RESEARCH ARTICLE

War's Everyday: Normalizing Violence and Legitimizing Power [1]

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ABSTRACT:

The article studies the everyday of violent conflicts and wars. It uses Somalia as a case study to explore how ordinary people experience and legitimize actors of violence. Building on biographic interviews, I show how violence became a normalized aspect of daily lives and was integrated in the habitus of people who developed the ability to routinely respond to it. However, I also show, that the specific temporality of violence impedes its full routinization and normalization. Legitimation processes in Somalia are marked by the tension of the routinized extraordinariness that protracted violence generates. Unsurprisingly, therefore, legitimation was mainly driven by experiences of security. These experiences were closely tied to four factors: clan membership, mobility, justice, and patriarchal conventions. These findings demonstrate the need to further develop a relational and processual understanding of legitimation that takes account of the everyday, as it is here that the actions of violent groups are felt, discussed, agreed-upon, rejected, or contested.

KEYWORDS:

War, Normalization of Violence, Armed Groups, Rebel Rule, Legitimacy, Everyday, Somalia

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1. Introduction

The interest of civil war research in the social orders and forms of rule established by non-state armed groups increased considerably in the last decades (Clapham 1998; Bakonyi, Hensell, and Siegelberg 2006; Schlichte 2009; Mampilly 2011; Arjona et al 2015a; Hoffmann and Verweijen 2019). Research into actors of violence and their attempts to control territories and populations is often embedded in the discourse on state fragility. The uncertainty about the future of the state rubbed off on fundamental political concepts that had hitherto been closely tied to it, including security (Booth 2007; Paris 2001), sovereignty (Stepputat and Hansen 2005) and citizenship (Swyngedouw 2005). The *governance* discourse even detached the business of governing from the state, which also cast questions of political legitimacy in a new light (critical Dean 2007, 6–8; Schlichte 2012).

Somalia is often used to showcase the fragility of statehood. The country also demonstrates the limited utility of state-centred political concepts. The Somali state collapsed in 1991, less than two years after the start of a civil war. Violent conflicts have continued ever since, bringing forth a succession of violent actors who used a wide range of technologies to assert their power and to establish authority in the territories they aimed at controlling. Researchers have investigated the modalities of power executed by warlords and their clan-based militias, who divided the country into small fiefdoms and asserted radically localized forms of rule between 1995 and 2006 (Menkhaus 2006; Bakonyi 2013). They have explored the rise of Islamist actors, most prominently the Islamist militia al-Shabaab which established its authority over large parts of southern and central Somalia between 2008 and 2012 (Hansen 2013). International efforts to counter the Islamist insurgency and to rebuild a central state, including the activities of the African Union's military intervention (AMISOM), have also been examined (Williams 2014). Yet, much less attention has been devoted to the relationships between these violent actors and the populations under their control, and to the question of how the latter regarded the former's activities. Generally, the literature on rebel governance tends to focus on the societal conditions under which armed groups mobilize support and the strategies they use while the perspectives of those exposed to their rule are understudied. Authors like Mampilly (2011) or Kalyvas (2006) emphasized civilian agency and significantly contributed to the understanding of relationships between violent actors and civilians. They, however, also focussed on the strategies armed groups employ to win support and did not systematically explore the viewpoints of the ruled. This article provides a contribution towards closing that gap. It pursues the question of how people in Somalia experienced the attempts of violent actors to rule. Focussing on everyday experiences with violence, power, and authority of armed groups, the article is guided by the questions: which aspects of rule met with public approval, which were rejected, and what were the respective reasons?

To answer these questions, I start by discussing the concepts of legitimacy (2) and everyday experience (3) arguing that the willingness to recognise a political actor and the order they establish as legitimate are rooted in everyday experiences. After an overview of the conflict dynamics in Somalia (4), I present the empirical approach and material (5). Overall, I conducted thirty-one biographical interviews with Somali refugees in Kenya. These show that the lives of many people in Somalia are characterised by protracted violence and crises (5.1). It is, therefore, hardly a surprise if the legitimacy of the ruling groups and the orders they establish is judged primarily in terms of whether they provide security. However, the interviewees' understanding of security was complex. I analyse this understanding and the associated ideas about legitimacy in the last section,

which is divided in four themes whose relevance became apparent in the interviews: clan membership (5.2), mobility (5.3), justice (5.4), and patriarchal convention (5.5). I conclude (6) by placing the findings in a processual understanding of legitimacy. The empirics point towards an iterative process of legitimation, in which the ruling group must continuously prove its worth in the everyday lives of the ruled.

2. About Power and Authority: The Social Practice of Legitimation

Max Weber conceptualised legitimacy as a central category of social life and as constitutive of social order (Weber 1980, 16). Legitimacy is, therefore, decisive to the transformation of power into authority. Whereas power refers to the ability to impose one's own will on others, authority implies compliance on the part of the ruled, who believe in the rightfulness of the authority and behave accordingly (Weber 1980, 28f.).

Expanding Weber's understanding of legitimacy, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1991; Luckmann 1987) have emphasized the ordinary and processual character of legitimation, which they embedded in their wider sociology of knowledge. Accordingly, legitimation is the social practice of attributing meaning to the social institutions and the relations of power prevalent in a society. Practices of legitimation comprise explanations and justifications that provide an existing institutional order with cognitive validity and normative dignity. By explaining (cognitive) and justifying (normative) things, actions, and relations, the legitimation process generates and distributes knowledge and values and thereby fosters social stability. Ultimately, legitimation causes that which *is* to appear as something that *should be* (Luckmann 1987, 110; Berger and Luckman 1991, 111).

