

Winter 12-2016

# The 2015 al-Shabaab's attack in Garissa, Kenya. An immersion into the structural, socio-political and psychological roots of violence

Mathilde Simon  
*SIT Graduate Institute*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/capstones>



Part of the [African Studies Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Simon, Mathilde, "The 2015 al-Shabaab's attack in Garissa, Kenya. An immersion into the structural, socio-political and psychological roots of violence" (2016). *Capstone Collection*. 2954.  
<https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/capstones/2954>

This Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Graduate Institute at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [digitalcollections@sit.edu](mailto:digitalcollections@sit.edu).

**The 2015 al-Shabaab's attack in Garissa, Kenya**

**An immersion into the structural, socio-political and psychological roots of violence**

Mathilde Simon

PIM-73

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a Masters of Art in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation at SIT Graduate Institute, Vermont, USA.

Advisor: Teresa Healy

Consent to Use of Capstone

I hereby grant permission for World Learning to publish my capstone on its websites and in any of its digital/electronic collections, and to reproduce and transmit my CAPSTONE ELECTRONICALLY. I understand that World Learning's websites and digital collections are publicly available via the Internet. I agree that World Learning is NOT responsible for any unauthorized use of my capstone by any third party who might access it on the Internet or otherwise.

Student name: Mathilde Simon

Date: 10/09/2016

## ABSTRACT

The paper studies the attack conducted by the Somali insurgent group al-Shabaab in Garissa, north of Kenya, on April 2, 2015. In contrast to judgmental and narrow-minded media explanations which tended to dominate the debate after the attack, the present paper uses conflict theories in order to investigate the deep roots of violence. It questions how a group such as al-Shabaab has been able to emerge, to find support and to become a major actor in the Horn of Africa, and to some extent internationally. It draws on Basic Human Needs, Collective Psychology and Structural and Cultural Violence theories to demonstrate that the attack in Garissa is the manifestation of decades of structural, cultural and direct violence between communities, as well as between colonial and post-colonial governments in Kenya and Somalia. Understanding the deep causes of violence and its endorsement by a part of the population is a first step to transform the conflict. Studying the relationships between the different actors is important in order to understand the cycle of violence, and to think of ways to defuse it and to heal decades-long wounds.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This paper is an Independent Practitioner Inquiry Capstone (IPIC).

Throughout my time at SIT, I focused on one aspect – sometimes two – of conflict theories, whether it was Basic Human Needs, Collective Psychology or Cultural and Structural Violence. I would like to use this paper as an opportunity to further engage with theories that I am not very familiar with, in order to connect them with ones that I already better understand. My goal is to analyze, through literature, the multiple angles that interplay in the evolution of the conflict. In the long-term, this work is part of a research and reflective practice agenda leading to a PhD. This paper would therefore be an opportunity to conduct research based on secondary sources, so as to become familiar with literature and the work that has already been conducted on the topic.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>9</b>
A. A lack of academic studies on the attack in Garissa contrasted with the multiplicity of narrow-minded media explanations .....	9
B. The history of Kenya and Somalia taken separately by most scholars; the need to bring them together .....	10
C. Al-Shabaab: a new trend progressively emerging in political life .....	12
<b>III. METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>13</b>
A. Approach .....	13
B. Theories used .....	14
C. Limitations .....	16
D. Objectives .....	18
<b>IV. A BRIEF HISTORY OF SOMALIA AND ITS NEIGHBORS: THE FIGHT OVER NATIONALISM, SOVEREIGNTY AND SELF-DETERMINATION .....</b>	<b>18</b>
A. The forced division of Somalia by Britain, France and Italy and the negation of local cultures .....	18
B. The legacy of colonialism and the emergence of long-lasting divisions at the Somali-Kenya border .....	22
C. Somalia's instability and internal divisions: the failure of the state and its consequences on neighboring countries .....	27
<b>V. THE SPREAD OF STRUCTURAL-CULTURAL VIOLENCE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CHOSEN TRAUMA .....</b>	<b>33</b>
A. A decades-long and ever growing flow of Somali refugees in Kenya .....	34
B. Somali refugees' identity: reinforcing one's own culture as a symbol of rejection of the host country's culture .....	38

C. A tradition of basic human needs violation in a context of structural and cultural violence . 42

D. The development of a chosen trauma ..... 46

**VI. TRANSFORMING THE COLLECTIVE TRAUMA INTO ACTION: AL-SHABAAB'S USE**

**OF DIRECT VIOLENCE ..... 50**

A. The reactivation of the chosen trauma into destructive modes of need fulfillment ..... 51

B. Leaders' role: showing the way from a violent ideology to a violent action ..... 55

C. Underdogs resorting to violence ..... 58

**VII. DISCUSSION ..... 62**

**VIII. REFERENCES ..... 66**

## I. INTRODUCTION

On April 2, 2015, the Somali insurgent group al-Shabaab conducted an attack at the Kenyan university in Garissa County in northern Kenya, which resulted in the death of 147 people. While al-Shabaab has become infamous in recent years, its roots trace back to the 1990s, as the group progressively emerged from the shadows. In this paper, I explore the context in which the group developed, and ask what made it possible for al-Shabaab to become such a threatening and inescapable actor in the region. Such inquiry into the causes of al-Shabaab's resort to violence appears important to provide an alternative explanation to the narrowness of media explanations and popular understanding that dominated the debate after the attack. Indeed, mostly presented in the news as motivated by religion, Christians being separated from Muslims in order to be executed, the media upheld a very judgmental and narrow-minded explanation of the deadly event, which prevented us from understanding its roots. I argue that al-Shabaab appears as a manifestation of the long-lasting conflict and violations of basic human needs, which have in turn generated a collective trauma leading many to long for revenge. The escalation of the conflict leading Kenya to wage war on Somalia since 2011 has provided yet another opportunity for al-Shabaab to justify its decision to use violence on Kenyan soil.

The essay uses conflict studies theories, including Basic Human Needs, Collective Psychology and Cultural-Structural and Direct Violence, in order to understand the decades-long cycle of violence, and the rationales behind the use of violence by the many social and political actors – be they insurgent groups or states. There has been a series of human right violations and violence committed by all parties which have in turn led the conflict to become intractable. As explained by Elias et al. (2009), “an intractable conflict usually is not intractable from the moment it is generated. Rather, it grows intractable as groups gradually distance themselves from each other, to the point where sheer mutual hatred reigns supreme” (p. 34). While Somalia has been considered as a failed state in a constant civil war for over 30 years, the violations of human rights and the trauma felt by

the population and by the actors resorting to violence have progressively increased, leading the possibility for peace to become increasingly more distant.

While I will first examine what other scholars have said and brought to the present discussion, I will then present the conflict theories I will use to analyze the conflict. Since understanding the current crisis in the north of Kenya implies investigating Somalia's history and struggles with its neighbors, I will briefly present in a third part the history of the region. Although I will focus mostly on Kenya, Ethiopia is also of significant importance in the conflict due to its contentious relationship with Somalia from the onset. And indeed, both Kenya and Somalia play a central role in al-Shabaab's rhetoric. This will lead me to study in a fourth section the spread of structural and cultural violence in the region and the development of a collective chosen trauma amongst the many communities involved, and especially amongst ethnic Somalis in Kenya. Lastly, I will analyze the ways the trauma is transformed into action, and how it became possible for al-Shabaab to use direct violence.

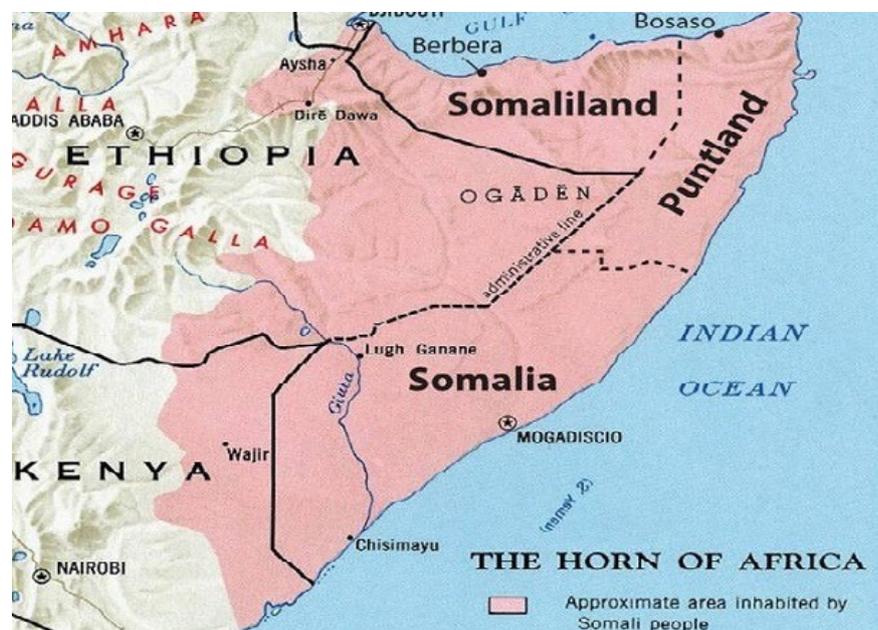


IMAGE © Horn Affairs English

Figure 1: map of Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. A lack of academic studies on the attack in Garissa contrasted with the multiplicity of narrow-minded media explanations

No scholar focused specifically on the conflict between Somalia and Kenya, and more specifically on the attack conducted by al-Shabaab in 2014, except for some articles in newspapers. While Daniel Branch (2012), specialist of Kenyan history, wrote an article on the war waged by Kenya against Somalia, the more recent attack conducted by al-Shabaab in Garissa has not been the object of academic studies. This may be due to the recent character of the event. Some distance appears necessary to understand the trend it is part of and to analyze its roots.

The Garissa attack has made the headlines of many newspapers, yet they provided narrow-minded and judgmental explanations, ones that attributed the attack to one motivated only by religion. For instance, the BBC (2015) wrote early in its article that “The militants singled out Christians and shot them”, while CNN’s headlines stated “147 dead, Islamist gunmen killed after attack at Kenya College”, then “Witness: Gunmen shot non-Muslims”. These are only a few examples of how religion was put on the headlines. Since the insurgent group has vowed allegiance to al Qaeda in 2011, it has been more and more associated with the already value-laden judgments on al Qaeda. The group now constitutes a very hot topic, one on which it is difficult to find historical explanations, especially in the context of the ‘War on Terror’.

Such judgments applied to it prior to any attempts to understand what lies behind its violent actions are reflected in the constant use of the word “terrorism” itself. It constitutes an all-encompassing notion often applied by Western powers such as Europe and the United-States, or representatives of top authorities such as states and the United-Nations, on insurgency groups. Qualifying a group of terrorist is therefore, already and in itself, a judgment. What other word, though, would enable us to better capture the multiplicity encompassed in the word “terrorist” and to prevent us from judging? How to analyze some of the groups and people in the present conflict without judging – and therefore making our understanding even more narrow and opaque, when

only words such as “terrorist” exist? By speaking of “terrorist groups” against the State, are we not taking side for the second? Such questions have been raised by scholars who specialize in terrorism, such as Krueger (2007), English (2009), and Laqueur (2007), amongst others. While the first one tries to understand the roots of terrorist actions, the second analyzes the specificity of terrorism since the beginning of this century, stressing the necessity “not to rely on implausibly simplistic assumptions of straightforward state ‘good’ versus uncomplicated terrorist ‘evil’” (English, 2009, p. 142). The third author analyzes how and why the ‘War on Terror’ failed, and provides great insights as to the necessity to understand the history of terrorism in order to understand it as a phenomenon. Too often, debates about terrorism “have been distinguished [...] more by passion and emotion (and, of course, preconceived notions) than by knowledge and insight” (Laqueur, 2007, p. 7). Together, they provide a framework to think of al-Shabaab’s actions in the context of international geopolitics, and highlight the necessity to understand such events in order not to reproduce the failures of the past. Groups deemed as “terrorists” aim at making the media headlines, since this demonstrates the fear they are able to spread in society. Yet, not all of them succeed. What are the tactics, rationales, social, political and cultural contexts that explain why some groups succeed in spreading fear and why others do not?

#### **B. The history of Kenya and Somalia taken separately by most scholars; the need to bring them together**

There are numerous studies of the history of Kenya and Somalia taken separately, yet very few scholars have studied in depth the history of the two countries taken together, although they appear very intertwined.

Kenya enjoys a democracy, with its shortcomings such as corruption, human rights violations, and so on. Despite some recent evolutions, the situation has remained relatively stable. One leading scholar is Branch (2012), who traces the history of politics and society in Kenya since independence. Highlighting the desire for unity in the post-independence era, Branch studies the relationship with Somalia and ethnic Somalis living in Kenya, who have been perceived as a threat

to Kenyan unity. Indeed, their claims on Kenyan territory were considered as providing opportunities for other ethnic groups in the country to do the same and further divide the new independent state. In light of this, Kenyan government consistently refused to “negotiate the territorial integrity of Kenya” (Branch, 2012, p. 30). On the issue of ethnicity and the unity of the state, Ajulu (2002) is also very enlightening. He deals with both the development of national identities as well as the decision by some communities, such as most Somalis living in the Northern Province District in Kenya, not to identify with their State. This issue ties back to a broader context, the one of Independences in the African continent, which has been described in great length by Meredith (2005). Meredith’s study is important to place the post-independence situation in the Horn of Africa in a broader historical and geographical context, helping us to understand the specificity and commonality of the present situation with other countries. These scholars help us understand how new independent states dealt with their population, having democratic ideals often transformed into dictatorships (Somalia) or authoritative powers (Kenya) that would not accept the diversity and affirmation of different cultural identities within the state. As the two states’ history are so intertwined, especially on their border, a common and comparative study of their evolution appears necessary.

Although not well documented yet, a new trend of literature is emerging on the border regions since recent events, such as al-Shabaab’s attacks in Kenya (Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi in 2013), and Kenya waging a war in Somalia since 2011. As such events demonstrate the need to understand the relationship between Kenya and Somalia, some scholars have started to focus on this. Most of the studies on the recent war waged by Kenya in Somalia adopt a top-down approach, dealing first and foremost with geopolitics determined by governments. Branch (2011, 2012) and Hidalgo (2014) are of great help to understand the long-term trends that affect current politics and trauma in the region. Hidalgo (2014) argues that “the Kenyan government has been its own worst enemy in attempting to reverse this trend”, and provides us with key insights to understand how the government’s answer has fuelled the cycle of violence. It helps us understand the rationales behind

governments' choices on a geopolitical scale. Yet, the rise of al-Shabaab is deeply linked to many Somalis' anger and disillusionment regarding the politics of their countries and of neighboring ones, which implies that a bottom-up approach, one looking at the population and the communities concerned, is necessary.

