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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Political Economy of Emergency: Postcolonialism, Crisis Governance and Decolonial Alternatives

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Abstract

The political rhetoric surrounding the Horn of Africa is perpetually framed through narratives of crisis, tragedy and emergency. These labels, rather than simply being used to describe instability, function as tools of governance to normalise dysfunction and entrench cycles of dependency. Drawing on postcolonial frameworks, the discourse interrogates how such crisis narratives obscure and ignore structural issues. Further, this sustains and promotes external authority, often rooted in colonial narratives of the region. The exploration of case studies, Somalia and South Sudan, highlighting how international interventions, often framed as peacebuilding or humanitarian efforts, reinforce the very 'crisis' it aims to address. The solution to decolonise this paradigm created by western interventionist economies lies in alternatives grounded in African epistemologies of governance that centre local sovereignty. In doing so, reimagining governance beyond 'emergency', towards sustainable political autonomy, rooted in localised political power, emerges as the primary, if not only, viable solution.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Discourse surrounding crisis governance in postcolonial states is often characterised by narratives of instability, dysfunction and repeated emergency. This lens of perpetual crisis is employed acutely in the Horn of Africa.[1] However, these terms are not merely descriptive; they serve as powerful narratives that shape both domestic policy and international interventions, positioning these states as fixed exceptions to the rule of global order. These labels are used to justify external interventions, such as peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, as well as place external pressure on internal government reform. Although states such as South Sudan and Somalia often warrant observation by international and humanitarian bodies, this framework of emergency typically overlooks underlying structural inequalities and historical legacies that continue to perpetuate dysfunction.

Furthermore, terms such as 'state emergency' and 'state failure' are deeply embedded in political discourse surrounding postcolonial state governance.[2] However, within these contexts, it is not understood as a temporary disruption but as a chronic condition. Continuous cycles of conflict, violence and poverty are seen as the norm within these states, allowing for a clear definition by the Western world.[3] The concept of the 'state of exception' captures this situation,[4] whereby measures and rhetoric that define dysfunction become a permanent state. Such labelling, whilst offering a shorthand explanation for complex state instability, masks much deeper socio-political inequalities.

Within this context, both external perception and policy take on a warped legitimacy whereby foreign interventionism and assistance are prioritised, sidestepping local and indigenous policy.[5] In practice, this can have harmful effects in reducing the capacity of local governance and reinforcing cycles of dependence whilst simultaneously undermining self-determination and sovereignty.[6]

This paper is guided by three central issues. First, the fact that international concepts of crisis and emergency shape narrative structures that surround Somalia and South Sudan rather than serving as merely descriptions of instability. Second, it is important to assess in what ways these labels operate as external tools of control. By examining how crisis narratives are mobilised, the sidelining of local governance and indigenous mechanisms are subjugated under the international cycle of dependency. Finally, this paper will assess how decolonial frameworks can offer a substantive alternative to internationally focused governance that aims to prioritise local agency and sovereignty.[7] In culmination, the economy of emergency in the Horn of Africa will be analysed, and clear pathways towards sustainable and locally driven solutions will be proposed.

Building on these key questions, Somalia and South Sudan highlight this political economy, emphasising the warped dynamics of crisis governance in real time.[8] Both states are portrayed

[1] A. de Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power* (2015).

[2] R. H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (1990).

[3] M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (1996).

[4] G. Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. by K. Attell (2005).

[5] R. Abrahamsen, *Disciplining Democracy: Development Discourse and Good Governance in Africa* (2000).

[6] M. Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (2007).

[7] S. N. Grovogui, *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Order and Institutions* (2006).

[8] R. I. Rotberg, 'The Failure and Collapse of Nation States: Breakdown, Prevention, and Repair' in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, Robert I. Rotberg (ed) (2004) 1–45.

as emblematic examples of dysfunction and perpetual emergency,[9] and therefore, by centring these two cases into the wider discourse, it becomes evident that crisis narratives are mobilised to justify external control.[10] Subsequently, this maintains a political hierarchy of crisis versus non-crisis states.[11] In doing so, the international order repeatedly undermines local political agency and indigenous practices in the wake of Western-centric models of intervention, framed on the same narratives that perpetuate the problem.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POSTCOLONIALISM, CRISIS AND EMERGENCY RULE

Postcolonial theorists have long questioned the assumed sovereignty of newly independent states,[12] highlighting how colonial structures, logistics and imaginaries persisted after formal independence, sustained through elite complicity and economic dependence.[13] Colonial rule in much of Africa was characterised by the centralisation of political authority and extraction of economic resources. Governance operated through both direct and indirect rule, reshaping local political institutions whilst limiting meaningful political autonomy. In the mid-20th century, waves of decolonisation formally dismantled imperial administrations as newly independent states asserted juridical sovereignty.[14] However, although independence marked the end of overt colonial administration, it did not necessarily dismantle underlying socio-political structures.[15] Resultingly, postcolonial states often emerged within constraints that continued to shape governance.

Achille Mbembe's work engages with this contention, presenting how power structures mimic colonial statues whilst also generating their own form of authoritarianism and disorder.[16] This creates emergency rhetoric and facilitates cycles of dependency often upheld by colonial power dynamics. Furthermore, foundational to this understanding is Franz Fanon's analysis, which exposes how colonial domination extends beyond territorial control into the psycho-social constitution of the colonised subject.[17] For Fanon, decolonisation is not merely a juridical transfer of power but a radical reconfiguration of the structures of thought, authority and legitimacy imposed under colonial rule.[18]

Building on this foundation, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o persistently criticises continued subverted colonial rule in Africa and highlights the need for decolonisation of discourse and epistemology surrounding the continent.[19] The lack of indigenous systems of knowledge and governance

[9] K. Menkhaus, 'State Failure, State-Building, and Prospects for a 'Functional Failed State' in Somalia' (2014) 656(1) *ANNALS Am Acad Pol Social Sci* 154.

[10] A. de Waal, 'Mission Without End? Peacekeeping in the African Political Marketplace' (2009) 85(1) *Int Affairs* 99.

[11] C. de Coning, 'Adaptive Peacebuilding' (2018) 94(2) *Int Affairs* 301.

[12] P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993).

[13] Mamdani, op. cit., n. 3, pp. 17–23.

[14] T. Mboya, *The Challenge of Nationhood* (1970).

[15] Moboya., Id.

[16] Mamdani, Id., pp. 116–130.

[17] F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963).

[18] Fanon, Id.