The social practice of legitimation plays out in analytically distinguishable spheres (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 112–115). At the level of the everyday, the meanings of institutions and interactions are learned and internalized to a point where they no longer require explanation or justification. Legitimation at this everyday level designates the transformation of knowledge into certainty, creating the "taken-for-granted cognitive […] and normative […] operating procedures" of a society (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 131). Berger and Luckman's explanations resemble Bourdieu's concept of habitus formation. The habitus is constituted as embodied past, as it comprises an ensemble of "durable and transportable dispositions", internalized experiences that provide generative "schemes of perception, thought and action" and thus structure practices (Bourdieu 1992, 53, 54). It produces the *doxa,* the pre-reflective, naïve, and unquestioned set of fundamental beliefs that undergird social practice (Bourdieu 1992: 68). The habitus links past experiences to expectations and forms a scheme of interpretation into which new experiences are integrated and against which future expectations are developed (see next section).

Practices of legitimation differ in the degree of abstraction of their explanations and justifications. While proverbs, moral maxims or folktales directly explain and encourage proper behaviour and/or discourage deviance, specialist and expert knowledge operates at a higher degree of abstraction. At the highest aggregated level, however, is the "symbolic universe" (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 113), a coherent and harmonized system of symbols and meanings that is ideally shared by all members of society. The social practices that eventually transform power into authority, reproduce existing relations of power and institutions and start to take them for granted require empirical investigation. Political sociology and anthropology provide a string of further components to understand this transformation. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, emphasized that power is experienced as self-evident and natural once its material and social sources are concealed, disguised, and eventually misrecognized and euphemized in moral concepts (honour, loyalty, kinship), a process he theorises as effects of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1983; Bourdieu 1992, 12ff.). James Scott's (1987, 307–314) investigations of authority are building on Bourdieu's concept of euphemization to elucidate how power is socially framed as natural and thereby disguised. Scott, however, also demonstrates how dominant orders can

be challenged by alternative explanations and values, so-called "hidden transcripts", that circulate parallel to dominant narratives. Hidden transcripts remain invisible for those in power but constitute parallel lifeworlds that are only accessible to some groups (Scott 1987, 284–303; Scott 1990). Hidden transcripts do usually not disturb the dominant social order, but they can, if certain conditions are met, compete with the official transcript, challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions, and question the legitimacy of an established order.

The present contribution builds on this processual conceptualisation of legitimacy and uses biographic interviews to investigate legitimation processes in the everyday of the ruled. The shift from the perspective of strategies for gaining legitimacy by those who rule to the experiences with the authority of those who are ruled generates insights into some of the explanations and justifications that the ruled use to (de)legitimize the actions of armed groups. Before I attend to the research findings, I outline my understanding of everyday experiences and of violence as an existential experience.

3. Routines and Ruptures in the Everyday: Violence as Existential Experience

Understanding war requires attending to everyday experiences in, of and with it (Sylvester 2013). According to Koselleck (1989), experiences enable human action and, therefore, constitute a basic anthropological category. People gather experiences and connect these with an expectation that the future will unfold in familiar patterns.[2] Both experiences and expectations are constituted in the present, and they are intrinsically interwoven as they link the present to the past and the future respectively. They differ in their temporality, however. Experiences are lived, internalised, gathered, and recalled, constituting a "present past" anchored in each person (Koselleck 1989, 354). Expectations are also developed in the present, based on accumulated experiences, but constitute a "present future" as they comprise a spectrum of anticipated possibilities and aspirations. Expectations are adapted, dropped, or transformed in the context of new experiences.

Building on Koselleck, Pickering (2004) suggests conceptualising everyday life as experiences that oscillate backwards and forwards. Most scholars associate the everyday with the uniformity of recurring events and the regularity of repeated activities that are swiftly integrated into the already formed "space of experiences" (Koselleck) or, as Bourdieu would call it, habitus. This routinisation generates normality and makes the future appear foreseeable. The everyday can, therefore, be associated with security, safety and belonging on one side and monotony and boredom on the other (Felski 1999, 22, 29; Lefebvre and Lewich 1987, 10).

The monotony of the everyday is punctured by spontaneous, novel events and experiences. New experiences may overlay previous ones and can demand an adaptation or an expansion of the habitus. In extreme situations, people can be exposed to existential experiences that produce strong tensions or even contradict the existing frame of explanation and justification. These experiences, which Bourdieu (2013, 169) links to moments of crisis, disrupt the *doxa* as they question the unsaid and reflect on what was previously taken for granted. Existential experiences that challenge interpretative patterns originate in events that are experienced as extraordinary and spectacular (Zolberg 1972). The most fundamental existential experience, according to Berger and Luckmann (1991, 119), is confrontation with death, and dying the most terrifying threat of all.

This article discusses experiences of violence, power and authority during violent conflicts, and thus in times when existential experiences are prevalent. After all, physical violence on a mass scale, and thus destruction, injury, pain, and death, is the defining characteristic of war. Novel events and experiences can, even under less dramatic circumstances, challenge the internalised schemes of interpretation. In times of protracted violence, however, existential threats can occur with such a regularity that they become endemic

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[2] Koselleck (1989, 349–375) identified the interruption of the tight link between experiences and expectations, and thus between past, present, and future, as characteristic of modernity.

and part of the "fabric of everyday normality" (Vigh 2008, 9). The article analyses the normalization of violence and thus of existential experiences in Somalia. After a brief introduction to the history of violence, I explore how the actions of armed groups in Somalia, and their attempts to rule and to establish their authority upon places and people are experienced, explained and justified (or not) by ordinary civilians.

4. The Long War in Somalia

Somalia has experienced consecutive phases of violence since 1988. The collapse of the state apparatus in 1991 initiated new rounds of violence, which concentrated on the southern half of the country. Conflict dynamics and actors of violence changed over time: Clan militias were formed in the 1980s to fight against the military dictatorship (1969-91), but then turned against each other after they captured the capital at the turn of 1991/92. The subsequent war caused tremendous suffering and initiated the first-ever humanitarian intervention of the UN (1992–95) which de-escalated violence but did not achieve lasting peace- and statebuilding. Clan elders in cooperation with (clan) militia leaders (warlords) and a new business class (often war profiteers) re-established localised forms of control and divided southern Somalia into a patchwork of clan-based fiefdoms (Menkhaus 2006; Bakonyi 2013).