There are, however, some very specific academics, such as Issack (2008) and Otunnu (1992), who have adopted a bottom-up approach on the relationships between the two countries. They analyze the legacy of History on the two States' relationships, and provide insights as to the ways the communities at stake lived the post-independence era in the north of Kenya. In addition, Rapando Murunga (2005) studied the specificity of the border between the two countries, linking the situation of Somali refugees in Kenya and "the trans-territoriality of crime" to "the fall-outs of post-Cold War conflicts in Africa" (p. 137). While looking at the geopolitical side of the story, these authors analyze the ways it affects the population in the region, and especially displaced communities.

As to refugees, some studies and testimonials have been published by scholars such as Lambo (2012), Yarnell and Thomas (2014), who focused on urban refugees living in Nairobi. To this extent, Yarnell and Thomas (2014) demonstrate how new discriminatory measures concerning refugees, together with the increase in security operations "opened the door to increased levels of abuse, extortion, and harassment of refugees" (p. 1). They provide testimonials of ethnic Somalis' relationship to both their host and their home countries, highlighting the harshness of Kenya's policies towards them and the way this might in turn play in favor of al-Shabaab. Both argue that, by favoring repatriation to their country of origin instead of integration within their host country, Somali identity has been reinforced, as well as the divide between communities in Kenya.

### **C. Al-Shabaab: a new trend that is progressively emerging in political life**

New trends have emerged, such as insurgent groups fighting the regimes. These new topics are less documented than the broader situation. For instance, books and academic articles on al-Shabaab are few, although the press is talking quite a lot about the group. Yet, none of them

includes the Garissa attack. The insurgent group al-Shabaab emerged from the shadows around 2006 and conducted many attacks mostly but not exclusively in Somalia and in Kenya. Authors who analyzed the group include Hansen (2016), Sipus (2010), and Vilkkko (2011). Hansen's book on al-Shabaab constitutes the most recent and complete study, providing a multi-faceted account on the emergence, functioning and future of the group. In addition, Scahill (2013)'s study of the hidden wars raged by the United-States abroad in the context of the 'War on Terror' is of great help to place the emergence of al-Shabaab in the broader international context, and especially in light of the United-States' foreign policy in the Horn of Africa.

Therefore, this literature review highlights the necessity to tie history to recent events in order to understand how both Somalia and Kenya's colonial and post-independence era have affected the social, political and cultural aspects of daily life in the countries. There is a need to look for a long-run explanation. In addition, to understand deadly events such as the 2014 attack in Garissa, we need to do a comparative (Kenya and Somalia) and bottom-up approach so as to understand the popular roots of al-Shabaab and its impact on the region. Using conflict theories will help understand the deep causes of the event and the way communities were impacted by the history of the region, allowing us to go behind a simple factual explanation.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

#### **A. Approach**

Since I have not been to Somalia nor to northern Kenya – both because doing so would entail conducting fieldwork in a very dangerous region and because my work as a practitioner did not lead me there, I will base this analysis on secondary sources. However, the Garissa attack took place right after my travel to Kenya, during which I had a conversation with some Kenyans about Somali refugees in Kenya. As I could sense feelings of defiance towards ethnic Somalis, I became interested in understanding the history of Somalis living in Kenya and the relationships between Kenyans and Somalis. I was working in Tanzania while the attack happened. Tanzania was indirectly affected by al-Shabaab, as the attack was making the headlines of all newspapers and was

on everyone's lips. People were wondering if a similar attack was going to happen in the country and military men were posted in crowded markets and areas. There were, also, rumours of al-Shabaab's military camps in several locations in Tanzania.

As to secondary sources, much research has been conducted on Kenya and Somalia. Yet al-Shabaab is still considered a new phenomenon and academic sources on the insurgent group are until now limited. I will bring together a historical understanding of nation-state formation in a context of post-colonial legacies, from pre-independence to the April 2015 attack. This will allow me, to a certain extent, to understand the contemporary phenomenon of al-Shabaab by compiling various studies on the history of the region.

In order to analyze the evolution of the conflict and the rise of the insurgent group, I will use several conflict theories that are relevant to the present case. I believe that bringing them into the analysis is important in order to move beyond a mere succession of historical facts. They provide a theoretical framework to understand how communities lived through the violence which has characterized the region for several decades, as well as their reaction to it.

## **B. Theories used**

I would like this analysis to be as multi-angled as possible in order to understand the various trends affecting the conflict.

### *Basic Human Needs*

I will firstly use Basic Human Needs theory, developed by various scholars. Basic Human Needs are defined as irreducible essentials in human life which are, because of their irreducibility, nonnegotiable in nature. Maslow (1987) first developed a Basic Human Needs' theory, followed by Galtung (1990). While Galtung states that such needs consist in welfare, freedom, security and meaning/identity, Maslow establishes a hierarchy between basic needs, starting with physiological ones, passing by safety, belonging/love, esteem, and eventually ending with the need for self-actualization.

There are, however, a number of disagreements on what those needs are, and on whether they apply universally. Indeed, culture plays a very important role, as for instance a more individualistic society may place a higher value on self-esteem than one which places community at its core. A shortfall of several theories lies in the fact that these are mostly elaborated by Western scholars, and that culture is often not taken enough into account.

In addition, I will bring into the discussion studies on the role of justice as a basic need. Justice has in general been downplayed by scholars such as Maslow and Galtung, yet “the indications are [it] is becoming recognized as a major concern [...]. Its presence gives satisfaction and security, and its absence quite the opposite” (Taylor, 2009, p. 5). Taylor (2009) and Johnstone (2011) both help us understand the conception of Justice that makes the most sense to people living in violent situations and whose basic needs are constantly violated, and why the need for justice is so important to make sense of one’s life and of the world around us. In light of this, the deprivation of justice is of primary importance in the development of feelings of frustration amongst a community’s members.

### *Collective Psychology*

Basic human needs also have a major impact on a community’s collective psychology. Their violation may lead to the development of a collective trauma that, over time, is passed from one generation to the next. The reactivation of such trauma can lead to the eruption of direct violence, which appears to be the case in the present event. Such processes have been studied at length by Volkan (1998, 2004). He investigates “the psychological links between massive large-group trauma and the development of political ideology of exaggerated entitlement” (Volkan, 2004, p. 1), demonstrating how such processes might generate intractable conflicts.

In addition, Bar-Tal (2013) has written extensively on the development of feelings of victimhood amongst a community. His articles are easily accessible and well-illustrated, although mostly based on the Israeli-Palestinian case. They provide a good framework and illustration with which to draw trends and compare to the Kenyan-Somali case. Lastly, Mach (1993) studied the link

between symbols, notions of identity and conflicts. Although it is not directly related to Collective Psychology, it is very important in order to understand how ethnic groups develop feelings of victimhood and a desire for revenge towards a state that they don't feel they belong to. It helps us question the notions of nationality, ethnicity and identity, and the role they play in the development of intractable conflicts. Indeed, as we previously briefly mentioned, the post-independence era witnessed a conflict between the Kenyan government's longing for a unified country, and the multiplicity of ethnic groups that aspired to acquire more independence.

Hence Collective Psychology will help us understand the trauma and feelings of victimhood developed throughout history, and their manifestations in action and retribution nowadays. Yet, it cannot explain alone the eruption of direct violence. Indeed, many communities in the world have developed decades or even centuries-long collective trauma, which have been passed on between generations without using violence. This is the reason why such theories need to be tightly linked to the historical context in order to understand what triggers specific groups to resort to violence.

#### *Cultural-Structural-Direct Violence*

Once we understand how the deprivation of basic human needs and the development of a chosen trauma lead to violence, we have to look at the different kinds of violence – structural, cultural, direct – that emerge over time and lead to a violent conflict. Galtung (1964) is, once more, a leading scholar on this issue. He highlights how the violation of basic human needs over time is institutionalized and leads to the rise of cultural and structural violence. Once reservoirs built of the chosen trauma are reactivated, direct violence easily erupts. Galtung's theories will therefore help us understand how these three forms of violence interplay in the conflict.

#### **C. Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study, which merit to be discussed prior to starting the analysis.

An obvious one lies in the fact that the analysis will be based only on secondary sources. No interviews with members of the communities involved or impacted by the conflict have been

conducted by the author, and this for several reasons. As a peacebuilder, I have conducted fieldwork in a variety of places, yet I have never worked in Kenya nor in Somalia. Doing research in the field for a woman alone would have been too risky. In addition, there was a time-related constraint, as I was already working in Tanzania at the time of the research project. I did not have the resources to organize fieldtrips neither to Nairobi, nor to northern Kenya or Somalia. Conducting interviews would first have implied making contacts, which usually takes a long time. As a result, I did not listen directly to people talking about their experience of the attack nor of the relationship between Kenya and Somalia. The only way for me to include people's voices was to look for testimonials I could find in articles and newspapers. Yet, these were already ones that had been impacted by other researchers and journalists' biases.

Another limitation consists of possible personal biases. Indeed, who I am and my subjectivity must play a role in the way I perceive the conflict and the history of the region. Some facts remind me of events or moments I have lived in my community or in other ones where I have spent some time, and must unconsciously orientate my way of thinking about them. For instance, the issues of terrorism and of refugees are currently on everyone's lips in my country, and discourses unfortunately tend to amount refugees to potential terrorists, creating a divide between "them" and "us" which is growing bigger every day. This might, perhaps, make me run the risk to make antagonisms bigger, or to equate Somali refugees to members of al-Shabaab, which would obviously impact the content, the analysis and therefore the quality of the research in a negative way. For this reason, I have tried to read as many articles and testimonials in order to place people's voices before my own interpretation. Such biases can however not be fully erased by bringing testimonials into the discussion.

Secondly, being relatively safe and far from the conflict in Tanzania might have led me to downplay the daily consequences of the violence on people's life. This might, in turn, slightly blur the way I analyze people's basic human needs and collective trauma.

I believe it is important for the reader to be aware of such biases in order to make his or her own judgment out of the present paper.

#### **D. Objectives**

My research topic is important as a means of contributing to dialogue on peacebuilding in Somalia, Kenya and more broadly in the Horn of Africa. Analyzing the legacy of colonization on the current conflict between the two States and the multiple communities at stake and its evolution is a first step to transform the conflict. Studying these relationships is important in order to understand the cycle of violence, and to think of ways to defuse it and to heal decades-long wounds. In light of the media's shortcoming in terms of analysis, which tend to make us unable to see the multiple influences and trends that affect the relationships between communities, such research appears particularly important to undertake.

### **IV. A BRIEF HISTORY OF SOMALIA AND ITS NEIGHBORS: THE FIGHT OVER NATIONALISM, SOVEREIGNTY AND SELF-DETERMINATION**

The ongoing civil war in Somalia and the never-ending conflicts with its neighbors over boundaries and self-determination tie back to colonization and to decisions made by European powers on behalf of the Somalis living in the northern region of Kenya. Such measures taken by foreign powers sharply contrasted with the local nomadic culture and its organization into clans and sub-clans, promoting internal divisions that would lead to further instability once the country acquired independence.

#### **A. The forced division of Somalia by Britain, France and Italy and the negation of local cultures**

##### *Traditional ethnic and clans forms of social organization*

Most Somalis are born into one of the main six clans, the Darod, Dir, Hawiye and Isaaq being the main four ones and representing 75% of the population. Those clans are then divided into sub-clans. For instance, the Isaaq is subdivided into three sub-clans, some of them being then divided into more sub-clans. Yet, this lineage classification is not conflict-free, as not all Somalis agree on

which lineage lines other Somalis belong to (see Hesse, 2010). Hence, “Somali genealogy presents individuals with a seemingly infinite number of ways to affiliate with, or dissociate from, fellow Somalis” (Hesse, 2010, p. 249). Clan and sub-clan identities are still very relevant nowadays: when introducing themselves, most Somalis tend to say which clan and/or sub-clan they belong to depending on who stands in front of them.

Traditionally, Somalis were pastoralist and nomadic, moving from one area to another depending on weather conditions. In this sense, they “have adhered to a geographically de-territorialized and nomadic identity by employing mobile ways of living to enhance their survival in a harsh and challenging environment” (Lambo, 2012, p. 1). Such traditional forms of organization imply that communities can cross and move constantly, their location evolving throughout time. This might, therefore, question the concept of borders, which is so important to authorities looking to establish clear boundaries between communities. It also questions the idea of a Somali nation-state: how to build a unified nation with clear national borders in such conditions? Lastly, such nomadic and pastoralist way of living, added to the multiplicity of communities Somalis belong to, have an impact on the concept of refugee. What does being a refugee from a de-territorialized culture mean, compared to being a refugee from a sedentary one, as most of the policy makers come from Western countries? Such issues will, indeed, have an impact on Somalis in Kenya and on the conflict, as we will study in more depth in part V.

#### *Colonial divisions and the imposition of boundaries*

Prior to independence, the Somali population was divided into five territorial entities. The French-occupied French Somaliland, nowadays Djibouti. The British-occupied British Somaliland, nowadays Somaliland and situated north of Somalia. Finally, Italy held the Italian Colony of Somalia. This last one had been disputed by Britain and Italy and was eventually granted to the second by the United Nations after World War II. In addition, the Somalis constituted the majority of the inhabitants in the northern part of the British colony of Kenya and of the West of Ethiopia, as

its Emperor Menelik invaded the Ogaden plateau in the nineteenth century (see Meredith, 2005). These divisions were all the results of military interests. The French wanted the port of Djibouti because it constituted an entrance to the Red Sea, while the British considered British Somaliland as a necessity to make sure their garrison in Aden was supplied with meat. As to Italy, it wanted to expand its small colonial empire as an illustration of its standing in the world (see Meredith, 2005).

Since the Italian colony of Somalia was under the close supervision of the international community, it was administered in a very interventionist manner, which provided Somalis with an experience in governance. In contrast, the British protectorate of Somaliland was mostly neglected by its colonizer, who did little to administer it. They considered the resource-barren territory only for its strategic location regarding the slave trade and for exportations. The region got the nickname of “Aden Butcher’s shop”, which symbolized the British lack of interest for this coastal area. It led to the development of major disparities between the two territories in terms of economic growth and political experience. This would have important consequences once the two territories were to merge into one at independence.