[19] N. wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986).

is highlighted by the continued pervasion of colonial education and language.[20] This formulates a hegemonic framework in which African ways of knowing, governing, and relating to the wider world are systematically marginalised.[21] This epistemic violence, identified by Fanon as central to colonial dominion, remains a core barrier to genuine sovereignty and self-determination on the continent.[22]

As a result, the decolonisation of the mind and the reclamation of indigenous epistemologies are not only cultural or educational imperatives but also deeply political acts, which are central to reimagining governance that is rooted in African lived realities.[23] Collectively, these key thinkers collectively expose that colonial legacies exist not merely in borders, but in conceptual frameworks through which governance is enacted and imagined.

Central to these postcolonial critiques is the understanding that colonial governance, both during and postcolonial rule, was never wholly about domination through force but also through a sophisticated system of indirect rule.[24] This played on the factors of racial hierarchy and legal exceptionalism. In a postcolonial context, the colonial practice of indirect rule creates tiered and ethically stratified structures of international relations that reify local and indigenous knowledge and fragmentary identities whilst centring power under a curated point of orbit.[25]

Thus, colonial legacies shape contemporary governance structurally and persistently. What is often framed as local dysfunction in postcolonial states is better understood as a historic consequence of imperial power, where institutions prioritised extractive control over democratic inclusivity or indigenous legitimacy.[26] Postcolonial critique insists that crisis management and peacebuilding must be analysed within these enduring power relations rather than as mere governance breakdowns.[27]

Theorising crisis as a mode of governance requires a conceptual shift away from viewing emergency as an episodic disruption and towards recognising its institutionalisation as a routine mechanism of rule. Giorgio Agamben's theory is foundational in this regard, whereby the state of exception refers to a liminal juridico-political space in which normal rule of law is suspended.[28] Instead, legal and social systems take the role, ostensibly in response to threat, as a sovereign power to decide on the threshold between legality and illegality.[29] In the context of postcolonial states where governance practices are frequently, if not primarily, governed through foreign security measures, this logic of exception does not act as a temporary measure but as one which becomes imbedded in the socio-legal framework. What Agamben describes in the context of liberal democracies finds even sharper resonance in a postcolonial setting, where historical patterns of external control continue to compromise sovereignty.[30]

[20] wa Thiong'o, Id., pp. 12–15.

[21] wa Thiong'o, Id., p. 40.

[22] wa Thiong'o, Id., p. 78.

[23] wa Thiong'o, Id.

[24] H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994).

[25] R. J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001).

[26] Chatterjee, op. cit, n. 12, pp. 14–20.

[27] Jackson, op. cit. n. 2., pp. 21–27.

[28] Agamben, op. cit., n. 4, pp. 1–4.

[29] G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by D. Heller-Roazen (1998).

[30] M. Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror* (2009).

Mbembe's necropolitical theory extends this framework by highlighting the ways in which power over life and death becomes central to postcolonial control.[31] In crisis-labelled states, this is evident through the normalisation of protracted internal displacement and humanitarian emergencies. Furthermore, the governance of populations through selective provision and withdrawal of necessities creates an environment in which citizens of states are routinely exposed to these qualifiers. This necro-power is often exercised, not only by state elites and internal armed groups but also further through international actors who, through decisions over aid allocation and security developments, control a monopoly on which lives are preserved and which are rendered expendable.[32] These decisions are often cloaked in language of humanitarian and crisis management but often reproduce the logistics of colonial rule.

These frameworks show that emergency and crisis governance is less about resolving disturbances than managing populations under chronic exceptionalism. Sovereignty and intervention merge, displacing local political agency and legitimising external control. Crisis is not a descriptive condition but a productive mechanism: through governmentality, governance renders disorder intelligible in ways that justify specific interventions whilst excluding alternative forms of authority. Neoliberal logics, framed as humanitarianism and stabilisation, reinforce this system, extending external power and undermining local political options. By constructing zones of exception and framing states as 'fragile' or 'failed', crisis discourse becomes a durable mechanism of control rather than an aberration, central to the apparatus of postcolonial governance.

3 | CRISIS NARRATIVES IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

3.1 | Somalia

Somalia has long occupied a central place in global discourses on state failure and crisis governance.[33] Through its continuous label as a 'failed state' since 1991, it is frequently the central figure in policy papers, media narratives and academic literature as a warning to state disintegration. The ubiquity of this label has not only defined Somalia's image on the world stage but has further shaped the logic of international intervention and crisis response.

The persistence of this framing cannot be separated from racialised hierarchies of governance that have historically positioned African states as inherently fragile, irrational or incapable of self-rule. Within this discursive tradition, instability in Somalia is rarely treated as contingent or historically produced, but rather as a naturalised condition requiring external supervision.[34] As a result, complex socio-political realities are formed in which Somalia tracks a single rhetoric of lawlessness and anarchy. Central to this is the selective framing of phenomena such as terrorism, piracy and famine. Even though undeniably a factor in the country's instability, they become the overarching emphasis of their discourse.

Western media and policy documents frequently present Somalia as a locus of insecurity, emphasising Al-Shabaab, maritime piracy and ongoing humanitarian crises. For instance, a recent BBC article spotlighted 'two Somali fishermen' who reportedly attended 'a secret meeting'

[31] A. Mbembe, 'Necropolitics' (2003) 15(1) *Public Culture* 11.

[32] Duffield, op. cit., n. 6, pp. 95–110.

[33] Rotberg, op. cit., n. 8, pp. 1–50.

[34] A. Ahmad, 'Agenda for Peace or Budget for War? Evaluating the Economic Impact of International Intervention in Somalia' (2012) 67(2) *Int J* 313.

to explain why they had become armed pirates.[35] Although this account provides some nuance regarding the influence of international geopolitics on piracy, the overarching narrative frames Somalia as a hub of lawlessness, exemplified by headlines such as 'Somali piracy 2.0' and the depiction of the country as dominated by 'new robbers of the high seas'.[36] Similarly, the New York Times has characterised Somalia as being 'on the cusp of war' under the 'terrorising' influence of armed groups.[37] These representations are indicative of a broader media discourse that foregrounds insecurity and conflict. Problematic portrayals in popular culture, including Black Hawk Down and Captain Phillips, further reinforce these narratives.[38] Although an in-depth analysis of such representations falls outside the scope of this paper, it is important to note that mass media consistently perpetuates negative perceptions of Somalia and Somali populations, shaping both public and policy attitudes.[39]

These crises are rarely contextualised within broader histories of colonial disruption, Cold War interference or global economic marginalisation. Further to this, positive moves towards solutions formulated by the government or African multilateral bodies are seldom reported. Instead, these issues are presented in isolation, framed as internal dysfunction and symptoms of the 'failed state' in need of external rescue. The proliferation of this facilitates a depoliticised, technocratic response that prioritises security and humanitarianism over sovereignty and self-determination.