In the context of the "global war on terror", the warlords were invited to peace negotiations in Kenya (2002-2004), which led to the formation of Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP) and Government (TFG). The TFG was unable to roll out its authority in Somalia. Among its contenders was the newly formed Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), an umbrella organisation of Islamist movements.[3] The UIC sought to establish an Islamic state and succeeded in expanding its power base across southern Somalia within just a few months in 2005. Before it could reach the Ethiopian border, Ethiopia's military intervened on the side of the TFG, defeated the UIC within a few weeks and enabled the TFG to establish its seat in Mogadishu in 2006. The new government was soon confronted with militant resistance, spearheaded by al-Shabaab, an Islamist militia formed from remnants of the UIC. Al-Shabaab conducted a successful guerrilla war against the TFG and its allies and controlled large parts of southern and central Somalia between 2008 and 2012, while the TFG clung to a few districts of Mogadishu. In the meantime, the number of AMISOM forces increased significantly, and the fight against al-Shabaab and for the control of Mogadishu intensified until al-Shabaab eventually withdrew its forces from Mogadishu and most other urban centres in southern Somalia during 2011 and 2012.

A change of presidency and the formation of a new parliament and government officially ended the transition phase in 2012. Although al-Shabaab lost the formal control of towns, it firmly established itself in rural areas and maintained an underground network in many cities where it continues to levy taxes and provide judicial services. The internationally recognized Federal Government of Somalia operates in practice through a 'series of city states' (Jaspars et al. 2019, iv), where both military and humanitarian aid are concentrated. Al-Shabaab continues attacks on military, political and civilian targets. Overall, the civil war and subsequent periods of violence have caused thousands of deaths. If there is one constant in the history of violence in Somalia, then it is the indifference of all the violent actors towards the suffering of the population.

5. Experiencing Power and Authority in Somalia: An Empirical Exploration

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[3] "Islamist" is used to characterize movements and organisations that want to establish authority based on Islamic principles.

To gain insights into relevant experiences of authority, I conducted thirty-one biographical interviews with Somali refugees in Nairobi, Kenya.[4] More men than women were ready to talk about their experiences, and the sample, therefore, comprises twenty-seven men and four women. Interviewees stemmed from different backgrounds, differed in age (21–67 years), clan affiliation and educational background (madrassa only to university). Most interviewees had been living in Kenya for less than two years and had previously spent their entire lives in Somalia. Of the three who had lived longer in Kenya, two returned regularly to Somalia, often for several months. Two interviewees were born and grew up in north-eastern Kenya but had spent several years in Somalia. Except for one man from Bosaaso, all interviewees had lived in the war-affected southern regions. However, the views presented are from people who decided to flee, and no interviewee supported al-Shabaab, albeit several had initially sympathized with the Islamist militia.

Interviewees were asked to narrate their life stories in the context of shifting armed actors and different types of rules, emphasizing the effects of political transitions. For the time after 2005, interviewees often referred to the presidents when dating events or identifying actors. These were, in chronological order: Abdiqasim Hassan (2000–04); Abdullahi Yusuf (2004–08), Sheikh Sharif (2009–12) and Hassan Sheikh (2012–17).

Thematic coding of the interview transcripts identified four recurrent themes related to practices of legitimation: "clan membership", "mobility", "justice" and "patriarchal conventions". Before unpacking each of the themes, I attend to the routinisation and normalization of violence interviewees described.

5.1 War as Everyday: The Normalization of Violence

The everyday is in many parts of Somalia characterised by violence, destruction, displacement, and death. All interviewees had a broad spectrum of experiences with violence, including fighting between clan militias, the bombardment of residential areas, suicide attacks, violent robberies, expulsions, and displacements. They spoke about the suddenness with which violence hits, and the destruction, fear, and pain it brought with it. Interviewees described how they "*could not sleep because of fear*" (Abdul, 25, Mogadishu), lost orientation and found themselves "*in a situation whereby you might not know what was going on*" (Ismael, 39, Beled Weyne) and where "*anything can happen*" (Hersi, 51, Kismaayo).[5]

Periods of intense violence alternated with longer periods of calm. Mustafa described how the attempts to establish a central government in Mogadishu from 2006 onwards were accompanied by waves of violence:

> *The situation was difficult during Abdullahi Yusuf [first TFG president] whereby there was a huge deployment of Ethiopian forces in Mogadishu. It was one of the worst periods that Somalia has witnessed. There was firing of artilleries all over. That time /..../ it turned worse because Ethiopians were indiscriminately firing mortars, killing women and children and even destroying buildings. Some of the people fled to areas at the outskirts of Mogadishu like Afgooye, Ceelasha Biyaha, and as far as up to central regions of Somalia, others fled to Baidoa and Beled Weyne town /.../. I fled to Afgooye /.../. We fled together because there was nobody who can survive there due to the indiscriminate shelling. /.../ After returning, and under the government of Sheikh Sharif [second TFG president] /.../*

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[4] The interviews were conducted in Kenya in 2014 and 2015, because security risks prevented travel and research in southern Somalia at that time.

[5] I use alias for interviewees but retain age and place of residence to allow contextualisation. The interviews were conducted in Somalia, with the help of an interpreter and transcribed into English by a native Somali speaker. Interview excerpts were copy-edited to remit for language errors.

the Ugandan troops [AMISOM] were firing mortars on civilian houses. That has led us to flee again to /.../ the outskirts of Mogadishu. Since that time /.../ I was regularly visiting Mogadishu /.../. But by then al-Shabaab militants were also there until I completely left /.../ 2014 (Mustafa, 41, Mogadishu).

Mustafa's account conveys an impression of the existential insecurity that people in Mogadishu experienced for years on end. Most interviewees experienced violence as random, arbitrary, and unpredictable. After the collapse of the state, people started carrying arms openly, shooting was heard almost daily, and killing became commonplace. The onset of violence interrupted the 'taken-for-granted' social procedures and people lacked the cognitive and normative schemes to provide unfolding events with meaning. Interviewees, for example, outlined how gunmen "*were [just] testing whether a bullet can kill someone*" (Mohamed, 28, Mogadishu) or that people were shot dead because gunmen were curious about the contents of a paper bag, even though they could "*see that the bag is empty*" (Yusuf, 50, Beled Weyne).