The divisions imposed by colonial powers contrasted sharply, as they did for many African states, with the local culture and the organization of Somali communities. Traditionally, the rights and obligations of Somalis were defined by their clans and their standing in comparison with others. The idea of a government – as we commonly understand it - was alien to Somalis: to Prunier (1997), “a settled population is needed before any form of state can be established”. Colonial powers brought in alien forms of organization and government, using the already existing system of clans to extend their control over Somalis and their territories, favoring some clan chiefs over others. It would eventually create conflicts between clans.

*The acquisition of independence: a poisoned victory*

The post-independence era was characterized by the new Somali and Kenyan states’ desire to build a strong and unified country. This was considered necessary in order to impose oneself on the regional and international scene.

Somalia acquired independence on July 1, 1960. British Somaliland<sup>1</sup> and Italian Somaliland united to form the Republic of Somalia. Yet, another ideal for Somalia emerged; Greater Somalia, which would have included the territories of Djibouti, the Ogaden region in Ethiopia and northern Kenya. The five-pointed, white stars on a light blue background national flag illustrates this dream for a Greater Somalia. The five stars represent the five regions which would, to many Somalis, ideally constitute Somalia. Hence, the independence of the country witnessed the emergence of a sharp contrast between the reality, where only two parts of what Somalis considered theirs were united, and the desire for a reunification of all five parts, which is an ideal still alive amongst many Somalis nowadays. Independence meant, to many, the eruption of a conflict over what Somalia should look like and where to settle its boundaries. It also implied conflicts with neighboring countries and with international powers which were still very present in the area, since “from the outset, Somalia made clear its refusal to accept the validity of its existing borders” (Meredith, 2005, 466), therefore supporting guerilla wars raged in neighboring regions.

The new state's boundaries were drawn by Britain and Italy. A referendum took place in Djibouti in 1958 asking the population whether it wanted to remain under the French or to join the Somali Republic, which was soon to acquire independence. While the results turned to be in favor of the French, there were allegations of vote rigging. In addition, there were many Europeans living in Djibouti, and their votes to remain with France had an important impact on the results of the referendum. A new constitution for the Republic of Somalia was adopted in 1961, and a government was formed, in which members of the trusteeship and protectorate held important positions. Yet, the president was shot in 1969 and a military coup d'état followed, putting Mohamed Siad Barre at the head of the state.

The longing for a unified state contrasted with the reality of internal divisions and conflicts: “as Somali politicians continue[d] to rebuild a central (even if federal) government and political entrepreneurs and warlords continue[d] to struggle over the resources that once belonged to the

---

<sup>1</sup> *British Somaliland became Somaliland at independence, a semi-autonomous region which declared independence from Somalia in 1991 after the collapse of the Barre's regime. Yet it is still considered part of Somalia by almost all the international community.*

states, ordinary Somalis remain[ed] deeply divided” (Kapteijns, 2013, p. 13). It became very difficult for the new government to contain the regular eruption of violence. The concept of Somalia appeared, since its outset and to both national powers as well as to the Somali population, as a contested one, one very difficult to define.

Hence the imposition of foreign forms of governance and divisions under colonization was maintained after independence: only two territories merged to form the Republic of Somalia, and even these two were deeply imprinted by the colonization era. Somali culture extends beyond Somali borders, which have been imposed by foreign powers. This was, since its outset, a source of conflicts over territories that generated feelings of disenfranchisement amongst many Somalis.

#### **B. The legacy of colonialism and the emergence of long-lasting divisions at the Somali-Kenya border**

*Kenya's Northern region: a strategic region for Somalia and Kenya newly independent states*

While the Northern Frontier District (NFD) was part of Italian Somaliland, Britain extended its control over Kenya to the NFD at the turn of the century. Following Otunnu (1992)'s argument, it did so in order to “provide a buffer between Italian Somaliland and Ethiopia on the one side, and the East African railway and the white settlers in the highlands on the other” (p. 21). Britain was also motivated by a desire to stop the Southward Somali expansion. Since the territory was constituted as a buffer zone, no serious attempt was made to foster political, social, and economic development. When Kenya gained its independence in 1963, Britain granted the administration of the Northern Frontier District to Kenyan nationalists, although it was an almost all-Somali area.

As a result, the former NFD came under the governance of Kenya. This was a substantial territory entity, which covered about 102,000 square miles or about half of the newly independent country's territory. According to Whittaker (2012), “in 1962, the region had an estimated population of 200,000, which was made up almost entirely by the pastoral Somali, and ethnically related Boran, Rendille, and Gabra groups” (p. 343). An informal plebiscite was conducted in 1962, which concluded that the majority of the inhabitants of the area overwhelmingly supported its

reunification with the Somali state (see Otunnu, 1992). Yet, the decision for the NFD to remain part of Kenya held. Additionally, it was supported by Ethiopia on the claim that handling it back to Somalia would lead to a “balkanization of the area” (see Otunnu, 1992), with the risk to Ethiopia of Somalia wanting to expand further.

As the majority of the inhabitants of the NFD rejected the decision, several opposition parties emerged. Armed struggle progressively intensified, while Kenyan authorities further isolated the district. Indeed, no efforts were made by the Kenyan government to integrate the region and its ethnic Somali inhabitants in the broader political and social agenda. As a result, “to counter the heightened insurgency activities in the area, a state of emergency was declared as Kenya obtained independence. In short, Kenya’s independence did not mean freedom from subjugation and harassment in the area” (Otunnu, 1992, p. 22). To many ethnic Somalis, it only meant that the colonizer had moved from Britain to Kenya.

*The 1967 Shifta war: the unfolding of violence between the two neighbors and the alienation of the ethnic Somali population in Kenya*

The *Shifta* war started at Kenya’s independence and lasted up to 1967. Consisting of a low-intensity war, it was motivated by insurgents’ desire to unify the NFD to the newly independent Republic of Somalia, in light of the dream of a Greater Somalia. As the border between Somalia and Kenya was very porous, due in part to the lack of infrastructure and to the harsh geography of the area, many *shifta* (i.e. radicalized Northern Frontier District residents) went to the Somali Republic and started to wage a guerilla war against Kenya. The insurgents were supported to some extent by Somalia, which was helping them with limited supplies of weapons. Yet, Somalia’s responsibility at this stage in the conflict was only minimal, as the insurgents:

... were in fact overwhelmingly inhabitants of Kenya. And it was not just Somalis who took up arms. Small numbers of Turkana and members of other ethnic communities in northern Kenya also joined the fight. They were concerned not about issues of sovereignty, but about

their fear of statecraft that would restrict movement and impose an unprecedented level of state regulation on their daily lives. (Branch, 2012, p. 27)

The label “*shifita*”, imposed on the insurgents by the Kenyan government, means “bandits”. It is representative of the negative image Kenyan officials had of the rebels and highlights their desire to delegitimize the movement. As an answer, Kenya started to expel dissidents back to Somalia in the 1970s. To Otunnu (1992), “anyone partaking in any form of dissent in the region would be seen as an ‘enemy’ of the state. This reinforced the image of the inhabitants of the area as ‘aliens’, whose loyalty to Kenya was always questionable” (p. 23). The government and military operated a generalization according to which all ethnic Somalis constituted a threat to the new state.

As such, these incidents provoked severe military retribution on behalf of the government. Attacks in the province were carried out on a regular basis, starting with the Garissa massacre perpetrated by Kenyan military against local Kenyan-Somalis in reaction to the killing of four civil servants. The massacre resulted in the death of approximately 3,000 ethnic Somali residents of Kenya (see Issack, 2008). As explained by Mohamed Osman Gosar, who lived through the massacre, to an *Al Jazeera* correspondent, “As often happened then and continues to happen today, the government fell back on its policy of collectively punishing an entire community for the crimes of a few” (*Al Jazeera*, 2013). This was followed by other massacres against Kenyan-Somalis, such as the Wagalla one in 1984, which consisted of an effort to disarm Kenyan-Somalis in the Wajir region who were engaged in a guerilla. While ethnic Somalis said thousands were killed, the government maintained that the operation resulted in only 57 deaths. Such collective punishments on behalf of the Kenyan military trace back to the *Shifita* war and illustrate the complicated relationships between the Northern Frontier District and Kenyan authorities (see *Al Jazeera*, 2013). It also highlights how the collective character of military retribution was felt as profoundly unfair and shocking to ethnic Somalis.

In addition to repressive measures, the government also developed a strategy of forced settlement in villages – often referred to as “forced villagization”. It did so in order to extend its

control over the inhabitants of the northern region. As such, “reconstruction in northern Kenya was focused on moving Kenyan pastoralists away from pastoralism” (Whittaker, 2012, p. 351), hence modifying the ways people had lived for centuries. To Whittaker (2012), “the general inference was that growing millet, maize and sorghum was the activity of civilized Kenyans, while pastoralism and its associated cultural practices were regressive, the activity of pastoral nomads and *shifita*” (p. 351). Based on such a negative view of pastoralism, the government started the process of forced villagization, which required the inhabitants of the NFD to move to specific areas designated by the government and controlled by security guards. Yet, “community development officials reported a ‘clear negative attitude towards change’ among residents” (Whittaker, 2012, p. 345), as the latter started to talk of the villages as “confinement” and “concentration camps” (see Whittaker, 2012).

Although the peace deal was signed in 1967, instability endured in the region. Only few of the insurgents who surrendered did so with their weapons, as these were brought back to Somalia. As a result, Rapando Murunga (2005) writes that:

The *Shifita* war is largely responsible for the criminalization of the Somali identity in Kenya. The war led to the stigma of the Somali as irredentist troublemakers and reference to *shifita* in political talk came to indiscriminately apply to all Somalis. From this, the criminality of the Somali in Kenya was banalised and provided the excuse to resort to exclusionary tactics in which the Somali were either ignored or targeted for punitive military and police confrontations. (p. 148)

Eventually, the use of violence by the Kenyan government in the NFD is revealing of the continuity between colonial and postcolonial Kenya. It greatly contributed to developing a sense of community victimization, in turn preventing the identification of the inhabitants of the area with the young Kenyan nation.

#### *A contentious concept of nationality*

The concepts of “nation” and “state” have two different meanings, although they are often mistaken for one another. The distinction between the two appears particularly relevant in the

present case, where many Somalis living in Kenya are citizens of the Kenyan state while considering themselves as belonging to the Somali nation.

According to Gellner (1983), the concept of “nation” implies two complementary elements:

Firstly, ‘two men are of the same nation if, and only if, they share the same culture, where culture, in turn, means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating. Secondly, two men are of the same nation if, and only if, they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. (as cited in Mach, 1993, p. 99)

Yet, this definition of the concept is problematic, as it seems very unlikely that all the citizens of a specific state, for instance Kenya, would share the same culture. Therefore, and although authorities often aspire to do so, it is highly unlikely that any state will equate itself with a single nation. There are many cultures present within a state, and this plurality can lead to more or less peaceful relationships between communities.

However, Gellner’s writing is interesting for us in the sense that it denotes the possibility of a conflict for some groups of individuals who might be citizens of a state and yet feel that they belong to another nation. The idea of mutual recognition outlined by Gellner has not worked in the case of Kenya. At independence, Kenya’s leader Kenyatta tried to bring the ideal of a unified nation-state to reality. Yet, this was often enforced through violent means, as we have seen. Somalis were perceived by government officials as threatening this ideal. Indeed, as outlined in the analysis of the *Shifita* war, many ethnic Kenyans and ethnic Somalis living in Kenya did not recognize each other as belonging to the same nation nor culture. The dichotomy between Somalis’ feelings of belonging to the Kenyan state and to the Somali nation is expressed by Branch (2012):

Somalis in northern parts of Kenya [...] feel a pull towards the neighboring independent state of Somalia and the notion of Greater Somalia. Greater Somalia offered ethnic Somalis dispersed across the modern states of Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti and, of course, Somalia, the promise that they would be brought together under one flag. (p. 29)

This longing for a Greater Somalia illustrates “the desire to preserve or enhance a people’s national or cultural identity when that identity is threatened, or the desire to transform or even create it where it is felt to be inadequate or lacking” (Mach, 1993, p. 101). In this sense, preserving one’s identity meant, to many Somalis, rejecting their belonging to the Kenyan state.

The process of decolonization and independence was a vital moment for the new emerging states, opening up debates about the concepts of identity, citizenship and sovereignty (see Branch, 2012). The 1960s were therefore a difficult time for Kenya as a young independent state, which might help explain its president Kenyatta’s desire to enhance a feeling of nationalism within all citizens. Yet, many Somalis rejected the Kenyan identity: “A civil servant posted to Garissa in September 1964 was amazed to be greeted by residents of the towns with ‘Hello. How is Kenya?’ ‘People here’, he noted, ‘regard the area on the opposite side of River Tana as being in ‘Kenya’” (Branch, 2012, p. 30). To Kenyan government, negotiating with dissidents in the NFD would have entailed opening up a Pandora box, risking the emergence of other claims on territories in other parts of Kenya, and eventually amounting to further divide the new nation-state.

Northern Kenya has been a particularly sensitive symbol of the tension between the two countries and their communities. To Kenyan government, the region illustrated the desire to demonstrate the strength of the newly independent state. Yet, to ethnic Somalis, it symbolized the violation of their rights as a people.

### **C. Somalia’s instability and internal divisions: the failure of the state and its consequences on neighboring countries**

#### *A longing for unity: The Republic of Somalia’s wars against its neighbors*

Violent conflicts at the border between Somalia and Kenya continued for decades after the *Shifita* war ended. The 1980s witnessed many border incidents, to which Kenyan security forces reacted by the use of severe military retribution, therefore creating a climate of general insecurity in the province (see Otunnu, 1992).

In addition to such tensions in its south, Somalia was in conflict with Ethiopia over the Ogaden region. A predominantly Somali-inhabited area, the region had been returned to Ethiopia in 1948 due to World War II allies' pressure on Britain. While Somali residents were supposed to retain their autonomy, the Ethiopian government eventually claimed sovereignty on the region. In such a context, the war between Ethiopia and Somalia broke out in July 1977, as Barre, then Somalia's ruler, sought to incorporate the region to Somalia with the aim of bringing the ideal of Greater Somalia to reality. The Soviet Union was helping Somalia previous to the war, yet "the superpowers dramatically changed client states – the U.S. backed Somalia and the Soviet Union backed Ethiopia" (Otunnu, 1992, p. 23), thus bringing the Cold war to the Horn of Africa. The Soviet Union, also an ally of Ethiopia, changed sides as it disapproved Somalia's military intervention. In 1978, Somali troops were pushed out of the Ogaden, and a truce was declared.