Terrorism, in particular, has become a key narrative driver. The reports of this crisis have entrenched international military and counterterrorism efforts through multilateral bodies such as the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) (AMISOM, now rebranded as ATMIS).[40] Although nominally led by African states, these missions are heavily funded and directed by Western powers, particularly the United States and the European Union. The emphasis on militarised security has had tangible consequences for Somalia's political development; most notably, the suppression of political pluralism and local autonomy in favour of top-down, externally designed state-building blueprints.

Similarly, piracy in the Gulf of Aden, which peaked in the late 2000s, was framed as a symptom of state failure.[41] Despite research showing its roots in the illegal overfishing and toxic dumping by foreign vessels,[42] piracy was overwhelmingly portrayed as criminal activity stemming from Somalia's lawlessness and lack of centralised government.[43] This narrative subsequently led to the deployment of international naval forces and intensified global surveillance of Somali waters.[44] What was obscured in this securitised portrayal was the economic marginalisation of Somali

[35] S. Ahmed, 'Somali Piracy 2.0 – the BBC Meets the New Robbers of the High Seas' *BBC* 22, December 2024.

[36] S. Ahmed, op. cit., n. 35.

[37] E. Schmitt, 'Trump Orders Airstrikes Against Islamic State in Somalia' *New York Times*, 1, February 2025.

[38] L. Kapteijns, 'Black Hawk Down: Recasting U.S. Military History at Somali Expense' in *Framing Africa: Portrayals of a Continent in Contemporary Mainstream Cinema* N. Eltringham (ed) (2013) 39–71.

[39] L. Kapteijns, Id.

[40] M. Harper, *Getting Somalia Wrong? Faith, War and Hope in a Shattered State* (2012).

[41] P. D. Williams, *Fighting for Peace in Somalia: A History and Analysis of the African Union Mission* (AMISOM) 2007–2017 (2018).

[42] M. N. Murphy, *Small Boats, Weak States, Dirty Money: Piracy and Maritime Terrorism in the Modern World* (2009).

[43] J. Bahadur, *The Pirates of Somalia: Inside Their Hidden World* (2011).

[44] P. Chalk, 'Piracy off the Horn of Africa: Scope, Dimensions, Causes and Responses' (2010) 16(2) *Brown J World Affairs* 89.

coastal communities and the absence of maritime governance capacity. These issues were deeply tied to Somalia's political history and international neglect rather than dysfunction.

At the heart of these narratives is the marginalisation of Somalia's own governance traditions. Indigenous systems have historically provided a resilient form for local governance.[45] An example of this is the system of Xeer, a customary law framework based on clan negotiation and restitution. Yet, these mechanisms are routinely dismissed by international actors as archaic or incompatible with modern statehood.[46] The prioritisation of externally imposed institutions such as the federal government, which has been formed through donor-funded processes, has alienated significant portions of the Somali population, many of whom view these institutions as corrupt or illegitimate.

Peacekeeping forces have also assisted in eroding this capacity, if not directly then indirectly, through their ability to reduce the capacity of local systems to adapt and innovate. These models frequently operate in manners which reinforce dependency whilst also tackling military-based objectives and security stabilisation. Their presence often substitutes a more sustained and integrated security approach lead by Somalis themselves. Further than this, the international organisation that is functioning in these states is often constrained by donor priorities linking to national development and reconstruction efforts. This reflects international stakeholder priorities, as it is primarily oriented toward geopolitical stability, counterterrorism, migration control and the preservation of the existing global aid architecture,[47] rather than genuinely supporting transformative change within the country. This reliance on external planning and funding thus constructs a state apparatus whereby legitimacy flows not from the governed but from international actors.

This dynamic is sustained through a discourse of permanent crisis, termed the 'economy of emergency'.[48] Emergency provides the rationale for extraordinary measures, for overriding sovereignty, for bypassing local systems and for entrenching international authority. Under the banner of crisis management, Somalia becomes governable only through exception. This mode of governance not only normalises a hierarchy of global power but also ensures the continual deferral of political resolution and the stunting of local agency.

3.2 | South Sudan

South Sudan, the world's newest country, emerged in 2011 amid international celebration and widespread optimism. Framed as a triumph of self-determination after decades of civil war, South Sudan's independence was heralded as the culmination of a successful international peacebuilding effort. However, within 2 years, the narrative had shifted dramatically to a state engulfed by internal conflict and marked by famine, violence and dysfunction. By 2013, South Sudan had been rapidly reclassified as a 'failed state'. Much like Somalia, South Sudan's portrayal as a site of perpetual crisis and destabilisation has led to a system of international intervention that, whilst ostensibly aimed at stabilisation, often reinforces what it seeks to resolve.

[45] J. Gundel and P. B. Khadka, 'Traditional Authorities as Both Curse and Cure: The Politics of Coping With Violent Extremism in Somalia' (2024) 24 *Conflict, Secur Dev* 25.

[46] Harper, op. cit. n. 40, pp. 94–97.

[47] De Waal, op. cit. n. 1, pp. 203–210.

[48] D. Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (2012).

The speed with which South Sudan was reclassified as a 'failed state' also reflects a racialised impatience embedded within international state-building discourse, wherein postcolonial African states are afforded limited time and tolerance to stabilise before being deemed incapable.[49] These contrasts sharply with the prolonged instability tolerated in non-African or Western contexts without equivalent delegitimisation of sovereignty.

The dominant narrative surrounding South Sudan is shaped by three tropes: ethnic violence, humanitarian emergency and state incapacity. The conflict between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar was quickly framed by international media and policy discourse as an ethnic war between Dinka and Nuer groups.[50] Although ethnicity did undoubtedly play a key role in the conflict, the reductionist framing by the media obscured deeper political contentions over power, wealth and state formation. By reducing this multifaceted spurt of violence and mobilisation into the box of 'ancient tribal hatred', international actors effectively depoliticised the crisis. As a result, this allowed these organisations to overlook historical legacies of militarisation, exclusionary governance and failed post-conflict reconciliation that have played a key role in shaping the outbreak of conflict.

In the wake of this renewed conflict, South Sudan became a focal point for humanitarian intervention. Images of displacement, starvation and mass suffering circulated widely, evoking global concern and prompting an influx of aid. The humanitarian industry grew rapidly, with international NGOs, UN agencies and donor governments assuming key roles in delivering services, providing food aid and managing camps for internally displaced persons. Although this was lifesaving in many instances, the humanitarian presence often substituted state capacity. The wider problem associated with health and education infrastructure remained donor funded, with the South Sudanese government permitted to take a passive role. This dynamic not only undermined the state legitimacy of the government but also, again, entrenched a system parallel to them, whereby the state was deemed ineffective and excluded from meaningful responsibility in wake of external actors.