People in many parts of Somalia experienced prolonged phases of such existential threats, which they described as the loss of routines and of order and certainty. Loss is a central feature of crisis, a disruption of the *doxa* and thus of what is taken for granted (Vigh 2008, 16). People could not link their violent experiences with the past, as violence disrupted the 'routine adjustment of subjective and objective structures' that characterises the habitus development (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 131). In consequence, the certainty and 'practical feel' (Bourdieu) that the habitus provides, ceased to operate leading to disorientation, confusion, or even panic. This disorientation was described by Aisha who fled together with her mother from Mogadishu in 1991:

"People were fleeing in groups. We fled with a lot of people. There were militias looting but we used vehicles. In a situation when people are fleeing, a mother may even forget the children but take a pillowcase instead" (Aisha, 42, Bardhere and Mogadishu).

Violence interrupted routines and demanded rapid reactions. In the fast pace of unfolding events, earlier experiences and the knowledge and justification for social practices, became irrelevant while the future was experienced as unpredictable and beyond individual influence: "*You could only survive by luck, you have no choice*", is how Ibrahim (38, Lafoole) summarized this lack of certainty.

Ultimately, however, violence occurred so frequently that it was integrated in peoples' spectrum of experiences. Many interviewees described how they gradually became accustomed to violence:

I saw several people who have been killed as well as bodies lying all over the streets, [...]. It was horrible, but people have adapted to that kind of life (Mustafa, 41, Mogadishu).

Especially younger interviewees' accounts show how people were getting used to and adapting to violence. Mustafa, who was born in 1989 and thus in the context of war and state collapse, described his daily routines in Mogadishu:

*"I went to school, first madrassa [Koran school], then a private school. From there, we were playing around, mainly football. Security was not consistent, sometimes it was good, sometimes bad" (**Mustafa, 41,** Mogadishu).*

When asked to provide more detail about the security situation, he explained:

Sometimes clans clashed while we were playing football, and players were injured in the fights. Sometimes it happened that when two teams were playing, the game turned into

> *fights and players went to collect their guns/.../ Teenagers have guns, and even 10 years old people join al-Shabaab. They recruit from the Madrassas. Young people learned how quickly things could turn violent (Mustafa, 41, Mogadishu).*

They witnessed peers acquiring guns, and many young men found themselves under pressure to join a militia. Although the intensity of fighting declined at times, violence never stopped entirely. Mohamed recalled how people adapted to the shootings, describing how "civilians will duck and watch the two warring sides exchanging fire." One of these gunfights stood out:

> *One of the days, when I left my neighbourhood /.../, I encountered fighting between gunmen /.../. By then, all the civilians ducked behind things. But the surprising thing I saw was a goat, which also ducked behind me. The situation has trained not only human beings but the animals too (Mohamed, 28, Mogadishu).*

Mohamed's depiction that violence 'trains' people underline how far it had become part of the everyday frame of life. Violence was normalised. It was no longer remarkable that Mohammed had to take cover, he had done it many times before. The observation that even goats adapted their behaviour, was raised to show how normal violence had become. This form of normalization extended to violent attacks by al-Shabaab:

> *Sometimes, even when you are in a restaurant it may blow off, the restaurant, but it is not frequent. […] People have adapted to that kind of situation. Although there is fear, they don't mind, they just go. You may not know whether the place is under threat or not /.../. However, they [people] usually ignore it. (Ali, 25, Baidoa)*

People developed the ability to routinely react to violence as they integrated violent experiences into their habitus. Violence ultimately also shaped peoples' horizon of expectations. Violence often struck randomly. Ali above described how people were living in the awareness that violence can hit anyone, anywhere, and at any time. The expectation of violence, however, meant that it was no longer experienced as exceptional. A complete normalization of violence is, however, prevented by its specific temporality and rhythm. Although violence was expected, the interview excerpts above also demonstrate that it continued to be experienced as sudden, unpredictable, and random. Victims were hit by stray bullets; residential homes came under fire or were shelled for no apparent reason; and many people died because they were at the wrong place at the wrong time. Experiencing violence can never become completely normal, and it can neither be experienced as dull or monotonous. The certainty of violence is the cause of uncertainty. Even if violence becomes normal, it retains its extraordinariness – routinized extraordinariness. After all, the experience of violence remains existential. As violence always disrupts the taken for granted, it produces a shadow and generates delegitimizing effects (Schlichte 2009). Scarry (1985) once described the experience of violence as "the making and unmaking of the world". Violence can end lives, it inflicts pain, it wounds and mutilates. Once violence hits, it severely limits abilities to act. One can try to take cover and hope to remain physically untouched, but pain, death and loss can never be completely routinized. The normalization of violence, therefore, has clear limits. Normalization is, as Ali emphasized, based on wilful ignorance which itself is embedded in the expectation (or hope) that violence will not hit here and not today, or even if, not damage the own body.

The tension between the normalization of violence and violence's inherent extraordinariness, between routine and rupture, demands a special form of adaptation. Getting used to it requires ignorance. Teenagers played football knowing well how dangerous such games could become. People visited shops and restaurants knowing that these were potential targets for violent attacks. Fatima, who fled Somalia in 2003 but returned

for several weeks in 2016 to attend her brother's wedding, described the residents' ability to be aware of and nonetheless ignore the danger:

> *In 2016, I went back to Galmudug [central Somalia]. You stay and you hear gunfire. Sometimes I go under the bed to cover myself. Residents have adapted. They say 'You will die when your time is ready. Don't mind'. But I was scared (Fatima, 35, Mogadishu).*

Residents, so Fatima, got used to living a life in danger. The interview excerpt, however, also reveals how the tension between routine and rupture is mitigated and how meaning is assigned to events and actions that are otherwise experienced as senseless and meaningless. Violence confronts people with their mortality, and the fear and terror that this instils needs to be mitigated "so as not to paralyse the continued performance of the routines of everyday life" (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 119). Expressions such as "you will die when your time is ready" and "your death is already written in God's book" are indicative of attempts to integrate violence into an explanatory and normative order. Even the most meaningless and accidental violent death could now be re-interpreted as personal fate and as the will of God. Such interpretations allow people to cope with fear. They also legitimize violence and delink it from a subject. Not the perpetrators, but personal fate or divine will decide when violence hits. Violence became an accepted part of a social reality which people felt that they could neither influence nor change. They could, however, try to ignore it.