With time, Ethiopia's involvement in the Somali conflagration increased. After the Somali state collapsed, Ethiopia was the main supplier of weapons to Somali factions. In addition, the government was heavily involved in Somali peace processes, with the aim of weakening the Somali state, thought of as dangerous for Ethiopia's regional power due to Somalia's Muslim majority and to Ethiopia's desire to acquire access to the sea. For these reasons, which still hold true today, Abdi Elmi (2010) argues that Ethiopia has an interest in maintaining clan-based regions that are hostile to each other in Somalia.

Hence, as these states acquired independence, their longing for national unity implied power struggles over conflicting ideals of nation-states. Kenya and Ethiopia, two Christian states, signed a mutual defense-pact against Somalia in 1963. As this section points out, the young Somali state's longing for unity and for the building of a national identity led to the development of conflicting relationships with its neighbors and to growing instability. With Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia having just acquired independence, several national identity formations entered in conflict. Ethiopia and Kenya felt their identity and therefore existence was threatened by the Somali identity, as this last one gravitated around a different religion and the dream of Greater Somalia.

*The failure of the state and the civil war*

Barre's government arose in 1969 following a military coup and continued until its collapse in 1991. While most scholars and newspapers date the collapse of the state at the end of the 1980s, others argue that it was rooted in the failure of the Ogaden war in 1978, when internal divisions started to gnaw away Barre's ideal of the nation-state (see Abdi Elmi, 2010). As Barre started to lose his legitimacy following the war, he put in place a divide-and-rule policy in order to maintain his grasp on the country: "Barre's rule was eventually challenged after his failed Ogaden campaign. When faced with the prospect of losing power, though, he quickly abandoned efforts to stamp out clannism and instead resurrected and ratcheted up clan differences" (Hesse, 2010, p. 251). As such, Barre tried to divert attention from his government's failure to rule the country by dividing and therefore weakening his opponents.

Such tribal divisions progressively evolved into territorial ones, and local authorities spread throughout the country. As stated by Kimenyi, Mukum Mbaku & Moyo (2010):

Barre's opportunistic and extremely violent regime helped to fuel mistrust among clans in Somalia. Eventually, many clan groups came to the conclusion that they could not trust a central government but had to depend only on their own clan/subclan for security, as well as economic and social development. Consequently, numerous clan-based warlords emerged to fight for control of the apparatus of government. (p. 1350-1351)

As communities came to fight with each other, the country became geographically, socially and politically divided. With violence escalating between clans, clan identity came to prime over Somali identity.

*The emergence of the Union of Islamic Courts and al-Shabaab: a parenthesis of stabilization in Somalia's recent history*

While Ethiopia invaded Somalia in 2006 in order to help prop up the Transitional Federal Government, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) emerged as the main Somali actor in the fight against Ethiopia and took power over large parts of the country. The UIC consisted of a union of

Sharia courts who conducted a guerilla war and ran a parallel administration to the Transitional Federal Government. Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen was one of its hard line factions and “served as the most militant youth group of the UIC during the six-month rule of the Courts in southern and central Somalia” (Gakuo Mwangi, 2012, p. 518). Yet, after being defeated by Ethiopian troops and by the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia, the UIC fled to neighboring countries. Al-Shabaab remained in Somalia and eventually emerged as a distinct force, launching an insurgency against both the TFG and Ethiopian forces from 2006 to 2009. To Vilkkko (2011), the group “was widely seen as a defender of Somali interests against the Ethiopian invaders. The ICU had been able to bring order and security, which led many to hope that al-Shabaab, regardless of means and ideology, could do the same” (p. 8). At this time, most Somalis considered members of al-Shabaab as freedom fighters rather than terrorists. Indeed,

The citizens of Mogadishu were tired of the anarchy, rape, robbery, theft and murder that had been the order of the day, and the various ideologies that had influenced Somali history, nationalism, fascism, Marxism and clannism, were all discredited. By the late 2000s, Islam was the only belief system in Somalia that had not been discredited, and citizens went to religious leaders with their needs for protection. (Hansen, 2016, p. 23)

Many hoped al-Shabaab and its hard line conception of Islam could unify the country and bring back a moral stand on politics.

Muslim identity is very important to the majority of the population in Somalia, and the insurgent group is trying to rally people under the concept of religion, in a desire to overcome clannism and the divisions it creates. And indeed,

Al-Shabaab propagates the use of Islamism as a tool for social transformation. Its extreme variant of Islamism is being used to homogenize the Somali culture and society, especially in a bid to get rid of what it considers as adverse characteristics of the society – namely clannism and Islamic pluralism. (Gakuo Mwangi, 2012, p. 523)

Using Salafi-Wahhabism, the group tries to provide a revolutionary discourse to Somalis by creating cross-clan alliances (see Gakuo Mwangi, 2012). Its desire to bring about social transformation in Somalia can be witnessed in the way the movement depicts itself, “as a defender and campaigner of genuine Islam [...]. [It] has advanced its version of Islamism as the most viable option for establishing good governance and stability in Somalia” (Gakuo Mwangi, 2012, p. 524). Yet, the group has progressively associated itself with al-Qaeda, eventually vowing allegiance to the latter in February 2012. Informal links between the two groups already existed, as many al-Shabaab’s members had gone to fight in Afghanistan. This illustrates the group’s idea that a true Muslim fighter should not fight only for one country but rather for the *ummah*<sup>2</sup> itself: “it tapped into the perception of a general threat to the *ummah*, and not only to Somalia” (Hansen, 2016, p. 63).

While initially calling for foreign fighters to join them, and therefore for an alliance with insurgent groups fighting for the *ummah* worldwide, it slightly changed strategies once holding power on territories, having to focus on governance issues (see Hansen, 2016). It then had to engage locally, which eventually implied that clans became more important within the movement. The longing for a global struggle was however to come back later on the forefront as the group lost territory, changing its tactics in the meantime.

Kenya is very present in al-Shabaab’s rhetoric: it is perceived by the group as one of the main actors playing against the interest of a Somali nation-state. The reasons for this is well summed up by Gakuo Mwangi (2012):

([they] include, among others, Kenya’s political and military support for the TFG in Somalia, its support for US backed counterterrorism efforts that especially target Somalis and Somalia, and the perception that the country is a Christian state. The country is widely seen as a frontline state against the spread of Islamist extremism in the Horn of Africa. (p. 521)

---

<sup>2</sup> Commonly understood as the community of Islamic people. It is a supra-national community, which unites people who identify as Muslims.

Written in 2012, the author however forgets one main reason for al-Shabaab's decision to resort to violence in Kenya, namely the decision of the latter to invade Somalia in 2011. We will study this point in more details later in the essay (see V. A.).

*The numerous peace processes and their repeated failures*

There have been numerous peace processes since the state collapsed, yet they have all failed. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) has always been thought of as very corrupted and defending the interests of international powers by most of the population. When the UIC emerged, it did so in opposition to the TFG. In 2006, the Khartoum-based talks tried to bring together the TFG and the UIC in a desire to forge a unity government, yet "neither side trusted each other" (Hesse, 2010, p. 253). While Ethiopia backed the TFG, the UIC began to call for a 'holy war'. The war with Ethiopia started, leading to the defeat of the UIC. Eventually, the last decades have witnessed, with the many attempts to form new governments, a very high turnover in presidents and prime ministers. This illustrates and in turn maintains the lack of stability in the country. The TFG is still today a besieged government in Somalia, one defended by foreign troops, which leads Hassan & Barnes (2007) to speak of a government "in residence, but not in power".

In front stand various insurgent groups that should be taken into account in any peace talk. Al-Shabaab is not the only one, yet it appears as the most threatening and infamous. Hizbul Islam, Raas Kaambooni, and Anoole/al-Furqaan are the main others. They are all mostly Islamic militias, with members issued from the Darod clans in majority. These factions have built alliances to hold territories based on strategic opportunities rather than on ideology. For instance, al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam joined to maintain their power on the port of Kismayo, which constitutes a strategic location for business, before al-Shabaab decided to renegotiate the "contract" (see Hesse, 2010). Such alliances have never lasted very long, increasing the instability and the ever-changing power balances in the country.

Eventually, Somalia has come to be known as one of the most striking example of a collapsed state, defined by Gakuo Mwangi (2012) as a state under "persistent and pervasive conflict" (p. 520).

To him, “this condition, created by the absence of strong internal state actors capable of effective conflict management, leads to the intervention of external actors in the conflict and conflict management process” (p. 520). Yet, this appears as too narrow-minded an explanation of state collapse: it forgets that the external actors that got involved in the conflict in Somalia did so at least as much to protect their interests than out of a real desire to bring about peace. Indeed, many scholars argue that Kenya and Ethiopia are not working towards a unified Somalia, as this would threaten their authority on the contested NFD and Ogaden areas.

Hence, we have seen that divisions under colonization strongly impacted the geographic, political, cultural and economic spheres of the newly independent states in the Horn of Africa. In a context of nation-building, Northern Kenya appeared since the beginning as a strategic region, yet one that symbolized the divisions and conflicts inherited from the colonial era. This generated feelings of disenfranchisement and anger due to the constant violations of Somalis' human rights and to the repetition of violent conflicts.

The recent and current contexts, with the war raged by Ethiopia in 2006 and then the one raged by Kenya since 2011, illustrate once more the inference of foreign powers in Somalia and the unresolved character of conflicts at its borders. They both highlight the internal divisions and weaknesses of Somalia, and stand as a reminder of a traumatic history. This situation enabled a group such as al-Shabaab to appear, at least at the beginning, as the main defender of Somali interests, one that crossed over clan divisions and that could bring back a seemingly homogeneous authority on the divided country.

## **V. THE SPREAD OF STRUCTURAL-CULTURAL VIOLENCE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CHOSEN TRAUMA**

In a context of continuous and violent conflict, the flow of Somali refugees to neighboring countries and especially Kenya has been rocketing. This has developed into a very tricky situation for Kenya, a country whose stability has always been threatened. The complexity of the situation for the many communities concerned by the tensions led, to a big extent, to a repetition of human

rights' violation by Kenya and to the constitution of a collective trauma among the Kenyan Somali community.

**A. A decades-long and ever growing flow of Somali refugees in Kenya**

*A Tradition of Somali refugees in Kenya*

A first and important point to clarify when dealing with the Somali community in Kenya consists of the distinction that needs to be made between Kenyan Somalis and Somali refugees. The first group refers to Somalis who were already living in Kenya prior to the civil war, as for instance Somalis in the north of Kenya. Once the civil war erupted in Somalia, many sought refuge in Ethiopia and Kenya at the beginning of the civil war. Yet “the image of Somalis seen in the larger historical context of conflicts between the two states and between the central government and the North-eastern Province have blurred the distinction between Somali refugees and Kenyan-Somalis” (Otunnu, 1992, p. 25). This is partly due to Kenya’s policies towards Somalis, as

The authorities have increased security sweeps and identity checks of Kenyans of Somali origin and Somalis living in Kenya. The arrival of the refugees is being used as an opportunity to impose compulsory screening on all Kenyan-Somalis, in order to identify ‘illegal aliens’. (Otunnu, 1992, p. 25)

Indirectly, the government’s message to people belonging to the Somali community can be interpreted by many as follows: Kenyan Somalis are considered as Somali refugees, who are themselves often associated with al-Shabaab’s sympathizers.

As of November 2011, “there were approximately 520,000 Somali refugees and asylum seekers [...], of which 444,030 were in the Dadaab camps, 45,000 in Kakuma camp, and 30790 in Nairobi” (Lambo, 2012, p. 1). Yet, in early 2016, Kenyan attitude towards Somali refugees has dramatically changed, as the government has declared the closing of the two main refugee camps previously mentioned. As explained by the Kenyan minister for national security, the camps constitute, to many officials and Kenyans, a threat to Kenyans’ security. The justification is that al-Shabaab has operated from Dadaab camp to mount some of its terrorist attacks, such as the 2013

Westgate one. Overcrowded and under-resourced conditions in the camps explain in part the possibility for such groups to operate and plan attacks from there. UNHCR is now in charge of the closing and repatriation process.

Somali refugees are therefore directly impacted by the War on Terror, where the image of a “pervasive and persistent terrorist threat” (Kibocho, 2016) in turn gives rise to more intense stereotyping against some populations. Indeed, as explained by the minister of national security Kibocho (2016) in *The Independent*,

Our action is taken at a time when a growing number of countries – rich and poor alike – globally are limiting refugee entry on the grounds of national security. For much lower populations than Kenya has hosted for decades. We understand their reasoning at a time when the International Community is challenged and, unfortunately, far too paralyzed in the face of metastasizing terrorist threats.

Western governments’ decisions concerning the flows of refugees fleeing the war in Syria indirectly impacts the ways refugees fleeing other conflicts in different parts of the world are treated by their host country.

In the Kenyan capital Nairobi, most refugees and members of the Somali community live in an area called Eastleigh, where refugee networks have developed over the last decades. Yet, once in urban areas and not registered in any refugee camps, Somali refugees become invisible to the Kenyan state. The situation in the area has deteriorated, Eastleigh being neglected by the authorities. It has come to be seen as a marginal space and the refugees living there as a criminal lot. According to Rapando Murunga (2005),

Both the government and refugees are responsible for the deteriorating situation in Eastleigh. The problem is that Kenyans do not factor in the state’s acts of omission to explain the rising rates of crime, rather, they focus on the Somali refugees as causes of uncertainty and crime and further add to suspicion of Somali refugees. (p. 154)

While the area is the place of violence and discrimination on the part of the Kenyan military towards the Somali community, constant conflicts have erupted between the two groups.

*Kenya's answer: from a welcoming state to a discriminating and marginalizing one*

Kenya was at first a generous host, welcoming refugees fleeing from Somalia: “until the late 1980s and early 1990s, refugees in Kenya enjoyed ‘full status’ rights” (Campbell, 2006, p. 399). As there were only very few refugees coming to Kenya, this did not appear as a problem, or at least one that could be easily controlled by the government.