Moreover, the model of state building promoted in South Sudan was a close mirroring of other externally driven templates used in post-conflict contexts. With the backing from international actors, South Sudan was encouraged to adopt liberal democratic norms: transparent elections, constitutional processes and multiparty politics. Although these suggestions seem logical from a western audience, they fail to entrench adequate grounding in local political realities. The efforts and norms reflect the assumption that these actors could build a state from scratch through the importation of Western institutional forms. However, without the foundational political consensus or reconciliation with local partners, the process was rushed and led to fragmentation and zero-sum struggles over state control. The emphasis on procedural legitimacy over substantive inclusions and power sharing between existing parties destabilised the political settlement and ultimately led to failure.

Although this is often framed as an intrastate failure, the international community's role has not been neutral. Through the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), donor frameworks and foreign actors have shaped governance in highly consequential ways. UNMISS, originally tasked with state-building and protection of civilians, evolved into a quasi-sovereign presence with its own compounds, logistical networks and deeply rooted security apparatus. Although this played a strong role in protecting civilians during major periods of instability and

[49] K. Andrews, *The New Age of Empire: How Racism and Colonialism still Rule the World* (2021).

[50] J. S. Young, *The Fate of Sudan: The Origins and Impact of the Civil War* (2012).

danger, it also operated largely independently of South Sudanese political processes. This reinforced a fragmented sovereignty and led to a status quo whereby international actors wielded significant power without direct accountability to the population.

Multiple peace processes that followed, including the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS)[51] and the 2018 Revitalised Agreement (R-ARCSS),[52] were largely driven by political elites and brokered by external agents. As a result, they often prioritised power sharing among the political and military figures over broader social reconciliation and stability. By focusing on a framework that divvied up government positions between warring factions, violence was rewarded and used as a tool of political leverage. This further incentivised militarised politics. Furthermore, these accords were shaped and enforced by external actors, particularly Western donors, who were privy to the system which sidelined domestic civil society, traditional elders and grassroots peacebuilders. As a result, the peace processes lacked legitimacy and were repeatedly undermined by renewed outbreaks of violence.[53]

The wider effects of these dynamics have led to South Sudan's categorisation of a permanent state of exception, becoming a state entity which is constantly suspended between war and peace. The interlinking issues between sovereignty and dependency have led to governmental collapse and perpetual aid packages, again formulated through the lens of the Western donors. The guise of state building and stabilisation is used to justify this ongoing international management, and yet, these processes rarely challenge the structural conditions which produce the vast amount of instability in the country.[54] As with Somalia, the narrative of failure obscures neutral and creative strategies to develop governance mechanisms, especially those employed by South Sudanese communities and traditional authorities. These actors are often utilised to fill local-level peace committees and negotiate small-level order between settlements but are never extrapolated further to fill gaps in wider governance. They continue to receive limited support compared to elite-led or internationally sanctioned initiatives.

3.3 | The framing of 'failure' and 'emergency'

The repeated framing of Somalia and South Sudan as 'failed states' or 'permanent emergencies' has had profound implications on how these countries are governed by international actors. Furthermore, it affects the way in which these crises are understood by the wider global community. Such labels construct a discourse in which instability is not only expected but also assumed to be intrinsic and perpetual. This, therefore, positions these states as incapable of self-rule and subsequently justifies continuous external management, often hidden under the guise of peacekeeping and humanitarian aid. Rather than addressing root causes of conflict or historical patterns of exploitation and exclusion, international actors engage with these countries through premade and unnuanced templates of crisis response which are temporary by design. However, these templates become permanent in practice.

Furthermore, this persistent state of exception narrative undermines local agency and erodes sovereignty within these states. When international donors and institutions dominate

[51] UN Security Council, *Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan* (ARCSS) (2015).

[52] UN Security Council, *Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan* (R-ARCSS) (2018).

[53] de Waal, op. cit. n. 1.

[54] Andrews, op. cit. n. 49.

policymaking and structure peace processes, national governments become hollowed out, leading to a performative version of sovereignty without substantive authority or jurisdiction over their own state. At the same time, local forms of governance, knowledge and negotiation are marginalised in favour of externally sanctioned solutions that often lack contextual legitimacy and cultural nuance. As a result, the political autonomy of both states and citizens is compromised. The possibility of alternative futures and indigenous sovereignty over decision-making and governmental makeup becomes foreclosed by a global system that assumes incapacity.

The framing of 'failure' and 'emergency' is not only a technocratic or security-oriented discourse but one deeply shaped by racialised assumptions inherited from colonial governance.[55] Postcolonial African states are frequently positioned within a hierarchy of political competence in which instability is treated as intrinsic rather than contingent, and where Black-led governments are afforded limited legitimacy, patience or authority. Although rarely articulated explicitly, these assumptions reproduce a civilisational logic that casts African political order as deficient, disorderly or perpetually incomplete.

Such racialised framings are sustained through ostensibly neutral categories such as 'state failure', 'fragility' and 'capacity-building', which obscure the historical and structural conditions, such as colonial extraction, Cold War militarisation and unequal integration into the global economy, that have shaped governance trajectories in Somalia and South Sudan.[56] By depoliticising crisis and locating dysfunction within the state itself, international actors avoid confronting their own role in producing and maintaining instability. The result is a system in which external intervention is normalised, sovereignty is conditional, and African political agency is rendered suspect unless validated by international approval.

Ultimately, the discourse of failure can never be neutral in the context of statehood. It is primarily a tool of governance that reproduces hierarchies of power between the Global North and South, centres external expertise, and sidelines the very voices most capable of imagining more just, inclusive, and locally rooted political order. A decolonial approach requires the dismantling of these narratives and a much stronger engagement in Somalia and South Sudan, not as blank slates or crises to be managed, but as complex entities with their own political visions and capacities.

4 | INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS AND THE MAINTENANCE OF DYSFUNCTION

4.1 | Peacekeeping missions and development aid

Peacekeeping missions and development aid in Somalia and South Sudan have become central pillars of international engagement. However, despite decades of intervention, both countries remain in cycles of violence and political fragmentation, continuing to be dependent on external aid and funding. The failure of missions such as AMISOM and UNMISS to address the foundational political drivers of instability continues to highlight the deeper issue; these interventions are more oriented towards containment rather than holistic transformation.