Violence, to draw an interim conclusion, became omnipresent, was interwoven into the social and individual space of experience (habitus) and shaped the horizon of expectations. Although violence can never be fully routinized, experiences with violence shaped people's interpretation of the past; structured their perception of the present; and influenced the options and possibilities they staked out for their future. Prolonged confrontation with violence eventually fostered schemes of interpretation that de-linked violence from perpetrators and placed it beyond 'human activity and signification' (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 107). Such initial processes of legitimation make violence bearable, acknowledge it as 'necessity and fate' to be 'lived through as such' (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 107). Such cognitive and normative rationalisations need to be read against the context of lives lived in a perpetual crisis, the (always incomplete) routinisation of existential experiences and the prolonged uncertainty and insecurity that had become part and parcel of people's lives in southern Somalia. Security improvements were therefore key for accepting the rules set by armed groups. The perception of security and the way people interpreted, explained, and justified the security provision of armed groups were inter-connected with clan affiliation, mobility, and justice – topics that I will detail in the following sections.

5.2 Legitimacy and the Ambivalence of Clan Affiliation

Given the (always incomplete) normalization of violence in Somalia, it is hardly surprising if processes of legitimation – providing normative and cognitive rationalisations for the action of armed organisations – were foremost related to their ability to enhance physical security. Security can be broadly conceptualized as condition in which routines unfold largely uninterrupted. Security, however, is not given but perceived and interpreted, embedded in previous experiences, part of the habitus and reflective of power relations. In the context of normalised violence and fragmented political authority, clan membership and place of residence became dominant features for security perceptions. The politicization and violent articulation of clan affiliation and its effects on settlement patterns and the reorganisation of political authority has already received scholarly attention (Menkhaus 2006; Bakonyi 2013; Hoehne 2016). Much less is known about how the deep-seated clanisation of the society is experienced, explained (cognitive) and justified (normative) by the population.

The interviews point towards an ambivalence of clan-based processes of legitimation. Older people tended to compare the fragmented authority of the warlords (1995–2006) to the mass violence that shattered the country 1991/92 and, therefore, often experienced their rule as rather peaceful and safe. Farah (52, Wajid), for example, explained: *"The security by then was good, I mean in every area its locals were maintaining the security, so it wasn't bad."* When further prompted, he remembered the proliferation of checkpoints and how security depended on clan affiliation:

> *Yes, there were several checkpoints aimed at extorting money from passengers, and there were also gunmen who erected checkpoints in the bush. Sometimes they loot and even hijack vehicles. But the checkpoints in our areas and even in the Gedo region, you could pass there without paying because they recognize people. These were clan-based roadblocks [...]. Generally, the security was good. (Farah, 52, Wajid)*

The localization of political rule de-escalated violence, as violent actors had to adhere to local rules of conduct, at least to some extent. Ismael (39, Beled Weyne) described how elders played an important role in reconciling conflicts and resolving differences between rival sub-clans and their militias. In this way, warlords and their militias anchored themselves in well-known institutions, and their cooperation with elders enabled people to explain and validate their actions. The clan provided the interpretative scheme through which people could make sense of the often-confusing political developments.

Farah's and Ismael's rather positive assessments were nonetheless not shared by all interviewees. Others foregrounded the random behaviour of militias and the many forms of harassment people experienced at checkpoints. Said (35, Mogadishu) worked as a minibus driver in Mogadishu and recalled how he had to stop his vehicle and pay the militias at the many checkpoints that divided the city. Checkpoints are governmental technologies, as they are ordering spaces and people while demarcating territorial claims which were often demonstrated violently. People were categorised on basis of their clan affiliation, selectively threatened, harassed, humiliated, robbed, and sometimes injured or killed at these checkpoints.

But all in all, interviewees across Somalia, and even from Mogadishu, a city contested by various militias, reported a general reduction in violence. Their accounts do suggest that violence was altogether more limited and became more predictable. Heinrich Popitz (1997, 157) coined the term "basic legitimacy" for this recognition of "the ordering value of the existent order". Basic legitimacy provides the first step in transforming power into authority. Popitz's analysis of legitimation processes aligns with Berger and Luckmann's (1991, 71) insight that order is valued because it allows routines, and provides relief from continuous questioning, reflection, and decision making. The link to clan-affiliation provided the common maxims that Weber considered as crucial for order-making. Read through the lens provided by Berger and Luckmann (1991), kinship resonated with people's experiences, provided cognitive as well as normative schemes through which the actions of warlords could be evaluated, explained, and justified. It, therefore, became an important feature for legitimation, without, however, being able to transcend the '*should be'* threshold, in which people also attributed normative validity to the clan militias' rule.

This became apparent when the warlords were disempowered by the Islamic Court Union (ICU) in 2005. Most interviewees emphasized how their security improved further and rationalised the betterment with the delinking of clan and authority and homogenisation of rule:

> *Before you had to beg at roadblocks while travelling. Under the ICU it was without clan pressure and without fear (Suleiman, 38, Huddur).*

This judgement was expanded to al-Shabaab:

> *Before al-Shabaab, from Luuq to Beled Weyne [from southern to central Somalia], there were several checkpoints, maybe 100, managed by clan militias. People were controlled according to their clans. Every clan manned a checkpoint. In that way, you had to pay everywhere, and you had to deal with militias everywhere. These checkpoints were dismantled by Shabaab. /.../ As an ordinary civilian, you were safe because the checkpoints were removed. (Abas, 43, Wajid).*

As a positive side-effect of the depoliticization of clan identities, interviewees also noted a reduction in revenge killings:[6] *"You did not have to fear that you were killed because you belong to a clan. They did not care about clan"* (Suleyman, 38, Huddur).

