that represents it. This is what the loans initiative did, with its predictable and generalizable lesson: goods passed through the gate pass through according to the gate's logic, which is exclusivity, so that any intervention that delivers goods without disturbing the gate reinforces it. These are not pointless things; a loaned and repaid dollar is a real good; but they are not inclusive, and measuring what we have provided in the good we've supplied and not in the gate that remains is to mistake the one for the other. Working on the terms of access requires acting on all three dimensions of the gate: to make a good's association with a lineage claim loose, and distribute entitlements instead by need or residence, or on account of both; to construct the bridging ties that the bonding trap describes in absentia: via cross-lineage cooperatives or enterprises; and to contest the naturalization of settlement in its own religious and cultural terms; the last approach has proved the most promising: it has, most recent reviews suggest, the advantage of working with the grain of legitimacy (Carter, 2021). The people most active in this work, then, are not the external development agencies with resources that must pass through the gate, but rather those who are excluded, and those who ally themselves with the excluded; the rule of thumb is this: assess the gate, not the goods.

In addition to the agents of this work, the sequencing is of importance. Given that the deepest, least attractive and thus most resisted interventions act upon the terms of accounting itself, a frontal assault is unlikely; a more viable pathway involves the step-wise construction of bridging ties and alternative institutions which create avenues of access beyond those controlled solely by the order of descent; in such ways access can come gradually to the place that makes it plausible to challenge the terms of ownership of the gate, and it may even become desirable. Women's collectives, groups of minorities, youth clubs, progressive and more senior leaders, the returning diaspora bearing alternative frameworks – these are the vehicles for such incremental work; in addition, the religious leadership whose blessing may make a more inclusive reading of one's status seem acceptable may well prove to be among the most potent of its allies. Such interventions will not be rapid; no outcomes are certain; but only interventions working on the gate itself are, rather than reinforcing it, likely to work toward its dismantling.

7.4 The Companion Analysis and the Comparative Horizon

While here we find that the object of clan control in the economy is a gate rather than a commodity, the companion article finds that the object of clan control in the representative order is a standing rather than a policy, a settlement rather than votes; the gate and what the companion article calls the unit of account are, in fact, the same mechanism functioning in different spheres of the social order; they both connect access to some genealogical marker, and they both produce social order by closure. Externalization of costs here, and bifurcation there: both aspects of the same order, a single settlement with a shared effect when some

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portion of its clientele is excluded and then, at least provisionally, replaced by some portion of what the other half calls the unit of account, that is to say, of personhood rather than votes. The same mechanism appears everywhere an ascriptive marker, some such credential, to borrow and adapt a phrase of Nancy Hirschman, rather than a purchaseable commodity defines eligibility: descent, of course, but also the notion of native in eastern Congo and Cote d'Ivoire, of religion in Lebanon, or Mamdani's native authority.

The mechanisms are the same; as a special case, and given that it's ascriptive and unpurchaseable and has remittances available in amounts large enough to test whether buying access is now possible even though access is structured by ascription, Hargeisa should serve almost as a laboratory for precisely those questions that may be tested with much greater precision elsewhere. Of course, as all scholars and researchers must stress, the limitations of our claims are that of one city, at one point in time. Thus, our assertion about the nature of clan-mediated economic activity is limited in its scope; and single-country case studies cannot make definitive judgments about the capacity of an economy in which most residents find themselves outside the clan- mediated networks of economic activity. As I will argue later, this latter problem will need to be handled by other approaches that examine, over time, the ways that the exclusion that defines this city, and for that matter much of Africa today, gets managed by those who stand outside and, in part, around those who are inside.

8. Conclusion

The research undertaken in this article aimed to examine the role of inter-clan alliance in mobilizing resources, sustaining economic cooperation, and ensuring collective security in post-conflict Hargeisa. The results of the study point to a different pattern of resource mobilization and security than is generally described in existing literature. While the study finds that inter-clan alliances are central to the post-conflict peace in Hargeisa and are effective in mobilizing resources, fostering economic cooperation, and providing collective security, these functions are not the result of cross-clan enterprise, of which the corpus contains no examples. Rather, they stem from a gatekeeping order in which the clan exercises control over access, not the price of goods, but rather the authority to allow entry. Access to credit, land, mediation, and security is, in effect, permitted based on genealogical status, and this ordering mechanism maintains stability by systematic cost externalization on groups such as minority lineages, women, youth, and the returning diaspora, who have weak or no standing to demand access through the gate. In this sense, stability and exclusion are merely opposite sides of the same coin.

The article offers three principal contributions. First, from an empirical perspective, it describes an access-based economy that is in direct contrast to the transaction-based economy previously presumed by the literature, based on a rigorously tested negative finding that is transparently reported. Second, it proposes a theoretical explanation for the order that integrates stability and exclusion: gatekeeping by descent, with the costs externalized on the genealogically excluded, which is then located within the Negotiated Hybrid Stability Framework as the face of the stability-inclusion paradox.

It highlights how resource allocation initiatives that depend on customary institutions reinforce the current patterns of distribution and posits that inclusive interventions should target the terms of access rather than merely the volume of resources. Although the post-conflict peace in Hargeisa is undeniably a success in the face of past conflict, the clan alliances that support this peace also maintain a system that generates high costs for certain segments of the population. Redistribution of these costs falls outside the scope of the present article, but it will be explored in the subsequent work that focuses on power-sharing and representation.

In recognizing the costs of this system, it is not the intention to wish it away. The alternative would, as is still well-known, have been the city's destruction, and nothing in this analysis should diminish the considerable accomplishment of having rebuilt and defended it. The purpose is to describe the costs accurately, and in doing so, to open up the question of their redistribution without the comfort of denial. This study shows what a stable post-conflict society can look like when the unit that has restored peace is more narrowly constituted than the population living within it, and the task for future research and policy is to determine the conditions for greater inclusion through a renegotiation of the gate, rather than working only with or through it.

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