In Somalia, AMISOM had some tactical successes, particularly in retaking urban centres, but it has consistently failed to implement a sustainable governance or national reconciliation plan.

[55] Andrews, op. cit. n. 49.

[56] Andrews, op. cit. n. 49.

It has always deployed a military-heavy approach, coupled with minimal investment in political institution building and long-term stability strategies. This suggests a structure which is aimed at alleviating Somalian conflict in the service of international counterterrorism objectives which affect the transnational community. This negates the need to resolve the country's deep-rooted political fractures.

Moreover, the centralisation of power in Mogadishu, heavily backed by donors, has sidelined the complex web of Somali clan-based governance, customary law (Xeer) and local political systems. These have historically been integral to conflict resolution and community order and would arguably serve as a more stable way to integrate a central government with local communities.

Similarly, a parallel pattern is visible in South Sudan. Since independence, the country has suffered heavily with civil war and elite political struggles. Although UNMISS was established to protect civilians and support peace implementation, it has largely functioned as a security buffer.[57] Therefore, it lacks the necessary role of a transformative political actor, which is needed to stabilise governance. Though it has provided shelter to civilians during outbreaks of violence, its limited mandates and reluctance to confront political elites have left the structural causes of conflict unaddressed and therefore persistent. As in Somalia, peacekeeping in South Sudan often serves to manage the symptoms of dysfunction whilst avoiding meaningful engagement with the root causes. These causes, such as the monopolisation of power by elites, exclusionary governance and lack of a national political settlement, are therefore what continues the perpetual state of crisis.

In both countries, aid often flows according to geopolitical imperatives, which often include counterterrorism in Somalia and regional stability in South Sudan.[58] This is done in the wake of priorities based on the demands of affected populations. Consequently, aid strategies prioritise measurable outcomes like service delivery and electoral milestones, which can be neatly reported on and defined as a success or failure.[59] Deeper political processes are thus ignored; grassroots reconciliation, inclusive governance or socio-economic justice becoming forgotten due to their immeasurable nature and lack of international validity. This technocratic approach to governance reduces political conflict to a set of logistical problems to be solved. It also defines these issues as solely solved via external funding and by sidelining the complex, culturally embedded mechanisms that could offer more sustainable solutions than the ones defined by Western donors.

Crucially, there is a stark ignorance of culturally sensitive models, which affects the validity of political mechanisms throughout the states. Both AMISOM and UNMISS are designed within frameworks that assume the legitimacy and authority of internationally endorsed state structures, which ignores the differences on the ground, such as the fragmented and often hybrid nature of authority.[60] This leads to a disjuncture between international models and local political realities, which often becomes a persistent feature of intervention. Traditional institutions, such as clan elders, customary courts and communal councils, are often either bypassed or co-opted in ways that strip them of legitimacy.[61] As a result, foreign-led interventions have frequently weakened local ownership of political processes, reinforced elite bargains and entrenched external dependency. Rather than catalysing sovereign political development, peacekeeping and aid in Somalia

[57] de Waal, op. cit. n. 1.

[58] Duffield, op. cit. n. 6.

[59] S. Autesserre, *The Trouble With the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (2010).

[60] A. Severine, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (2014).

[61] V. Boege et al., 'On Hybrid Political Orders and Emerging States: State Formation in the Context of 'Fragility' in *Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series* (2008).

and South Sudan have helped entrench a political economy of crisis; one in which dysfunction is managed rather than resolved.

4.2 | External actors and the governance of crisis

Further to peacebuilding efforts, the management of said political crises is increasingly headed by a network of external institutions.[62] Most prominently these include the UN, the AU, Western governments and regional organisations like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).[63] Although these actors often present themselves as neutral mediators or technical supporters, their interventions have effectively reconfigured both narratives and governance in these countries. This has led to the institutionalisation of crisis as a permanent condition and embedded external oversight as a routine feature of political life.

The UN and AU, through peacekeeping missions and political support frameworks, have positioned themselves as central arbiters of legitimacy in these cases. Although these efforts are framed as necessary for stabilisation, they often bypass or marginalise local deliberative processes and replace any form of organic political development with externally determined benchmarks.

Western governments are also pivotal in providing financial support and political leverage. Mainly lead by the United States, the United Kingdom and members of the European Union, their influence is exerted not only through bilateral aid and diplomacy but also through control over multilateral funding mechanisms and the imposition of sanctions.[64] This political donor power frequently translates into de facto authority, which enables foreign actors to set priorities and, more importantly, determine which local actors are included or excluded from political processes. As a result, domestic political dynamics are increasingly shaped in response to donor expectations and the stipulations which these impose rather than the needs of the constituencies on the ground.

Regional actors like IGAD have also taken on major roles in peace negotiations, most notably, in these cases, in South Sudan.[65] Yet, despite IGAD's overarching presence, their interventions are often constrained by internal divisions and geopolitical rivalries among member states. The organisation's mediation efforts have focused historically on elite power-sharing arrangements rather than building inclusive political frameworks.[66] This elite-centric approach has perpetuated short-term deals that appease armed factions whilst ignoring deeper set issues. Without addressing underlying grievances or establishing mechanisms for long-term accountability, stability has not been achieved.

Collectively, these external actors contribute to the normalisation of crisis governance and dependence. By establishing parallel administrative systems and temporary political settlements, they entrench a mode of rule in which emergency becomes routine. Further than this, through providing a framework which is constantly monitored by an external body, it removes accountability of the actions of the people on the ground and ultimately erodes sovereignty. Rather than dismantling the structures that produce instability, international interventions often stabilise them just enough to prevent collapse, allowing them to persist without meaningful reform under

[62] de Waal, op. cit. n. 1.

[63] M. Brosig, *Cooperative Peacekeeping in Africa: Exploring Regime Complexity* (2015).

[64] E. Mawdsley, *From Recipients to Donors: Emerging Powers and the Changing Development Landscape* (2012).

[65] D. Lanz, *South Sudan's Civil War: Violence, Insurgency and Failed Peacemaking* (2020).

[66] de Waal, op. cit. n. 1.

the guise of statistical success. In doing so, they undermine local governance capacities and erode popular sovereignty to embed cycles of dysfunction within postcolonial communities.

Ultimately, although external actors claim to manage crisis, they increasingly create systems which solely govern through them. This maintains influence via perpetual transition and delayed implementation, creating a system embedded in the constant deferral of political closure. This mode of governance not only displaces local political agency but also ensures that both Somalia and South Sudan remain locked within externally defined frameworks that rarely align with their complex, historically rooted political realities.