Altogether, the intertwinement of clan and political authority was evaluated with mixed feelings. The establishment of clan-based forms of rule, especially the cooperation between the clan militias and elders, had improved interviewees' security and allowed the development of some routines. However, interviewees also emphasized how the politicization of clan generated new insecurities and carried the potential for violence. In Somalia, clan affiliation provided a well-known mechanism for social ordering, even before the war. The literature, therefore, tends to assume that the mobilisation of clan-based loyalties nearly automatically provided violent actors with legitimacy. However, legitimacy is neither just given nor static. Even authority based on widely acknowledged kinship patterns (clan), which can easily be integrated in available explanatory and normative schemes, need to prove their worth in the everyday. If alternative forms of order work better and are further improving security, then they may find wider appeal. Many interviewees, for example, supported the ICU's attempts to defeat the warlords and several also al-Shabaab's fight against the TFG and their allies. The rule of the Islamists, however, did also not endure the test of the everyday. Albeit violent conflicts and crime diminished under Islamist rule, security did not necessarily improve (see below).

5.3 Legitimacy and Mobility

Mobility was a recurring topic in the biographic narratives and closely aligned to security. On the one side, displacement is a common effect of violence, and most interviewees had been repeatedly displaced, often settling in one of the make-shift camps that surround most Somali cities.[7] On the other side, however, violence can enforce immobility,[8] and interviewees often associated insecurity with the loss of mobility:

> *Then, the civil war began in 1991, and everything became troublesome. You could not travel to another region. So, there was no movement, you have to stay indoors within the territory of your sub-clan (Abdul, 55, Bosaso).*

The proliferation of checkpoints disrupted mobility. Checkpoints are a spatio-material expression of governmental power, displayed as ability to control the movements of others (Bakonyi 2011, 192-193). Interviewees described how they had to negotiate and pay for passage at these checkpoints, which always bore the risk of violence. They, therefore, tried to reduce their movement to minimize this risk. The lack of mobility impeded their livelihood. Abdul (55, Bosaso), a trader, lost access to markets in south and central Somalia,

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[6] In the absence of state-based judicial services, collective blood revenge remains common. Any male member of a kinship group can be punished for a crime committed by another member. Homicides often set off vicious circles of revenge killings in Somalia.

[7] The link between displacement and urbanisation is discussed in Bakonyi and Chonka (2022).

[8] See the detailed discussion in Lubkeman (2008, esp. chap. 6) who outlines how wartime immobility in Mozambique is shaped by power imbalances.

where his clan was not present. Hassan (67, Huddur), a nomadic livestock herder, lost access to pasture and water and could not maintain his herds. Sometimes, violent clashes stopped movements altogether. Several interviewees recalled situations when they had been trapped. Abdul for example remembered how he and his family got stuck in a location between the Ethiopian intervention forces and al-Shabaab:

> *We were stranded between SOS and Hilwa [in Mogadishu] /.../, we were stuck in the middle due to heavy fighting between the groups (Abdul, 25, Mogadishu).*

Unable to flee, people faced long periods of waiting:

> *A night when a mortar shell hit a neighbour […] some [people] died, others were injured. We needed to rush to a hospital, but it was around midnight. But there was a curfew, there was no way to move after 5 pm. So, the options were to be either killed by al-Shabaab or to just wait. We could not do anything but had to wait with people bleeding and dying (Nur, ~45, Mogadishu).*

People forced into immobility experience the power of others. Enforced immobility engenders feelings of power- and helpless, feelings that were in Nur's case underscored by the urgency with which action was needed to save lives. Less dramatic losses of mobility were described by many. Mustafa outlined how people hardly ever left their homes in Mogadishu: "*from home, you go to the mosque, you sleep, and you eat since there was nothing you can do*" (Mustafa, 41, Mogadishu). Inactivity and boredom also characterised the lives of those who had fled to the large make-shift camps that displaced people established at the outskirts of cities. After al-Shabaab took over, people often described that they preferred to stay at home not to attract the attention of the Islamists (see below).

Periods of violence, displacement and destruction were experienced as times of inactivity, waiting, and even boredom, a form of boredom generated by fear and insecurity and, therefore, experienced differently form the boredom that characterizes routines. Vigh (2008, 11) has shown how "endemic crises" do not necessarily curtail agency but rather limit possibilities for actions. The close association between security and mobility in Somalia underscores Vigh's finding. People who were caught between warring factions were deprived of their ability to act at all, while the immobility imposed by prolonged conflicts points towards reduced options to act. The endemic insecurity experienced in Somalia severely restrained peoples' physical movement, reduced their social contacts and abilities to shape their own lives. The power relations established by armed groups were, therefore, often evaluated in terms of their effects on mobility.

5.4 Legitimacy through Justice

The depoliticization of clan affiliation was also regarded as progress concerning justice. The ICU established a network of courts, which was later expanded by al-Shabaab. The Islamists provided clear rules of behaviour based on their interpretation of the sharia. They executed judicial functions, punished crimes, and individualized punishment. All this was initially welcomed by many interviewees. Al-Shabaab's strict policing further led to a noticeable decline in violence and crimes. The courts dealt with disputes and crimes according to Islamic law and usually without heed to the clan affiliation of the parties. Several interviewees felt that their judicial services were "fair":

> *They [al-Shabaab] will fairly deal with it [conflicts], particularly when it comes to land disputes. They will carry out an investigation to establish the real landowner /.../ So generally, it was fair, the way they handle disputes (Barre, 37, Bardhere).*

> *They also brought some kind of justice, especially for vulnerable people and for minorities. In the clan system, they [minorities] were disturbed, their land was taken. Now minorities got their land back. /.../ Also, Jareer [racially stigmatised minorities] were now equal. Some became leaders, some joined the army. Minorities were equally respected (Suleiman, 38, Huddur).*

Unlike the clan militias, al-Shabaab's fighters were regarded as orderly and disciplined. They patrolled the streets "*like normal forces"* and "*they did not bother the locals*" (Barre, 37, Bardhere). Their forces were "*trained to stay away from people. They were separated and lived in barracks and did not intermingle*" (Suleyman, 38, Huddur).