The early 1990s witnessed a shift in Kenya's policy towards refugees, alongside the end of the Cold War. Indeed, as “Western countries lost an ideological incentive to resettle large numbers of refugees in their countries, [...] much of the burden of hosting refugees rested on countries of first asylum” (Lambo, 2012, p. 3), mostly neighboring countries. At the same time, violent conflicts were increasing across the continent. By 1992, there were approximately 400,000 Somali refugees in Kenya, whose government felt deeply overwhelmed. Its response to the refugee crisis was a temporary one, which consisted of waiting for the conflict to be over in order to enable refugees to go back to Somalia. This led to an ‘encampment policy’, where refugees were isolated from the rest of the population (see Lambo, 2012). Yet, the conflict lasted much longer than expected, and refugees stayed for decades.

In order to hold more control over Somali refugees living in urban areas such as Eastleigh, the Kenyan government recently changed strategies, imposing all urban refugees to report to refugee camps. In the meantime, it launched an operation in order to identify and root out alleged members of al-Shabaab. As written by Yarnell and Thomas (2014), “together, these two initiatives opened the door to increased levels of abuse, extortion, and harassment of refugees by the Kenyan police” (p. 1). Yet, Yarnell and Thomas highlight the fact that:

Kenya's deportations of Somalis to Mogadishu, coupled with the government's ongoing pressure for large-scale returns, come at a time when Somalia is simply not ready to receive large numbers of returnees. For one, the security situation inside Somalia has worsened in

many areas over the past year. A military offensive against al-Shabaab strongholds in south central Somalia in early 2014 by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) led to increased displacement, and insecurity persists throughout much of the region. (p. 4)

Somali refugees whom Kenya wants to repatriate to their country of origins are simply left in limbo.

*Since 2000s: Kenya's decision to resort to violence as an expression of its desire to hide the state's weakness*

Kenya, like other neighboring countries, is not in an easy situation when it comes to hosting so many refugees. Indeed, not many countries have to deal with more than 600,000 refugees. Kenya already faces many challenges to provide infrastructures to its inhabitants, while dealing at the same time with several security issues due to its geographic location: “being a neighbor of Somalia and having a sizeable ethnic Somali population within its borders, Kenya can barely escape some consequences of the internal strife in Somalia” (Lambo, 2012, p. 25). There has been growing insecurity over the last years, since al-Shabaab has led operations out of cells based among the Somali community both in the capital city and in refugee camps. This has provided authorities with a new reason “to reinforce its encampment policy and keep refugee population far from any urban center” (Lambo, 2012, p. 4).

Kenya adopted a military response to growing insecurity issues, dispatching about 2,000 troops in Somalia in October 2011. After al-Shabaab conducted a series of cross-border raids and kidnapped tourists and aid workers in Kenya, the latter invaded its neighbor, claiming to secure its border and to create a “buffer zone” (Branch, 2011). An interesting point consists in the use of the term “buffer zone”, which ties back to colonization and to the decision of the British to handle the Northern Frontier District to Kenya in order to prevent Kenya from troubles and from a Somali expansion. The idea of isolating Kenya from the troubles and insurgents in Somalia illustrates the government's defiance towards the Somali community, and its view of Somalis as responsible for increased crime in Kenya. Yet, Branch (2011) also offers another explanation to Kenya's incursion into Somalia, as

... spurred less by the threat of al-Shabaab and more by domestic military and political dynamics. [...] So far the country has never once gone to war with another state. But recently, as Washington has funneled counterterrorism funds into East Africa and underwritten a stronger Kenyan military, the country's military has grown more confident and combative. (p. 1)

While there is widespread support for the war against Somalia, Muslim circles in Kenya view it in a slightly different way. There is a long tradition of discrimination against the Muslim community in the country, and the decision to invade Somalia further alienates Muslims, in the meantime reinforcing al-Shabaab's discourses presenting Muslims under the threat of Christian governments. Indeed, since Kenya gained independence, "a lack of public investment in health and education and inequalities in access to land have left many Muslims along the coast feeling alienated" (Branch, 2011, p. 2). As a result, "Muslim communities have a long-standing suspicion of the Kenyan state and its motives. In recent years, the rising influence of Christian evangelism has introduced overt Islamophobia into the public debate" (Branch, 2011, p. 2). As Kenya invaded Somalia, terrorist attacks conducted in Kenya by al-Shabaab members and its sympathizers have risen. As alleged by Human Rights Watch, such attacks have in turn been followed by indiscriminate reprisals against local Somalis (see Branch, 2011).

Kenya's Northern province has therefore been a source of conflict between Somalia and Kenya since its onset, leading to suspicious and violent relationships. The decade-long conflict has, in recent years, led to more terrorist attacks and military interventions, leading the cycle of violence to develop and reach new segments of the population.

#### **B. Somali refugees' identity: reinforcing one's own culture as a symbol of rejection of the host country's culture**

##### *The impact of the Somali nomadic culture on refugee identity*

Since Somalis traditionally employ mobile and nomadic ways of living,

[t]he link between place and identity as is prioritized in sedentary thinking, therefore, cannot be applied to the Somali nomadic pastoralist, as his or her identity derives from membership of a particular clan (that extends across vast areas) rather than to a specific place that is geographically fixed. (Lambo, 2012, p.6)

According to this view, Somalis' sense of identity would have more to do with the social network and relationships they are part of than with territory.

Such a de-territorialized conception of identity becomes problematic when it comes to the application of human rights, which holds that people access most of these through their country of origins. Indeed, the nation-state is the primary means through which populations access their human rights (see Lambo, 2012). The solutions presented to Somali refugees are not adapted to their situations, especially as international agencies dealing with refugees continue to favor politics of repatriation to the country of origin rather than integration within the new communities. Such policies are primarily influenced by sedentary theories, which view territory as the source of identity and community organization.

Following this view of Somali identity, the feelings of rejection of Kenya held by many Somalis living in Kenya would not be caused by the separation from their homeland. Rather, it would be due to the way they are treated in their host country:

Among Somali refugees in Kenya, there is a strong belief that their identity as Somalis has been preserved due to the harsh conditions and strict policies under which they live. A territorialized claim on identity, therefore, exists in Kenya, whereby the rights of people are determined by who they are (their national identity) and the nature of their presence in the country. (Lambo, 2012 p. 10)

It is through bonding with one's own Somali community as well as through the opposition with other communities that Somalis in Kenya would maintain their culture and perception of their reality. This echoes Elias et al. (2009), who wrote that "attempts to form bonds with people that you can associate with, rather than people with whom you cannot, are supposedly founded on a desire of

preserving your own perceptions of reality, neglecting the possibility of other perceptions” (p. 29). From there, prejudices towards others spread, as members of a community categorize individuals into ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’.

*The significance of territory to Somalis in exile*

While Lambo’s view is very relevant in the present case, highlighting the specificity of the Somali culture and its impact on Somalis in exile, it however does not seem to completely resonate with the situation of Somalis living in Northern Kenya, whose demands are more nationalistic than ethnic. I agree with Lambo’s explanation as it provides us with tools to understand the many clan-conflicts within Somalia. Yet, a group such as al-Shabaab promotes a unifying conception of the Somali culture and does not make any distinction between the various clans, at least in theory. Their discourse stresses the belief that Somalis have been separated from their land. It appears that the conception of the motherland held by many Somalis in exile is slightly different from the one held by Somalis living in Somalia, which leads us to argue that, when it comes to Somalis in exile, “territory seems to be one of the major components of cultural identity, both as a natural basis of a group’s existence and as a space which is culturally organized by a group and therefore becomes a part of a group’s cultural heritage” (Mach, 1993, p. 172). The longing for a Greater Somalia and the strength of the Somali culture within refugees in Kenya illustrate the fact that “when a group is separated from its land, perhaps by an external power, there often remains an ‘association’ or tie between people and territory. This association itself becomes an essential part of the collective memory and identity” (Mach, 1993, p. 173). Because they are forcefully separated from their homeland, Somali refugees might stress the importance of the Somali nation in a way they perhaps wouldn’t do were they still living in Somalia.

Collective memory and identity have been reformulated by al-Shabaab to provide a predominant place to the notion of a Somali nation and identity. Hence:

Territory is subjected to cultural organization both in a physical and purely conceptual sense. Its ideological qualities as a group’s homeland are emphasized, created and

interpreted in such a way that the group's exclusive rights become justified and the group achieves splendor through possession of its land. (Mach, 1993, p. 173)

To illustrate this claim, the group uses a wide variety of tools which stress the common history of the community, such as myths, legends, literature and arts, all of them presented as symbols of the unity of the community. Mach further writes that "an element of conflict is built into the ideology of homeland. This is especially true in cases of ethnic groups or nations living within the borders of an empire or a state which is not ethnically homogeneous" (Mach, 1993, p. 174). Al-Shabaab's rhetoric presenting Somalia as a Muslim country under the threat of Christian countries is an illustration of a religious ideology tightly tied to the conception of the nation and in a broader sense to the *ummah*.

#### *Concepts of identity and ethnicity revisited in times of conflict*

The concept of identity is a dynamic notion created in action. By the latter, we mean that a group's identity is shaped by the group's constant interactions with other groups, "in which their we-image and they-image change together with the changing balance of power and with the degree of accommodation and conflict in the interplay of forces which shape the social context" (Mach, 1993, p. 263). Identity should therefore not be analyzed as a static concept, but rather as one constantly evolving, especially in times of conflicts, when relationships with other groups are strongly evolving. Groups mutually influence each other's identity. Henry Hale (2004)'s definition of the concept as a "self-locating device in an uncertain social world" (as cited in Abdi Elmi, 2010, p. 28) appears very interesting. Indeed, when is the world more uncertain than in times of conflict? In such times, some identities become more salient than others, as for instance a Muslim, Somali identity. The notion of an "uncertain world" denotes the need to fix one's identity as a way to understand one's role and place in a world that is dangerous and constantly moving, one that is hard to grasp.

Because of its constant evolution, the concept of identity leaves room for manipulation. Mach (1993) writes that:

Ethnicity is a strategy assumed by one or more groups in social conflict or competition which uses cultural differences and creates symbolic boundaries in order to emphasize and maintain the group's identity. In doing this a group increases solidarity among its members and strengthens its relative position in the balance of power, protects its sovereignty over its territory and resources, and uses the image of ethnicity in various forms of struggle for right, privilege, prosperity, access to positions, and so on. Ethnic strategy is usually undertaken by a minority, that is a group which lives within a social system with other groups of which at least one is more powerful and better established. (p. 215-216)

We indeed have a difficult political and social situation, where the majority of the Somali population in Kenya constitutes an ethnic minority that for long dreamt of developing special contacts with their community living in the state of Somalia. While such dreams have constantly been destroyed, al-Shabaab has been able to emphasize the concept of a Somali and Muslim identity, creating a symbolic boundary with Christian Kenyans.

While many Somalis in Kenya feel rejected and unwelcomed by their host country's community, they might in turn voluntarily assume rejection of Kenyans as a way to protect themselves and their culture.

Although the Somali division into clans and sub-clans often tends to prime over national identity, the harshness of the situation in which Somalis in Kenya find themselves has led many to unify behind a national identity. In this sense, Somalis in Kenya have seen their own conception of identity evolved throughout the conflict. Such conditions have led to a widening of the gap between communities, in a desire to preserve one's own identity by separating oneself from others.

### **C. A tradition of basic human needs violation in a context of structural and cultural violence**

#### *Basic human needs' hierarchy*

The violation of basic human needs (BHN) is a constant in the relationship between Kenyan and Somali communities. As defined by Galtung (1990), basic human needs are "irreducible and

nonnegotiable essentials in human life” (p. 303), and consist of welfare, freedom, security, and meaning/identity.

Maslow (1987) dresses a hierarchy of basic human needs, according to which physiological needs come first. They consist of what the organism needs to survive, such as oxygen, water and food. Many refugees, displaced by violence, have come to experience a violation of such needs. The need for safety comes second. The war raged in Somalia, as well as the repeated attacks on the Somali community in Kenya have clearly violated these needs. In Somalia, Kenyan military appears as a constant threat since, according to Human Rights Watch, “foreign forces have committed grave abuses in south central Somalia, including indiscriminately bombed and shelled populated areas” (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 2). On the other side of the conflicts, deadly attacks such as the ones carried out by al-Shabaab on Kenyan soil have violated many Kenyans’ safety needs.

The third category consists of the need for respect. As stated by Maslow (1987), “all people in our society [...] have a need or desire for a stable and firmly based, usually high evaluation of themselves, [...] and for the esteem of others” (p. 90). There is however a strong belief among the Somali community that the local population perceives them as ‘the other’, ‘the Somali’, which might in turn have fostered the construction of a separate group identity (see Lambo, 2012). Hence Somali refugees in Kenya will seek support within their own community, perceived as the only one able to bring them the respect and self-esteem needed: “their sense of marginalization seems to have grown in the aftermath of the recent kidnappings in Kenya by al-Shabaab militants in September and October 2011, as well as the grenade attacks in Nairobi in late October 2011” (Lambo, 2012, p. 11). This is even truer in light of the recent Garissa attack and of Kenya government’s reactions.

Then come self-actualization needs. Their non-respect develops into feelings of frustration. Maslow (1987) defines them as “the tendency for [a person] to become actualized in what he is potentially” (p. 89-90). To this extent, many Somali refugees talked of a “life in limbo”. And, indeed, as highlighted by Lambo (2012), “as a result of the lack of education and employment opportunities for Somali refugees in Eastleigh and Kenya in general, many lives have [...] been put

on hold since arriving in the country” (p. 12). As explained by the majority of his interviewees, “they did not enjoy their lives in Kenya because there was a total lack of opportunities here and they expressed frustration by saying that they had wasted many of their years” (Lambo, 2012, p. 12). To many, it seems that their life as refugees prevent them from actualizing what they are potentially, leaving their lives on hold.

Kenyan military’s violation of basic human needs also affects the country’s Muslim population: “in 2012, a year after the intervention in Somalia, a draconian anti-terrorism bill was passed. Kenyan law enforcement has used the bill as a blank check against any communities that it does not entirely trust – especially Kenyan Somalis” (Branch, 2011). This has helped al-Shabaab’s recruitment efforts, as the group was trying to export its ideology to the Muslim community discriminated against by Kenyan government.