5 | EMERGENCY GOVERNANCE AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

5.1 | Internal elites and the consolidation of war

In both Somalia and South Sudan, protracted emergencies have provided fertile ground for political and military elites to entrench their power. Rather than crises leading to the breakdown of governance, they often become tools through which governance is recalibrated by external actors in ways that favour elite consolidation.[67] Emergency conditions, sustained by violence, humanitarian catastrophe, or simply just a political stalemate, are not simply endured by ruling coalitions. They are instead instrumentalised to suppress dissent and reward loyalists. However, this structure often shields those in power from meaningful accountability.

In Somalia, political elites, particularly in the federal government, frequently delay political processes, which leads to a centralised authority aiming to marginalise opposition actors. Leaders exploit the pretext of national security or fragile peace to avoid power-sharing compromises or constitutional reforms that would distribute power. Even though these manoeuvres negatively affect Somalian communities, they are often supported by international actors as stability-seeking mechanisms. This inadvertently bolsters a narrow elite class whilst sidelining broader democratic participation.

In South Sudan, the consolidation of power under emergency conditions has followed a similar trajectory. Since independence, the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) has repeatedly invoked the language of existential threat, whether from internal rebellion, ethnic violence or humanitarian crisis, to justify authoritarian governance.[68] President Salva Kiir and his inner circle have used successive peace agreements not as vehicles for reconciliation, but as instruments for elite bargaining, often bringing rivals into government through co-optation rather than democratic mandate.[69] Crisis, thus, becomes a strategy; a means of forestalling reform, suspending elections and maintaining a fragmented status quo in which the distribution of power is negotiated among a narrow group of armed actors.

Crisis governance also serves to delegitimise opposition voices. Civil society organisations, independent media, and grassroots movements are routinely branded as destabilising forces or foreign proxies, particularly when they challenge the dominant narrative of crisis or call for structural change. In Somalia, activists critical of government malfeasance are accused of undermining

[67] de Waal, op. cit. n. 1.

[68] de Waal, op. cit. n. 1.

[69] Sudan Tribune, *Sudan says South Peace Deal not Applicable to West* (2020).

the fight against terrorism.[70] In South Sudan, dissenters are often cast as tribal provocateurs or spoilers of peace,[71] thus justifying their exclusion or repression. This securitised framing shrinks political space, redefines loyalty as patriotism, and isolates the public from meaningful participation in national debates. Therefore, by casting themselves as the only legitimate stewards of fragile statehood, political and military elites in both countries convert instability into authority. This logic perpetuates a governance system where crisis is not resolved but reproduced and managed to solely serve elite interests.

5.2 | State sovereignty and the norm of crisis

In both Somalia and South Sudan, protracted crisis conditions have eroded the sovereignty of the state. Sovereignty becomes deeply compromised when the state is perpetually governed through emergency mechanisms and international oversight. What emerges is a hybrid form of governance in which formal state institutions are sidelined, whereas external actors increasingly shape domestic political trajectories under the pretext of stabilisation.[72]

Although the Somali state technically retains formal sovereignty, it lacks the institutional autonomy to make and enforce decisions independently. In effect, the architecture of emergency governance has replaced a sovereign state with a donor-managed process of stabilisation in which Somali political actors must negotiate power not only among themselves but also with international stakeholders. A similar pattern can be seen in South Sudan, where peacekeeping operations and externally brokered peace agreements have profoundly shaped state operations. UNMISS plays a central role in civilian protection and humanitarian logistics, often stepping in where the state lacks. Key functions of governance are frequently delivered by international organisations or NGOs. The 2018 peace agreement, brokered by IGAD, imposed a power-sharing arrangement that, whilst necessary to halt violence, entrenched a system in which external actors mediate core aspects of political life.[73] The result is a diminished form of sovereignty in which the South Sudanese state is both reliant on and constrained by its international partners.

The political consequences of this erosion are significant. Local governance structures become both disempowered and delegitimised. In contexts where state institutions are weak, it is often local leaders, traditional authorities or civil society actors who provide stability. However, their roles are frequently overlooked or marginalised in externally driven peacebuilding frameworks that prioritise elite bargains over inclusive governance. Moreover, the normalisation of external intervention contributes to a dependency dynamic, where the state's legitimacy is derived not from its citizens, but from its ability to secure continued international support.

Ultimately, the governance of emergency, underwritten by international actors, undermines the development of sovereign, accountable institutions. By bypassing or substituting the state's formal functions, external interventions may stabilise the short term, but they risk entrenching a longer-term political fragility in which sovereignty becomes symbolic rather than substantive.

Recurrent crises in Somalia and South Sudan have led to the normalisation of dysfunction in governance, creating a political environment in which emergency measures become the standard

[70] Human Rights Watch, "*Like Fish in Poisonous Waters": Attacks on Media Freedom in Somalia* (2016).

[71] International Crisis Group, *Salvaging South Sudan's Fragile Peace Deal* (2019) Africa Report 270.

[72] K. Menkhaus, 'Somalia: State Collapse, Multilateral Intervention, and Strategies for Political Reconstruction' (2004) 29(3) *Int. Secur* 74.

[73] UN Security Council, *Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan* (R-ARCSS) (2018).

operating procedure. As these states cycle through repeated outbreaks of violence, humanitarian emergencies and political instability, the line between crisis management and regular governance becomes increasingly blurred. What was once an exceptional response to extraordinary circumstances is now institutionalised as the modus operandi, eroding the expectation of normal governance and perpetuating a state of chronic instability.

The long-term implications of living in a state of perpetual emergency are deeply concerning for political and social stability. On a political level, the normalisation of crisis weakens the social contract between citizens and the state. Governments, in both Somalia and South Sudan, come to rely more on external power than on their domestic legitimacy. This erodes trust in local institutions and fuels resentment among the population, who may begin to view the state as an ineffectual entity incapable of responding to their needs. Socially, this instability fosters a sense of hopelessness and disillusionment, where ordinary citizens are deprived of the opportunity to build stable, long-term livelihoods or participate in political processes. In the long run, this 'crisis fatigue' risks embedding a culture of dependency and alienation, which can be difficult to reverse without a radical transformation of governance and international intervention strategies.

6 | DECOLONIAL ALTERNATIVES: RETHINKING GOVERNANCE IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

6.1 | Pan-Africanism as a decolonial governance framework

Pan-Africanism emerged as both a political project and an epistemic challenge to colonial domination, grounded in the collective struggle for African sovereignty, dignity, and self-determination.[74] From its early articulations in anti-colonial thought to its institutionalisation in post-independence African regionalism, Pan-Africanism has consistently rejected the legitimacy of external authority over African political futures.[75] Central to this tradition is the assertion that African states and societies possess the political capacity, historical knowledge and moral authority to govern themselves without permanent external supervision.[76] In this sense, Pan-Africanism functions not merely as an ideology of unity but as a decolonial framework for governance that directly challenges the hierarchies embedded in international intervention and crisis management.