Interviewees appreciated the physical separation of the Islamist's forces, the wearing of uniforms, and that they received training, interpreting it as professionalisation compared with the clan militias. However, interviewees expressed rather mixed feelings towards al-Shabaab's indoctrination of young men. Suleyman (38, Huddur), for example, described how young men changed after they joined al-Shabaab *"they received training, and they received a new ideology"*. Their separate accommodation was also interpreted as an attempt to uproot them from their families and from traditions. Suleyman articulated the widespread belief that al-Shabaab subjected the young men to brainwashing, changing their character and behaviour.

Al-Shabaab's initial popularity was mainly based on its successes in reducing violence and crime, enforcing laws, and setting behavioural norms independently of clan affiliation and based on the Sharia, thus on widely accepted norms. This provided people with a sense of certainty and security, which they were unable to sustain. As time went on, al-Shabaab's manner of rule was described as increasingly unpredictable, and perceived as arbitrary with actions that, once more, undermined the development of everyday routines.

The implementation of Islamic laws was mainly appreciated, but there was less enthusiasm for how al-Shabaab applied the laws. One interviewee criticised that they punished minor violations extremely harshly, for example amputating a hand for petty theft (Barre, 37, Bardhere). Another complained that al-Shabaab passed judgment without consulting the perpetuators or victims of crimes and without taking into consideration the broader context:

> *If the ICU arrested you, they consult and consider context and release or kill you. Under Shabaab you were arrested and killed without consideration (Yusuf, 50, Beled Weyne).*

Arrests were, according to Hersi (51, Qansadhere), often based on false or questionable accusations. Hersi and Farah (52, Wajid) emphasized how al Shabaab were creating a new form of insecurity:

> *Security-wise they were good but to whom? Only to persons who are not targeted. If you are not, you can continue travelling, even in the night-time. /.../. But, if you are the target, then you are done. [...]. And you don't know if you are the target. /.../. We were not happy with them, because you didn't know if you are on their list or not. (Hersi, 51, Qansadhere)*

> *Once your life is under threat [meaning you are accused of wrongdoing], they [al-Shabaab] could do anything to your family. What kind of security are they maintaining? You are always in a state of fear, you can't talk, and you can't move freely. I don't think that they were good in the security sector. (Farah, 52, Wajid).*

Al-Shabaab itself was increasingly regarded as a danger. It represented a new and previously unknown type of threat, as the organisation used violence in ways that could not be integrated into already established spaces of experiences and schemes of interpretation for violent actions as their atrocities did not easily align to what

had already become normalized (clan-based) violence. Additionally, and as outlined above, interviewees had often experienced violence as random. Before, with a little luck, one could avoid violence or be protected by God's will. Under al-Shabaab, violence was employed strategically. It affected those who ended up, for whatever reason, on "their list". Not knowing the rules of who "became a target" left people once more in deep uncertainty. Not knowing the rules initiated doubts over al-Shabaab's interpretation of the Sharia:

> *The starting of the group and the way they approached it [governance] was very nice. It was only later that they were starting to contradict the Islamic Sharia (Abdo, 45, Mogadishu).*

Al-Shabaab's governance was by many interviewees experienced as increasingly violent and erratic. Their punishments, and especially the public display of mutilated corpses, also provoked horror and dismay:

> *Another boy, a son of my cousin, came to evening prayers to the mosque. After that Shabaab caught and beheaded him. /.... When the family asked why, they said he has visited government soldiers and that is why we killed him. When the family begged for the body, they refused and said he will provide an example for the others'. (Yusuf, 50, Beled Weyne)*

Al-Shabaab ruled through fear, they "kept fear alive" (Hersi, 51, Khansadhere). This climate of fear generated mistrust and silenced people:

> *Everybody was suspicious and fearing. Even there were no interactions between civilians themselves and the social life was not good. It reached an extent whereby you suspect your partner or friend [to spy for al-Shabaab] (Abdi, 50, Kismaayo).*

The effect was social isolation. One young woman who had worked for an international organisation recalled:

> *They [al-Shabaab] came to my house and looked for something. That was a sign of danger. They ordered us to keep put: "You two girls you stay there" and they destroyed things. We could not move outside, and we could not go to anybody. /.../ We did not have anybody. (Sara, 23, Bakool)*

In certain respects, the effects of al-Shabaab's authoritarian form of rule differed little from those of direct physical violence. Many interviewees minimized the frequency and spatial radius of movements, and several people described that they rarely left their homes for fear of attracting the attention of the militias.

5.5 Legitimacy and Patriarchal Conventions

During crises, people tend to renegotiate and try to adapt conventions and traditions to the new situation. In Somalia, for example, clan affiliation advanced into a core mechanism for social organisation and compensated for the loss of central government. The way the clan is practised today, and clan relations are interpreted is itself part of war-induced social change. This also applies to gender relations, as the civil war and clan-based violence further deepened patriarchal rules. The resurgence and politicization of the patrilinear genealogy (clan) fostered rigid interpretations of male and female roles and responsibilities that constrained the decision-making power and to some extent also the agency of women. At the same time, however, the civil war also

expanded the economic opportunities of women, if only because many became the main breadwinners of their extended families.[9]

Not only clans but also gender relations were renegotiated under al-Shabaab. While most interviewees appreciated that al-Shabaab did not base its rule on clan, the reinterpretation of patriarchal conventions was criticised, centrally among them al-Shabaab's attitude to marriage:

> *They encouraged the youth to marry, and several young men and women got married during their administration because there was no restriction like payment of huge dowry. In fact, they facilitated the marriage. [...] I never liked their administration because I will not accept that a man marries my daughter without my consent. But they [al-Shabaab] were doing so. [...] They are always on the side of the women. In case she says 'my father is refusing that I marry this man, but I love him', they overrule the father's decision. (Ahmed, 52, Merka)*

In a similar vein:

> *They [al-Shabaab] give directives that should be obeyed. You can see a scenario whereby they will decide for you and your family. Maybe your daughter will be married to one of their members and you can't talk with them about it. They don't even consult. (Farah, 52, Wajid)*

In Somalia, marriages involve protracted negotiations between the families of the groom and bride. When they promoted marriage as the mutual decision of the bride and groom, the Islamists were violating long-standing and taken-for granted conventions, thus the fundamental beliefs or *doxa* of the society. Their abolishment of the patriarchal prerogatives of the fathers (especially of the father of the bride) was perceived as disempowering and described as humiliating by older male interviewees. The limitations of dowry payment were received with mixed feelings. Interviewees expressed their support for the easing of marriages but also raised concerns about the sustainability of marriages built on insufficient economic foundations. Male al-Shabaab members' prerogative of selecting brides without involving their families, and reports about forced marriages, violated fundamental beliefs, and further alienated many.[10] According to interviewees, al-Shabaab could even force a married woman to divorce and to remarry, either because her husband was abroad for a longer time (Ahmed, 52, Marka) or because he was regarded as an unbeliever. Farah (52, Wajid) recalled:

> *I saw that my married daughter was forcibly picked from her house by al-Shabaab members, whom I knew, in front of me, her husband and her two children. They were telling me that your daughter is married to an apostate man and that he will no longer be her husband. I could not talk and there was nothing I could do about it. (Farah, 52, Wajid)*

Many interviewees interpreted these practices as grave violations of traditions, and as interference in private matters. In this context, al-Shabaab appears as an organisation that sees no need to uphold social conventions and values, nor to obey the laws of the shared religion in a manner accepted by the wider society. It violated moral concepts and the transcripts that used to guide social interaction. The inability to explain or justify such violations, together with the increasingly unpredictable form of rule increased dissatisfaction with al-Shabaab's authority and decreased its legitimacy.

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[9] On the complexity of gender relations in Somalia and war induced changes, see El-Bushra and Gardner (2016).
[10] One interviewee had fled Somalia fearing forced marriage (Sara, 23, Bakool).

6. Experiencing and Legitimizing Authority during Violent Conflicts

The literature on rebel governance often treats legitimacy as a static phenomenon, a reservoir to be tapped into or a resource to be mobilised by armed groups as required (critical Malthaner 2015). Legitimacy, as the Somali example demonstrated, is better understood as a social process comprising practices of explaining (cognitive) and justifying (normative) power and authority by the ruled. The present contribution used Somalia as case study to address the question of how the power and authority of armed groups were experienced by those who were ruled. To answer this question, I explored everyday experiences with violence, power, and authority, and analysed how the ruled explained and justified or criticized the actions of armed groups.

Overall, the interviewees judged the armed organisations less on their ideas and ideologies, and more on the effects their practices had on the daily life. In a context of ubiquitous violence, the groups vying for territory and influence were measured first and foremost in terms of their success in enhancing security. The ideology or political programme of an armed group was not considered unimportant, as they provided explanatory and normative schemes to evaluate their actions. But foremost interviewees evaluated the armed groups' effects on their security. People were not asking, for example, whether clan or religion offered the better normative basis for governing but evaluated concrete manifestations of power in their everyday and how it factored in their daily activities. Islamist armed groups, for example, were not so much judged by their interpretation of Islam, but by their ability to improve security. The introduction of rules supported predictability and fostered social order. Improved security was, however, not only linked to a decline in violence but also to the restoration of mobility. The authoritarian rule of al Shabaab, for example, restricted interviewees' mobility, albeit the group enhanced physical security. To put it differently, mobility became an expression of a wider understanding of security as it attested physical safety, allowed economic opportunities, and fostered social networks. Conversely, (forced) immobility was experienced as a loss of agency and control.

The initial support that al-Shabaab was able to muster was increasingly undermined by what was seen as an arbitrary practice and as flouting of their own rules and conventions. From the perspective of interviewees, the social world became once more confusing and life insecure and less mobile. The confusion of older men and their disempowerment by al-Shabaab's reinterpretation of patriarchal rules underscored perceptions of al-Shabaab's erratic display of power. Interviewees could no longer make sense of al-Shabaab's behaviour as they could neither explain and justify it with tradition (clan, gender) nor did it align with their understanding of Islam. As outlined, legitimation requires that an established order is provided with cognitive validity and normative dignity by the ruled. Interviewees' critique of al-Shabaab's interpretation of Islam shows that people were increasingly challenging the normative validity of the organisation's authority.

The findings presented above also demonstrate that legitimacy is realised through social relations and in everyday practices and change with them. The question of whether an armed group enjoys legitimacy or not cannot solely be extrapolated from the strategies they pursue to gain support. After all, power is executed in daily social actions, and authority is experienced in the everyday where it penetrates lives, provides codes of conduct, shapes actions and determines options and forms expectations. Authority must prove its worth in the everyday, for that is where it is tolerated, supported, rejected, or undermined.

In southern Somalia, the ruling actions of armed groups are felt, discussed, and compared with the practices of earlier armed groups' attempts to rule. They are explained and justified (or not) in comparison with them. Wherever possible, people try to negotiate and influence these rules. However, power positions in the relations between armed organisations and civilians are extremely unequally distributed, and the potential influence and negotiating position are therefore heavily constrained. The last resort for people is to try avoiding unwanted practices, even if this means restricting one's mobility or fleeing it altogether. All interviewees have opted for the latter option. The voices I presented above are from people who decided to flee and to look for a better life

elsewhere. These voices are by no means exceptional as hundreds of thousands of people have fled Somalia and even more are on the move within the country – attempting to escape violence and unwanted forms of rule.

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