*The inclusion of justice amongst basic human needs*

While Maslow and Galtung’s theories of BHN are of particular interest in the present case, I believe both of them, and especially Galtung’s theory, downplay the role of justice. Indeed, the latter simply describes it as “the commodity produced by the legal system” (Galtung, as cited in Taylor, 2009, p. 6). Yet the concept of justice encompasses many possible definitions. An interesting one developed by Taylor (2009) defines justice as “the reciprocal quality of relationships that [is] obtained between people for their mutual wellbeing” (p. 6). The notion of reciprocity appears very relevant, as it carries the idea that one’s acts towards others should be replied to in an appropriate way, thus helping us make sense of our relationships with others as equals.

Maslow (1987) granted justice more importance, raising the question of whether or not it should be included, yet choosing not to at first. He however included it after a reexamination, based on the understanding that:

... positioned there among the security needs, the need for justice would be consistent with the need for everyone at all stages of life to be treated fairly, and hence with a better chance

of being able to thrive cognitively, emotionally, socially, and spiritually than otherwise. (as cited in Taylor, 2009, p. 7)

In addition, Fischer and Skitka (2006) suggest that “people have an inherent need to believe in a just world – i.e. to believe that good things happen to good people and bad things to bad people” (as cited in Johnstone, 2011, p. 38). Such a belief would provide a person with a meaning and predictability of the world. The need for justice encompasses several other BHN, such as security, respect, meaning to one’s life and self-actualization, and illustrates how intertwined they all are.

In the present case, it appears important to include justice as a BHN: the civil war in Somalia, the conflict between Kenya and Somalia, and the discrimination and violence on behalf of the Kenyan government towards the Somali community have deprived many people from their right to justice, preventing them from developing a fair understanding of their world. Kenyans who have endured attacks conducted by insurgent groups such as al-Shabaab are also prevented from accessing such a need. This is exaggerated by the media, who present terrorism as the killing of innocents, thereby making it impossible for most people to understand why terrorist attacks happen. We will come back to this point later in the essay (VI. A.).

*The long-lasting violation of basic human needs as a manifestation of structural and cultural violence*

The acceptance of the violation of the out-group’s BHN manifests a culture of discrimination and marginalization endorsed by the in-group. The violation of BHN is reacted to “with a threat of emergency response” (Maslow, 1987, p. 92). Since many Somalis and Muslims in Kenya feel dispossessed from their basic rights, some have joined the violent fight against the government. Dehumanization of the other has taken place on both sides, helping al-Shabaab in its attempts to appear as a unifying group for the Muslim community.

With their basic human needs unmet, many Somali and Kenyan Muslims have been forced into their position as underdogs, developing feelings of helplessness as to moving up in the interaction system, defined by Johan Galtung as “a multidimensional system of stratification, where

those who have and those who have not, those who have more and those who have less, find, are given, or are forced into their positions” (Galtung, 1964, p. 96). The lack of opportunities and respect leads to the frustration directed at the topdogs or power players, perceived to be Kenyans, and especially Christian Kenyans. While the concept of “topdogs” means the people or communities who hold a high position in society, the ones who hold a low position are represented by the concept of “underdogs”.

The constant violation of basic human needs led many Kenyan Somalis and Somali refugees to view themselves as underdogs in Kenyan society. It also led many to think of Kenyans, and especially Christian Kenyans, who have seemed to be favored by the government, as topdogs who unfairly enjoyed a better status in society. This situation, which has been maintained on the long-run, developed into structural and cultural violence, where the injustice of the system was perceived to be inherent to Kenyan politics. It eventually developed into a chosen trauma, as we will study in more depth in the following section.

#### **D. The development of a chosen trauma**

##### *A chosen trauma passed on from one generation to the next*

The violation of many Somalis' BHN led to the development of a chosen trauma, defined by Volkan as “the collective mental representation of an event that has caused a large group to face drastic common losses, to feel helpless and victimized by another group, and to share a humiliating injury” (Volkan, 2004, p. 47). The chosen trauma is not constituted by one event in itself, but rather by a repetition of events that, together, build a feeling of helplessness and persecution within a group. As members of the group experience the trauma, they build a double mental representation, one that unites them while at the same time opposing them with the group that they consider to be responsible for their trauma. Although the justification for the use of the term “trauma” appears obvious in such cases, disagreements have been raised as to the use of the term “chosen”, on the basis that a group does not choose to be victimized. Yet, Volkan (1998) explains that it

... reflects a group's unconscious 'choice' to add a past generation's mental representation of an event to its own identity, and the fact that while groups may have experienced any number of traumas in their history, only certain ones remain alive over centuries. (p. 7)

In other words, a group's collective trauma and the image of repeated victimization inflicted on it by others spring from an unconscious choice to read events and history in a way that validates the trauma. In light of this, historical events are tied back to other traumatic ones, and their repetition highlights the inability of the group to protect itself, its honor and to reverse humiliation, leading to a desire for revenge that goes unaccomplished from one generation to the next.

The discrimination and violence on behalf of the Kenyan government towards the Somali community and the absence of self-determination and self-actualization implied by such discriminations are all examples of violations of basic human needs that led to the development of a chosen trauma. The repetition of such violence, whether direct, structural or cultural, across several generations who can share their stories, led many to analyze it in terms of a repeated pattern where Kenya was responsible for the humiliation of the Somali population. By sharing a common understanding of the community's history, the group comes out unified by feelings of helplessness and victimization, which then transforms into a desire for revenge. On many Kenyans' side, Somalis are on the contrary perceived as violent and unable to integrate, and this for generations. Another chosen trauma developed, where some might feel constantly threatened by the presence of Somalis on Kenyan soil, this especially nowadays with the rise of al-Shabaab.

A shared history is then passed on from one generation to the next. As an illustration of this inter-generation trauma, Somalis from different generations share a similar conception of their history, even though many have not gone through the same historical events. Indeed, as found by Lambo (2012) after its series of interviews with Somalis living in Kenya, "the opinions of second-generation Somali refugees on the notion of home were similar to those with older refugees who had left Somalia as adults" (p. 14). An idealized conception of Somalia has been formed over time:

Their understanding of Somalia had been formed by stories told to them by parents and elder relatives as well as seeing images on television, the Internet and listening to the radio. This had helped to form a familiarity with their country of origin and a relationship with Somalia – albeit one that was deeply rooted in idealism. (Lambo, 2012, p.15)

This illustrates the fact that a sense of “we-ness” is developed since childhood, as children share and grow up carrying their parents and grandparents’ representation of Somalia’s history and culture.

*Selective memory validates the chosen trauma*

As many members of Somali and Kenyan communities developed a chosen trauma according to which the other was responsible for their ill-being and humiliation, contentious conceptions of history developed: “ongoing power struggles and negotiations take place in the constant competition between possibly conflicting interpretations of the past” (Elias et al., 2009, p. 42). A group’s “narratives of past defeats and glories contribute to a community’s self-understanding and thereby its collective identity” (Elias et al., 2009, p. 36). Such self-understanding can evolve in a positive way, when conflicts are transformed and the opposing groups’ worldviews are properly taken into account. Yet, in the present case, we observe an isolation of many Somalis who then develop their parallel conception of history around images of violence and conflicts. Memory plays a very important role, as it

...can be manipulated in the way that violence committed by in-group members is more easily forgotten. Sahdra and Ross suggest that members develop what is referred to as ‘blind spots’ in this area by focusing only on information supporting their own view. (Sahdra & Ross (2007), in Elias et al., 2009, p. 20)

Memory, therefore, is not objective but always a matter of unconscious selection deeply influenced by a person and her community’s worldview.

Collective memory is then internalized by the individual who views of himself as belonging to the victimized community (see Elias et al., 2009). As the past shapes the present, the opposite

holds true, and they both come to reinforce each other. In times of conflict, memory appears especially important as it provides the individual with a consistent meaning of history marked by the victimization of a group he identifies with over time. Hence selective memory validates a need for “sameness” throughout history.

*Reservoirs are constituted to maintain the chosen trauma and its associated violence ready to be deployed*

As the individual's memory comes to validate and operate in the same way as his group's memory, he comes to experience the traumas inflicted to his group as his own. In this sense, “cultural traumas need not be experienced directly by an individual. As is the case with victimization, the crux of the matter is the commitment of the individual to the in-group” (Elias et al., 2009, p. 46). Traumas transmitted from one generation to the next involve the depositing of an already formed self or object image into the developing self-representation of a child under the premise that there it can be kept safe and that the resolution of the conflict with which it is associated can be postponed until a future time. Hence “the ‘deposited image’ then becomes like a psychological gene that influences the child's identity” (Volkan, 1998, p. 5-6). It unconsciously provides the child with a certain task to accomplish, namely to take revenge and save his community from further humiliation. This goes on from one generation to the next until revenge can happen, in the meantime becoming an ethnic marker, i.e. a psychological gene of the large group.

Garissa appears as an ethnic marker, amongst many others, due to the attack conducted in 1980 by the Kenyan military against members of the Somali community, and because it is part of a territory that once belonged to Somalia. In addition to its psychological relevance, Garissa also holds a major political role, as it is one of al-Shabaab's stronghold. Indeed, the organization

... controls two-thirds of Garissa County, which the group's top operatives have declared as their preferred base of operations. This has proved to be a strategic location; it has allowed al-Shabaab to target the half million Somali refugees sandwiched between Garissa and the Somalia border as potential recruits. These refugees, who fled Somalia's civil war, have

been languishing in a state of perpetual uncertainty in dismal refugee camps for years or even decades. (Hidalgo, 2014)

The dismantlement of the two main refugee camps, as we have seen in V. A. might not improve Somali refugees' conditions, pushing many of them to become more invisible to the Kenyan state and to the international community.

The violation of basic human needs, the development of structural and cultural violence and the emergence of a chosen trauma are all intertwined. Together, they lead communities to understand the world and the conflict that affects them as a repetition of history, deepening the gap between them.

Yet, conceiving of history as a repetition would logically lead to a deterministic understanding of it, one that would discourage communities from acting against such conditions. Other questions therefore arise as to what leads to the eruption of direct violence. Indeed, what makes the chosen trauma come to action? Why did the rise of al-Shabaab enable the reservoir to open and develop into a time collapse? These questions illustrate the fact that collective psychology alone cannot fully explain insurgent group's decision to resort to violence. We then have to look at the situation and at political process approach in order to understand what made the eruption of violence possible.

## **VI. TRANSFORMING THE COLLECTIVE TRAUMA INTO ACTION: AL-SHABAAB'S USE OF DIRECT VIOLENCE**

What made many people who shared the collective trauma decide to resort to violence in Kenya, or at least to accept it? In trying to answer this question, we will firstly look at collective psychology and what makes the reactivation of a chosen trauma possible. Secondly, we will study the role of a leader – a group in the present context – in fuelling the conflict: how does it motivate and justify violence, engage with the youth whose lives are often in limbos, and eventually success in presenting aggression as the only way out of the underdog status?

**A. The reactivation of the chosen trauma into destructive modes of need fulfillment***The opening of reservoirs*

When a chosen trauma is reactivated, a process called 'time-collapse' happens. It refers to "the fears, expectations, fantasies, and defenses associated with a chosen trauma that reappear when both conscious and unconscious connections are made between the past trauma and a contemporary threat. [...] The sense of revenge becomes exaggerated" (Volkan, 1998, p. 9). The current military conflict between Kenya and Somalia emerges as the visible part of an iceberg whose main part is under the surface, constituted by decades of discrimination and violence.

Time-collapse is deeply linked to resorting to violent action, as the reactivation of the trauma may lead a community's leaders to make irrational and sadistic decisions that in turn prepare members of the large group to accept such violent acts which would otherwise be unthinkable. As Volkan (2004) explains, the reactivation of a chosen trauma:

... may initiate massive violent acts, including genocidal ones, directed toward a current 'enemy' group. Such violent acts and accompanying terror leads of course to a massive trauma for the victimized group and the development of what Julius (1991) calls a 'cycle of violence'. (p. 6)

In brief, the reactivation of the chosen trauma held by many members of the Somali community leads *some members* of the latter to resort to violent actions whose repetition in turn constitute a chosen trauma for many Kenyans affected by the attacks.

*The specificity of terrorism*

When the chosen trauma is reactivated, it generates a desire for revenge against the group of people deemed to be responsible for one's own misfortune. Yet, while the desire for revenge was very pressing in such a situation of time-collapse (when the events of the present reminded al-Shabaab of past injustices), power balance was very much in favor of the opponent. In such situations, resorting to terrorist actions, which are based on asymmetric warfare, appears as the only possible way to inflict pain on the enemy.

Definitions of the term 'terrorism' widely vary, as the survey conducted by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research a few months after September 11, 2001 illustrates (see Shamir and Shikaki, 2002). According to its authors, 53% of the Palestinians interviewed said they did not consider the attacks on the World Trade Center to be terrorism. Yet September 11, 2001 is the starting point of the War on Terror, and constitutes the most striking examples, to many people, of a terrorist attack. How, and is it possible, to decide who is right? People's conception of terrorism varies deeply depending on subjective, cultural and political factors. Shamir and Shikaki (2002) come to the conclusion that "the current study provides a striking illustration of the old adage that 'one man's 'terrorist' is another man's 'freedom fighter'" (p. 553). According to this survey, it is very difficult – perhaps even impossible – to objectively define who is a terrorist.

The notion of terrorism indeed carries a negative judgment on behalf of the authority who deems a person or a group 'terrorist'. It focuses on the means, i.e. the killing of civilians, rather than on the goals. This, in turn, prevents us from questioning and analyzing the political, social, psychological or religious claims on behalf of the 'terrorist' organization or individual. The survey further illustrates the fact that the two communities at stake come to view the conflict and the use of violence in radically opposed way, justifying their own while condemning the other's. It eventually leads them to live in different realities shaped by their respective chosen trauma.