At its core, Pan-Africanism contests the assumption that is frequently reproduced in global governance discourse that African instability is best addressed through external expertise, trusteeship or technocratic management. Instead, it advances a model of collective sovereignty in which political legitimacy is rooted in African historical experience and regional solidarity rather than external validation.[77] This principle has been reflected, albeit unevenly, in the norms of non-interference, self-determination and regional problem-solving adopted by African institutions such as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and its successor, the AU. Although these

[74] T. Mkandawire, *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development* (2005).

[75] Mkandawire, op. cit. n. 74.

[76] S. Ilo, S. O. Abidde, and E. K. Matambo 'How Relevant is Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism in the Twenty-First Century?' in *Xenophobia, Nativism and Pan-Africanism in 21st Century Africa: History, Concepts, Practice and Case Study* (2021).

[77] S. O. Abidde and E. K. Matambo 'The Utility of Pan-Africanism in Africa and the African Diaspora' in *Xenophobia, Nativism and Pan-Africanism in 21st Century Africa: History, Concepts, Practice and Case Study* (2021).

principles have often been compromised in practice, they articulate an alternative vision of political order that stands in direct opposition to the logic of permanent emergency that has come to dominate international engagement in Africa.[78]

Importantly, Pan-Africanism does not deny the existence of conflict, crisis or governance challenges within African states. Rather, it rejects the framing of such challenges as evidence of inherent incapacity or civilisational deficiency. By situating instability within longer histories of colonial disruption, economic extraction and geopolitical interference, Pan-Africanism reframes crisis as a political condition produced through structural inequality rather than a technical problem requiring external management.[79] This perspective exposes how international interventions, particularly those justified through humanitarian or security imperatives, often reproduce the very dependencies and exclusions they claim to resolve.[80]

In the context of Somalia and South Sudan, the relevance of Pan-Africanism lies in its capacity to challenge the normalisation of external authority over African governance. In both cases, international actors have exercised significant influence over security arrangements, political settlements and institutional design, frequently bypassing regional mechanisms and local political processes. Although such interventions are often framed as temporary or exceptional, Pan-African critiques reveal how they become routinised, transforming sovereignty into a conditional status contingent on compliance with donor priorities and international norms.[81] From this perspective, the erosion of political autonomy in these states is not an unfortunate by-product of crisis response but a predictable outcome of governance models that privilege external control over regional and local agency.

Pan-Africanism also offers a critical lens through which to reassess the role of African regional organisations in conflict management.[82] Although institutions such as the AU and sub-regional bodies have sought to mediate conflicts and promote stability, their efforts are frequently constrained by dependence on external funding, logistical support and political approval.[83] This dependence limits their ability to act as genuinely autonomous political actors and often aligns regional interventions with the strategic interests of non-African powers. A decolonial Pan-African approach therefore demands not only African-led solutions in name but also the material and political conditions necessary for regional institutions to exercise independent judgement and authority.

Seen in this light, Pan-Africanism is not simply a normative appeal to solidarity but a structural critique of global governance. It calls for the reconfiguration of how authority, expertise and responsibility are distributed in international responses to conflict and instability. Rather than managing African crises through externally designed templates of security and humanitarianism, a Pan-African framework prioritises political inclusion, negotiated legitimacy and regional accountability. This shift challenges the dominance of crisis governance by insisting that

[78] Abidde and Matambo, Id.

[79] R. K Awosola, S. O. Abidde, and E. K. Matambo 'Nativism in Nigeria: The Struggle for Ownership and Control of Resources' in *Xenophobia, Nativism and Pan-Africanism in 21st Century Africa: History, Concepts, Practice and Case Study* (2021).

[80] Awosola, Abidde and Matambo, Id.

[81] K. Essien and T. Falola, *Pan-Africanism and the Politics of African Citizenship and Identity* (2014).

[82] Essien and Falola, Id.

[83] C. Hartmann 'ECOWAS and the Restoration of Democracy in the Gambia' (2017) 52(1) *Afr Spectr* 85.

sustainable peace and stability cannot be imposed through emergency measures but must emerge from political processes rooted in African social realities.[84]

As a decolonial governance framework, Pan-Africanism thus provides the conceptual foundation for rethinking intervention, sovereignty and political order in the Horn of Africa. However, for this framework to move beyond principle, it must be operationalised through governance practices that engage directly with local political institutions, knowledge systems and modes of conflict resolution. It is to these Afrocentric and indigenous governance mechanisms, often marginalised or rendered invisible by international actors, that the analysis now turns.

6.2 | Afrocentric and indigenous governance models as decolonial practice

Although Pan-Africanism provides a regional and structural critique of externally imposed governance, Afrocentric and indigenous governance systems offer concrete mechanisms through which decolonial principles can be enacted in practice. These approaches reject the assumption that effective governance must mirror Western institutional forms, instead grounding political authority in local histories, social relations and normative orders.[85] Afrocentric governance does not imply a rejection of modern political institutions, but rather a pluralist and context-sensitive approach in which multiple sources of authority coexist and interact.[86] In this sense, indigenous governance systems should be understood not as remnants of a pre-modern past, but as living political institutions that continue to structure social order and conflict resolution across the Horn of Africa.

In Somalia, customary governance systems such as Xeer have long provided mechanisms for dispute resolution, security provision and social regulation in the absence, or deliberate withdrawal, of centralised state authority.[87] Rooted in clan-based negotiation, collective responsibility, and restorative justice, Xeer has enabled communities to manage conflict and maintain order despite prolonged state collapse and international disengagement.[88] However, international state-building efforts have consistently marginalised these systems, privileging externally designed federal institutions and electoral processes that often lack local legitimacy.[89] By framing governance exclusively through the lens of formal statehood, international actors have treated Xeer as incompatible with modern sovereignty rather than as a potential foundation for hybrid governance arrangements grounded in Somali political realities.[90]

A similar dynamic is evident in South Sudan, where customary authorities and community-based conflict resolution mechanisms have played a critical role in managing local disputes, facilitating reconciliation and maintaining social cohesion during periods of intense violence.[91]

[84] Andrews, op. cit. n. 49.

[85] Andrews, op. cit. n. 49.

[86] Mboya, op. cit. n. 14.

[87] Gundel and Khadka, op cit., n. 45.

[88] Gundel and Khadka, Id.