Terrorism obeys the principle of asymmetric warfare, whereby the group resorting to such strategy is weaker than its opponent. After the Union of Islamic Courts was defeated in 2006, al-Shabaab insurgents came out as the sole defenders of the Somali state. Yet since they were much weaker than their African opponents backed by international powers, their only choice to protect Somalia seemed to be, at the time, to use asymmetric warfare. Indeed, "the subsequent Ethiopian invasion in December 2006 [...] led to the emergence of a new twist in Islamic resistance in Somalia: 'asymmetric warfare' in the form of suicide terrorism" (Ibrahim, 2010, p. 286), conducted against TFG government officials, Ethiopians and more broadly against anyone perceived as

supporting them. Bonaparte (1979) illustrates the relevance of the asymmetry thesis in such a context as follows:

In international relations, what matters almost always is the relative weight of various powers: the weaker party has to conform to the wishes of the stronger. This is because the weaker party has no way of exerting pressure on the stronger, or at least not to the extent that the strongest party would have to conform. Hence, when the two parties arrive at a solution, this is always on an asymmetric basis. In the case of terrorism, however, the asymmetry thesis doesn't push terrorists towards agreement. Why so? The explanation is that terrorism is based on the asymmetry thesis as well. They use terrorism because they are the weaker party. Terrorism seems to be the only way to fight a power which appears 'too solid to be modified with normal political instruments'. (p. 209)

In light of this, it appears that limiting the fight against al-Shabaab to a military one that aims at weakening them is, on its own, not going to prevent from more terrorist actions. There is a rationale behind conducting terrorist actions, which states that resorting to terrorism might be the only way to make one's voice heard and therefore to defend oneself in a non-equilibrated situation. Strategy might, to a big extent, explain the group's decision to resort to violence the way it does.

#### *The role of the youth in fuelling the conflict*

Most of young adults live a life in limbo, be they refugees in camps or young people in Somalia. Joining the ranks of al-Shabaab might appear to some - perhaps many - as the only way to answer their basic human needs. Following numerous interviews, Hansen (2016) proposes an explanation:

In an interview with Al-Shabaab recruits in Nairobi conducted in 2010, several factors were highlighted, including the feeling of alienation from their host countries, partly because of blocked opportunities and discrimination, and a wish to implement the Sharia in Somalia and elsewhere, to help people; one recruit still stressed the Ethiopian role. A single Kenyan Somali who was interviewed stressed money as a factor. They had all been recruited through

groups within mosques of *madrassas*, which seem to have reinforced a narrative stressing discrimination. (p. 98)

Joining an insurgent group might therefore appear as a way to gain the respect and self-esteem many young people have been deprived of. In addition, education plays a major role, as it provides them with a narrative of History that seems to justify al-Shabaab's decision to resort to violence.

People also grow up learning ways to deal with conflict. Collective psychology might, once more, help explain some young adults' desire to answer their basic human needs in an aggressive way. Indeed, when one grows up in an aggressive context, one learns how to resolve things in an aggressive way. As explained by Staub (1999),

Harming others may be a way for them to affirm their identity, to gain a feeling of security, to feel effective and in control, to develop and maintain connections with aggressive peers or associates, and to maintain the understanding of the world they have developed. In others words, they come to fulfill their basic needs in aggressive ways. (p. 189)

When growing up in a violent context, resorting to an aggressive behavior might appear as the only way to give a sense to one's world and to integrate within the context, one of violence.

Joining al-Shabaab might also appear as an opportunity to gain economic power, which in turn enables these people to answer other basic human needs, such as food, water, to mention only a few. Still according to Hansen (2016), al-Shabaab's "militias were paid, US\$20 for a hand grenade, US\$30 for killing a soldier, US\$100 for a road bomb or a mortar attack – this in a period when the TFG's police and army failed to get any pay at all" (p. 58). This led to a counter-productive situation for the TFG, whereby soldiers were fighting each other and inflicting suffering on the local population, further alienating it. Indeed, "(t)he remaining TFG police systematically stole and pillaged to keep themselves alive, and fought other police units over the meager funds allocated to them" (Hansen, 2016, p. 55). In such a context, it became easier for al-Shabaab to inspire trust to many Somalis, or at least to appear as less frightening an possibility than the TFG, one that would be more viable economically speaking.

Hence, although some of the youth fighting in al-Shabaab's ranks might have been recruited by force by the group, there are also economic, social and psychological reasons that might lead others to make the decision to join the group.

With the constant implication of foreign powers in Somali affairs, the long-lasting trauma inherited from colonization has been reactivated through the process of time-collapse, where the present appears as a replication of the past. In such a context of power imbalance between Somali forces and foreign ones, terrorism appears to many as the only possibility out of the conflict. The necessity of such violence is easily instilled in youths who have grown up in harsh and violent situations, where the violation of basic human needs was constant. Many came up with a good knowledge of violence, and a limited – inexistent sometimes? – knowledge of peace.

**B. Leaders' role: showing the way from a violent ideology to a violent action**

*Al-Shabaab: a leading figure in the war against foreign powers*

Leaders use symbols in order to reinforce individuals' feeling of belonging to the large group, and their opposition to the out-group. Symbols serve to identify who belongs to the group and what its values are. Mach (1993) speaks of such symbols as "exclusive",

... in the sense that they not only express the integrity and solidarity of the group, but also divide people into supporters and opponents, friends and enemies, emphasize differences between them and define boundaries of the political and ideological domain of the group. (p. 105)

Following the Ethiopian invasion, al-Shabaab has been able to appear as the main leader of the resistance against the invasion of Somalia by foreign powers. In the contentious relationship with Kenya, the latter's discrimination against its Somali population and by extension against many Muslims in the country has put many of them in the underdog position on the economic, political, social and cultural levels. This created an opportunity for al-Shabaab to build itself as a leading figure for people who felt trapped in the underdog position. Indeed, Hidalgo writes that al-Shabaab

“has been able to depict the government as eager to inflict more suffering on the already disadvantaged” (Hidalgo, 2014), deepening their positions as underdogs.

Al-Shabaab's importance and positive image as defenders of social justice has been reinforced by its role in Somali society. To a certain extent, they provided, for some time, what the population needed in war-torn areas. Indeed, when they controlled territories in south central Somalia, the group provided local-level administration, employment, education, justice, food and security, which contrasted sharply with the failure of the TFG to deliver such essentials (see Gakuo Mwangi, 2012). Yet as they have lost power and hold on territories, the inhabitants of these areas have seen these improvements stopped.

The group has also been able to create motivation for individuals and family by employing them and paying monthly salaries. As such, “engaging in conflict and other illicit activities is, to some degree, based on a cost-benefit analysis that takes into consideration the opportunity cost of the activity in question” (Kimenyi, Mukum Mbaku & Moyo, 2010, p. 1358). The decision to become part of a group such as al-Shabaab does not have to do only with a desire for revenge, but also with one of survival.

#### *Propaganda as a tool for the promotion of violence*

An ideology is necessary to the person who seeks to validate and give a meaning to her actions, therefore answering a basic need for self-respect and meaning to one's life. The formulation of an ideology generally results from a group of individuals, yet they require a larger group who will be receptive to it and nurture it. As Volkan proposes, “the reactivation of a chosen trauma prepares a society to welcome an excessive entitlement” ideology (Volkan, 2004, p. 2). Here we can make the following hypothesis: by conducting attacks against Christians in Kenya, al-Shabaab might have been looking for a military answer from Kenyan government, which would in turn violate Somalis' BHN. This would lead to the reactivation of the chosen trauma which is shared by many Somalis and Muslims, hence rallying them to al-Shabaab's cause. It would provide them with the opportunity to renew their role as leaders and defenders of Muslims and Somalis. This appears

especially necessary for the group since support has decreased over the last years due to a condemnation of their violent actions and to a questioning of their legitimacy once the war with Ethiopia was over. Such a violent conflict would also widen the religious gap between many Christians and Muslims, as has been the case after the Garissa attack in April 2015.

In order to reach the larger group, the smaller group of individuals – in the present case al-Shabaab – needs to develop its political propaganda. As defined by Volkan, it would consist of “any communication and manipulation from a source of political authority that is directed to its followers and its opposition at home and/or abroad, as well as those who might be described as ‘neutrals’” (Volkan, 2004, p. 10). The use of propaganda is meant to disseminate the leader’s ideas and political ideology. While the fall of Siyad Barre’s regime left the country in a local-level governance void, al-Shabaab has used this void to develop its political ideology around Islam. As both the radio and the media collapsed, insurgent groups could develop their own propaganda and easily spread it. The situation of a state collapse therefore creates opportunities for insurgent groups to spread their worldview: “in the absence of functional legal media constraints, non-state armed actors can establish media outlets and freely disseminate propaganda in order to set the political agenda and achieve their political objectives” (Gakuo Mwangi, 2012, p. 552). Al-Shabaab has indeed invested in the propaganda sector, launching, for instance, a highly sophisticated campaign on the Internet (see Gakuo Mwangi, 2012). Once they controlled large parts of south central Somalia, they used the radio “not only to disseminate its jihadist rhetoric but also [to] portray the movement as a provider of basic economic and political goods and services, hence capable of governing Somalia effectively” (Gakuo Mwangi, 2012, p. 522-523). It used pan-Islamic symbols in order to motivate international fighters to join them in their fight against the West, depicting the conflict in light of a ‘Clash of Civilizations’. Al-Shabaab’s propaganda system therefore aimed at reaching both Somalis and international followers.

Hence al-Shabaab is not only present militarily but also socially, politically and culturally. As such, they assume the role of guide on many fronts, and fill a void which was left by other actors.

They have been able to build an ideology which has provided many a sense to a senseless world, one with a certain stability yet where the use of violence is necessary. While many al-Shabaab leaders might be aware of the way their ideology influences its followers, it would be too easy to speak of manipulation. Many of its leaders might be themselves convinced of the need to wage a war against foreign powers and their influence on the country.

### **C. Underdogs resorting to violence**

#### *The spread of structural violence*

There are several conditions that make it possible for the underdog to resort to violence. Galtung explains that extreme forms of aggression will mostly not occur unless (a) “other means of equilibrium towards a compete topdog configuration have been tried”, and (b) “the culture has some practice in violent aggression” (Galtung, 1964, p. 99). Aggression happens when the underdog (U) accesses a topdog (T) position. Indeed, “an element in a TU position will be constantly reminded of his objective state of disequilibrium by the differential treatment he is exposed to” (Galtung, 1964, p. 99). The gap between the underdog and the topdog positions lead to the development of an “unstable self-image”, which then transforms into a desire to acquire a stable self-image by acquiring topdog positions on the other levels. On the contrary, a complete underdog (UU) will mostly not resort to violence against the complete topdog (TT), as the latter will be behind the underdog’s imagination, being too far away from his actual position in the interaction system. To this extent, while:

The absolute deprivation of the UU may be higher, [...] the TU has relative deprivation built into his position. The destabilizing effect of this discrepancy will provide a mobility pressure, and the thesis is then that if there are no open channels of mobility, rectification of the disequilibrium will be carried out by other means. (Galtung 1964, p. 99)

Galtung’s thesis is based on the idea that on a social ladder, one compares oneself to the step right above rather than to the one at the top.

Yet the underdog is often deprived of the resources that enable him to use violence. Getting such resources implies replacing a U status by a T one, therefore going one step up on the ladder. How, then, to convert a U status into a T one?

*Acquiring an economic topdog status*

In Nairobi's Eastleigh area, many Somali Kenyans have become very successful businessmen. Yet while these members of the Somali community acquired a topdog status regarding wealth, discrimination maintained them in underdog statuses in other domains such as political and cultural ones. Many of them have fuelled al-Shabaab with their wealth during the war against Ethiopia in a desire to help the group fight for Somalis' interests and to re-equilibrate their underdog position towards a topdog one. Indeed, according to Sipus, "it is well known throughout Eastleigh that al-Shabaab utilize[d] incoming remittance flows to fund its operations in Somalia and ha[d] direct involvement with many of the businesses in Eastleigh" (Sipus, 2010, p. 29). In recent years, the diaspora's support for al-Shabaab has dramatically decreased due primarily to the group's affiliation with al Qaeda. Nevertheless, this happens when the group is already financially autonomous and receives financial support from al Qaeda. As the group controlled large part of south central Somalia, it acquired funding through an efficient taxation system (see Hansen, 2016).

Disequilibrium then spreads across the community. As Galtung (1964) claims:

Disequilibrium at one level can lead to disequilibrium at another level: a highly disequilibrated individual may become the leader of a completely underdog group and lead it into disequilibrium by giving it power, property or education. The group in turn, may lead the nation into disequilibrium. (p. 106)

We can then make the following hypothesis: as funding enabled al-Shabaab to acquire a better position on the economic ladder, the group might have become a highly disequilibrated group leader. This then spread to other members of the Somali and to some extent Muslim communities. This echoes Krueger (2007), who explains that "[i]nstead of being drawn from the ranks of the poor, numerous academic and government studies find that terrorists tend to be drawn from well-

educated, middle-class or high-income families” (p. 3). Once the movement acquire some strength thanks to better off individuals, it can spread to another part of the society, one that still feels trapped in its underdog status on the economic level.

*Some limits to conflict theories; the need to bring Political Process Approach into the discussion*

There is a limit to Structural Violence and Collective Psychology taken independently of the political, social and economic context. As to Collective Psychology, chosen traumas are present in all societies, yet in some communities they are more intense and persisting than in others, although evaluating criteria such as intensity and persistence of a chosen trauma might be a very difficult task. Not all chosen traumas are reactivated nor do they all lead to violence.

Concerning Structural Violence theory, a limit to it lies in the fact that “structural strains, regardless of their versions, are common to all societies but they do not always lead to violent radicalism” (Gakuo Mwangi, 2012, p. 515). I however do not fully agree with Gakuo Mwangi when it comes to his criticism of Structural Violence theory. In my view, Galtung well explains the ways structural violence leads the underdog to resort to violence, developing on how to transform a U status into a T one. Yet, this also highlights the need to look very closely at the situation.

Political Process Approach:

... points to the existence of a political opportunity structure that determines the emergence, strategies and success of social movements activities and collective actions, and argues that social movements emerge when *change in political opportunities increases the possibilities for social movements to mobilize by opening up new and existing channels of aspirations.*

*(italic by me, Gakuo Mwangi, 2012, p. 516)*

Hence, a group's agency is best explained using the political environment that leads to specific choices, including the group's strategies, tactics and goals. The use of violence is deeply influenced by specific events that create opportunities for the chosen trauma to be reactivated and for the complete underdog to acquire a T status.

In the present case, the conflict between Somalia and its Christian neighbors has provided an opportunity to unite many Somalis and Kenyan under Islam. As written by Gakuo Mwangi,

Though Islamism in contemporary Somalia has soared, clannism remains the dominant political logic, within which Islamists and Sharia' courts are generally constrained. The clans, however, unite when faced with a foreign threat. Islamist politics have been strongest when Somalis are faced with a foreign, non-Muslim threat. Islam is an agent of short-term mass mobilization. Radical Islam is, therefore, more powerful when Somalis find themselves threatened by secular or Christian states. (Gakuo Mwangi, 2012, p. 517)

While faced with international powers trying to influence Somali politics, it has become easier for al-Shabaab and its sympathizers to view of all of these foreign powers in a group of Christian states, with Christian interests, building Islam as a threatened religion.

Until now, it seems that international stakeholders have prioritized a conception of peace in Somalia that is not shared by many Somalis. Many argue that Ethiopia, Kenya and the United-States, amongst others, are afraid of the emergence of a strong Islamic state in Somalia (see Scahill, 2013). The country is therefore a strategic one in the 'War on Terror'. As explained by Abdi Elmi (2010),

The international community has predetermined the 'universal' way of organizing a nation-state. For [Roland Paris and Shalmali Guttal], all internationally-sponsored peacebuilding activities so far have been based on the assumption that a liberal democracy and market economy have to be the cornerstones of the state. (p. 129)

The negation of many Somalis' culture and point of views by international actors has reinforced the illegitimacy of peace processes and may explain the fact that many locals lost hope in such processes. This has helped foster support for al-Shabaab, which appears as a more viable alternative than the numerous failed peace processes and transitional governments.

A last noteworthy point to make, however, is to acknowledge the loss of support among the Somali community for al-Shabaab over the last years. This is, mostly, due to the violence of their

action and to their decision to publicly vow allegiance to al Qaeda. Indeed, “some al-Shabaab leaders have been challenged because of the support for extreme and indiscriminate acts of violence” (Hesse, 2010, p. 257). Such dissent within the group first appeared after the suicide bombing conducted in December 2009 at the Shamo Hotel in Mogadishu, which resulted in 23 deaths, including four government ministers. As a response, a dissident group was created, which condemned the attack. While the insurgent group became more divided and lost much of its support among the Somali community, it changed tactics, stressing on the need to internationalize the movement. As Hansen explains, “al-Shabaab has solved this by reconstructing conflicts, highlighting religious aspects while de-emphasizing geographical and ethnic aspects” (Hansen, 2016, p. 149). Many scholars, including Hansen, have argued that the use of terror in attacks such as the one at the Shamo Hotel and at Garissa university is partly meant to divert attention from battlefield losses.

The recent context of conflict with neighboring countries ties back to the past and raises, once more, issues of self-determination which had already generated a wound passed on from one generation to the next. In this context, al-Shabaab has assumed the role of a leader, a guide who could wage a war against other powers and provide a guidance to end the repetition of the trauma. On the structural level, this has been possible because of the acquisition of some topdog statuses. These generated a hope and therefore a desire to move up further in the social ladder.

## **DISCUSSION**

### *Conclusions*

The essay hoped to demonstrate how the April 2nd, 2015 attack in Garissa is the manifestation of decades of structural, cultural and direct violence between communities and governments in Kenya and Somalia. Such history of violence and the repetition of basic human needs violation have led to the development of a chosen trauma. The collective trauma has been held in a reservoir transmitted from one generation to the next, each time validated and reinforced by new eruptions of violence and basic human needs violations. As communication between

communities in conflict has not been facilitated, they have come to further isolate, creating an environment where stereotypes, prejudices and hatred could flourish. Time-collapse enabled the reopening of the reservoir in the 2000s. The current war waged by Kenya in Somalia nourishes this trauma and seems to further validate the feeling of an endless repetition of History.

Structural Violence theory helped explain the emergence of an interaction system where the various communities hold underdog and topdog positions, developing relationships based on inequality, domination and oppression. As al-Shabaab could move up economically on the interaction system ladder, it provided many Somalis an opportunity to acquire a topdog status, further spreading disequilibrium. The group then acquired more fighters, more political and social weight in Somalia and eventually internationally. Yet, this was a double-edged sword, as al-Shabaab's strategy led to the reinforcement of many negative prejudices towards Somalis, further including them on the side of radical Islamist groups widely condemned by international powers.

The group's popularity has dramatically decreased due to the intensity and the scope of its violence, judged by many as too extreme and indiscriminate. This could create an opportunity to bring together communities who have suffered from the conflict, and to fill the void that has been created by the loss of popularity of al-Shabaab. Yet, the contrary seems to be happening: as Kenyan military went to war in Somalia, more basic human needs have been violated and the traumatic history is brought back on the forefront once again. The antagonism between communities further grows, and seems to provide a perfect narrative that could justify, to a consequent part of the population, al-Shabaab's use of violence.

#### *Practical applicability*

Analyzing the legacy of colonization on the current conflict is a first step to transform it. Studying these relationships is important in order to understand the cycle of violence, and to think of ways to defuse it and to heal decades-long wounds. Until now, groups taking part in the conflict such as al-Shabaab have been excluded from peace conferences. After having studied their role in the conflict and what they represent for the population – be it a positive or negative representation –

it appears especially important to include them in peace processes. Only then will some members of the Somali community feel that their view and trauma have been – at least partly – taken into account. Erasing al-Shabaab from the peace equation would imply, once more, delegitimizing the conflict transformation process by imposing international powers' conceptions of peace and governance on Somalia, deepening the conflict and the chosen trauma. Yet, this is a very tricky point, as many Kenyans would feel threatened by the inclusion of such a group, deemed as radical and terrorist, in a peace process in the neighboring country of Somalia.

It is therefore necessary to adopt a more open-minded conception of what peace and governance could look like. Understanding what this conception would entail implies listening to the communities concerned. Governments, organizations and individuals who work on this issue should, when they do not, work with the population. While it is of primary importance to understand why some Somalis supported al-Shabaab, it is as important to stop associating Somalis with al-Shabaab. Top authorities should work in concert with grassroots organizations which are closer and generally more trusted by the population, in order to incorporate the various communities into the peace processes. This means that a bottom-up approach should be considered, one that would instill community-based conflict transformation in order to increase the mutual understanding between members from different communities. Some organizations are, obviously, already working on this, such as the Anti Tribalism Movement and Peace Direct. Other organizations focusing on community dialogue and working directly in Somalia and in Kenya should be supported.

Finally, authorities dealing with refugees need to adapt their policies to the situation in Somalia, as well as to the social and cultural realities of Somali communities: repatriation is inadapted, and working against the integration of displaced people creates isolation and fuels conflicts. The UNHCR is the organization the most present in the area, yet other international organizations also operate in the region. As they often come from Western countries, their views of refugees might be influenced too deeply by a Western conception of nationality and exile.

*Recommendations for further research*

Let us remind the reader that a limit to this study consists in the fact that it is based on secondary sources, as the author did not conduct fieldwork. In this sense, the essay should be taken as a preliminary argument. Further research needs to be conducted that would help to understand the size of the population supporting al-Shabaab, and to link conflict theories to personal histories. As such, fieldwork and interviews would be necessary in order to further explore how communities live through the conflict and the ways to better take their views into account when designing peace talks and processes.

## REFERENCES

- Abdi Elmi, A. (2010). *Understanding the Somalia Conflagration; Identity, Political Islam and Peacebuilding*. London and New York: Pluto Press / Oxford: Pambazuka Press
- Ajulu, R. (2002). Politicised Ethnicity, Competitive Politics and Conflict in Kenya: A Historical Perspective. *African Studies*, 61, 251-258.
- Al Jazeera (2013). Revisiting Kenya's forgotten pogroms. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeeracorrespondent/2013/11/revisiting-kenya-forgotten-pogroms-20131111110145776543.html>
- Bar-Tal, D. (2013). *Intractable Conflicts; Socio-Psychological Foundations and Dynamics*. Cambridge University Press
- Barnes, C., Hassan, H. (2007). The Rise and Fall of Mogadishu's Islamic Courts. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 1, 151-160. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17531050701452382>
- BBC News (2015). Kenya attack: 147 dead in Garissa University assault. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32169080>
- Bonaparte, L. (1979). Some Unanticipated Consequences of Terrorism. *Journal of Peace Research*, 16
- Branch, D. (2011). Why Kenya Invaded Somalia: The Opening of an Aggressive New Chapter. *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2011-11-15/why-kenya-invaded-somalia>
- Branch, D. (2012). *Kenya; Between hope and despair, 1963-2012*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press
- Campbell, E. (2006). Urban Refugees in Nairobi: Problems of Protection, Mechanisms of Survival, and Possibilities for Integration. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 19, 396-413
- Elias, C., Adler, T.M.S., Christensen, J.H., Christensen, J.J., Jensen, N.G., Johannsen, C., Pinhasi, T., Stockner, S.M., Vahl, H.P. (2009). *Collective Identity & Conflict; Understanding*

- Togetherness and Opposition*. Roskilde University. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/12517589.pdf>
- English, R. (2009). *Terrorism; How to Respond*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press
- Fischer, R., Skitka, L. (2006). Justice: social-psychological perspectives. *Justice as a Basic Human Need* (A.J.W. Taylor). New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc. 85-93.
- Gakuo Mwangi, O. (2012). State Collapse, *Al-Shabaab*, Islamism, and Legitimacy in Somalia. *Politics, Religion and Ideology*, 13, 513-527
- Galtung, J. (1964). A Structural Theory of Aggression. *Journal of Peace Research*, 1, 95-119
- Galtung, J. (1990). International Development in Human Perspective. *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 301-335
- Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Hale, H. (2004). Explaining Ethnicity. *Comparative Political Studies*, 37
- Hallakhe, A. B., Ainte, A. (2014). Kenya and Somalia must work together on post al-Shabaab security. African Arguments. Retrieved from <http://africanarguments.org/2014/04/02/kenya-and-somalia-must-work-together-on-post-al-shabaab-security-by-abdullahi-boru-hallakhe-and-abihakim-ainte/>
- Hansen, S. J. (2016). *Al-Shabaab in Somalia; The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group*. London: Hurst & Co
- Hesse, B. J. (2010). Introduction: The myth of 'Somalia'. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. 28, 247-259
- Hidalgo, P. (2014). Kenya's Worst Enemy: Nairobi's Losing Battle Against Militant Islam. *Foreign Affairs*. Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2014-04-23/kenyas-worst-enemy>
- Human Rights Watch (2013). *World Report 2013: Somalia*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/somalia>

- Ibrahim, M. (2010). Somalia and global terrorism: A growing connection? *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 28, 283-295
- Issack, A. (2008). Legal impediments to development in Northern Kenya. *Pambazuka News*, 403, 10 – 22. Retrieved from <http://www.pambazuka.net/en/category.php/comment/51377/print>
- Johnstone, M.-J. (2011). Nursing and Justice as a basic human need. *Nursing Philosophy*, 12, 34-44
- Kapteijns, L. (2013). *Clan Cleansing in Somalia; The Ruinous Legacy of 1991*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press
- Kibicho, K. (2016). As the Kenyan minister for national security, here's why I'm shutting the world's biggest refugee camp. *The Independent*. Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/as-the-kenyan-minister-for-national-security-heres-why-im-shutting-the-worlds-biggest-refugee-camp-a7020891.html>
- Kimenyi, M. S., Mukum Mbaku, J., Moyo, N. (2010). Reconstituting Africa's Failed States: The Case of Somalia. *Social Research*, 77, 1339-1366.
- Krueger, A. B. (2007). *What Makes a Terrorist; Economics and the Roots of Terrorism*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press
- Laqueur, W. (2007). *Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.
- Lambo, I. (2012). In the shelter of each other: notions of home and belonging amongst Somali refugees in Nairobi. *New Issues in Refugee Research*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/4face3d09.pdf>
- Mach, Z. (1993). *Symbols, Conflict and Identity*. Albany: State University of New York
- Maslow, A. H. (1987) A Theory of Human Motivation. *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper and Row
- Meredith, M. (2005). *The State of Africa; A History of the Continent Since Independence*. London, UK: Simon & Schuster

- Otunnu, O. (1992). Factors Affecting the Treatment of Kenyan-Somalis and Somali Refugees in Kenya: A Historical Overview. *Refuge*, 12, 21-26. Retrieved from <http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/refuge/article/viewFile/21678/20351>
- Prunier, G. (1997). Surviving without the UN: Somaliland, a forgotten country. *Le Monde Diplomatique*. Retrieved from <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/33/114.html>
- Rapando Murunga, G. (2005). Conflict in Somalia and Crime in Kenya: Understanding the Trans-Territoriality of Crime. *African and Asian Studies*, 4, 137-161
- Sahdra, B., Rosse, M. (2007). *Group Identification and Historical Memory*. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 33, 384-395
- Scahill, J. (2013). *Dirty Wars; The World is a Battlefield*. London, UK: Serpent's Tail.
- Shamir, J., Shikaki, K. (2002). Self-Serving Perceptions of Terrorism Among Israeli and Palestinians. *Political Psychology*, 23, 537-557
- Sipus, M. (2010). Support for al-Shabaab through the Diaspora. *Forced Migration Review*, 37. Retrieved from <http://www.fmreview.org/en/non-state/29.pdf>
- Staub, E. (1999). The Roots of Evil: Social Conditions, Culture, Personality, and Basic Human Needs. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3, 179-192
- Taylor, T. (2009). Justice as a Basic Human Need. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 38, 5-10
- Vilkko, V. (2011). Al Shabaab: From External Support to Internal Extraction. Uppsala Universitet. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Retrieved from [http://www.uu.se/digitalAssets/57/57537\\_MFS\\_paper\\_Vilkko.pdf](http://www.uu.se/digitalAssets/57/57537_MFS_paper_Vilkko.pdf)
- Volkan, V. D. (1998). Transgenerational Transmissions and "Chosen Trauma": An Element of Large-Group Identity. Retrieved from <http://www.vamikvolkan.com/Transgenerational-Transmissions-and-Chosen-Traumas.php>

- Volkan V.D. (2004). The Seven Threads of Large-Group Identity. *Blind Trust*. Charlottesville, VA: Pitchstone Publishing, 23-55
- Volkan, V. D. (2004). Chosen trauma, the Political Ideology of Entitlement and Violence. Retrieved from <http://www.vamikvolkan.com/Chosen-Trauma,-the-Political-Ideology-of-Entitlement-and-Violence.php>
- Whittaker, H. (2012). Forced Villagization during the *Shifita* Conflict in Kenya, ca. 1963-1968. *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 45, 343-364
- Yarnell, M., Thomas, A. (2014). Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Somali Refugees in Kenya. Refugees International. Retrieved from <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2015/10/4/between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place-somali-refugees-in-kenya>