[89] C. De Coning, 'Africa and UN Peace Operations: Implications for the Future Role of Regional Organisations' in *United Nations Peace Operations in a Changing Global Order* (2019).

[90] Gundel and Khadka, op cit., n. 45.

[91] A. A. Awolich, *Fixing Governance is Key to Stability in South Sudan* (2018).

Traditional elders, chiefs and local peace committees have often been the primary actors capable of negotiating ceasefires and resolving conflicts at the community level. Yet, these actors have been systematically sidelined in national peace processes, which prioritise elite power-sharing agreements brokered by external actors. Agreements such as the ARCSS and R-ARCSS, whilst framed as inclusive political settlements, largely institutionalised militarised elites and rewarded violence as a pathway to political authority, undermining grassroots legitimacy and entrenching cycles of instability.[92]

Afrocentric governance approaches challenge this model by recentring political authority within communities rather than external institutions or elite bargaining forums.[93] In both Somalia and South Sudan, governance failures are not solely the result of weak state capacity but of the systematic exclusion of locally legitimate actors from decision-making processes. Afrocentric frameworks emphasise participatory governance, negotiated authority and social accountability, recognising that political order emerges through ongoing processes of contestation and compromise rather than the imposition of fixed institutional templates.[94] This perspective directly confronts the technocratic assumptions underpinning liberal peacebuilding, which often equates stability with procedural compliance rather than substantive legitimacy.

Importantly, indigenous governance systems are not presented here as inherently democratic, egalitarian or free from internal hierarchies. They are shaped by power relations related to gender, age and lineage and can reproduce exclusionary practices. However, unlike externally imposed governance structures, these systems remain accountable to local communities and are subject to internal contestation and adaptation.[95] Their legitimacy derives not from international recognition or donor endorsement but from social embeddedness and historical continuity. This distinction is crucial in understanding why externally driven interventions have struggled to produce sustainable political order in the Horn of Africa.

Incorporating Afrocentric and indigenous governance into broader political frameworks would therefore require a fundamental rethinking of statehood and sovereignty. Rather than treating the state as the sole locus of political authority, a decolonial governance model recognises the coexistence of multiple governance systems operating at different scales. In Somalia, this could involve formal recognition of customary law within constitutional arrangements and security provision that supports, rather than supplants, community-based mechanisms.[96] In South Sudan, it would entail elevating customary authorities and civil society actors from peripheral roles in peacebuilding to central participants in national political settlements.

Such an approach stands in sharp contrast to crisis governance, which prioritises short-term stabilisation through militarised security and humanitarian management. By foregrounding indigenous governance systems, Afrocentric frameworks challenge the logic of permanent emergency and open space for political transformation rooted in local agency. This does not imply the absence of international engagement but rather a reconfiguration of its role from authoritative manager to supportive partner accountable to regional and local priorities.

Ultimately, Afrocentric and indigenous governance approaches reveal that alternatives to crisis governance already exist within the Horn of Africa. Their marginalisation is not the result

[92] E. B. Namakula, 'Rethinking United Nations Peacekeeping Responses to Resources Wars and Armed Conflicts in Africa: Integrating African Indigenous Knowledge Systems' (2022) 14(4) *J Aggression, Conflict Peace Res* 320.

[93] Namakula, Id.

[94] Namakula, Id.

[95] Namakula, op. cit. n. 92.

[96] Namakula, Id.

of inherent inadequacy but of a global governance system that privileges external expertise and centralised authority over locally grounded political solutions. Recentring these systems is therefore not an act of romanticism but a necessary step toward decolonising governance and restoring substantive sovereignty in postcolonial African states.

6.3 | From crisis management to political transformation

The cases of Somalia and South Sudan demonstrate that the persistent framing of African states as sites of failure or permanent emergency functions less as a neutral diagnosis than as a governing strategy.[97] Through this discourse, instability is naturalised, sovereignty is rendered conditional, and external intervention is positioned as both necessary and inevitable. Crisis governance, whilst often justified through humanitarian and security imperatives, prioritises short-term stabilisation and technocratic management over political inclusion, historical accountability and locally grounded legitimacy.[98] As a result, it frequently entrenches the very conditions of dependency and fragmentation that it claims to resolve.

A decolonial, Pan-African approach offers a fundamentally different political logic. Rather than managing crisis through exception, it seeks to transform the structures through which authority and legitimacy are produced. By recentring regional judgement, collective sovereignty and locally embedded governance systems, this approach challenges the assumption that political order must be externally designed or supervised.[99] In both Somalia and South Sudan, the marginalisation of indigenous and community-based institutions has not reflected their inadequacy but their incompatibility with intervention frameworks that privilege centralised authority and external expertise.

Reframing governance through decolonial and Pan-African lenses, thus, shifts the focus from emergency response to political transformation.[100] It opens space for plural, negotiated forms of authority that are accountable to local populations rather than international actors.[101] Although such approaches do not offer quick solutions or technocratic certainty, they provide a more plausible foundation for sustainable peace by addressing legitimacy, inclusion and sovereignty as political questions. Moving beyond crisis governance is therefore not only a normative imperative, but a practical necessity for reimagining governance in the Horn of Africa.

7 | CONCLUSIONS

Crisis governance in the Horn of Africa reflects deep colonial continuities and ongoing external control. Repeatedly framing Somalia and South Sudan as perpetual emergencies justifies constant intervention, reinforcing dysfunction and sidelining local agency. Emergency governance, often under the guise of humanitarianism, becomes normalised; short-term responses evolve into sustained mechanisms of external oversight, undermining local sovereignty and

[97] De Coning, op. cit. n. 89.

[98] Andrews, op. cit. n. 49.

[99] Andrews, op. cit. Id.

[100] Ilo, Abidde and Matambo, op. cit. n. 76.

[101] De Coning, op. cit. n. 89.

decision-making. Crisis narratives rarely address root causes, instead serving the strategic interests of external actors. Case studies of Somalia and South Sudan illustrate how interventions frequently exacerbate existing inequalities and overlook indigenous governance structures. The normalisation of emergency governance impedes sustainable political development, perpetuating cycles of dependency and undermining long-term peace.

A decolonial framework emphasises Afrocentric solutions that recognise the historical, cultural and political contexts of African societies. Governance models should empower local populations and institutions, integrating indigenous knowledge and traditions. Moving beyond the crisis discourse, the international community must support locally driven solutions that respect sovereignty, encourage regional solidarity and prioritise self-determination. Through resisting the normalisation of crisis governance, can the Horn of Africa, and postcolonial Africa more broadly, can chart a path toward political stability, social justice and lasting peace.

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