

Joint Master in Global Economic Governance and Public Affairs

*What Key Factors Have
Influenced International
Mediation Efforts in Resolving
Conflicts in East Africa?*

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International Mediation of East African Conflicts

Abstract

As East African people have suffered from various conflicts recently, the key factors influencing mediation initiatives must continue to be examined. Whilst the cessation of hostilities has been reached in many conflicts, sustainable peace remains elusive in the region. Additionally, the tensions left in the aftermath of certain conflicts has contributed to the destabilisation of the region. As such, this thesis endeavours to analyse these factors, with the use of two case studies: the Tigray War and the South Sudanese Civil War. Through the adoption of a qualitative methodology, it will be investigated as to whether there are similarities in the challenges faced, and whether there are entrenched reasons for the prevalence of tension and violence. Findings from this study have found a variety of intersecting reasons, namely historical grievances, poverty, weak institutions, ethnic tension and socio-political underrepresentation. The lack of inclusive processes and the reliance on natural resources related to the East African context, only worsen the outcomes of international mediation. This study demonstrates the need for nuanced interpretations of these conflicts, and holistic approaches to mediation. The lessons learned from the past experiences of mediation in the great lakes region should be used for future mediation outcomes as this could prove to be effective.

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I. Introduction

Background and Context of East African Conflicts

East Africa is a region that was plagued by various conflicts in the 20th century. Some of the socio-political effects of these conflicts have had spillover effects in the 21st century. The conflicts in this region, like all conflicts, have led to loss of human life, dignity, and property. Although some countries are more stable than others, conflicts in a region always pose a systemic and social risk for the neighbouring countries. Two examples of the consequences that have arisen due to conflicts in East Africa can be found in Kenya. According to the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) there are roughly 280,000 Somali refugees in Kenya; and the instability in Somalia that caused this mass exodus has also caused an increase in terrorist attacks carried out by Al-Shabaab in Kenya in the 21st century. To give a broader understanding of the periods of fragility that the region has gone through, much of the rest of the introduction will be centred on briefly contextualising the history of East African conflicts, whilst looking at how conflict resolution can be prominent in promoting stability and development in the region.

Ethiopia, which will be looked at as a case study has faced internal conflicts since the 20th century due to issues such as political repression and catastrophic famines. During Mengistu's rule and at the start of the Ethiopian civil war, civil society was stifled at its natal stage, as intellectuals and anyone who should dissent were systematically eliminated during the Red Terror. From 1976 to 1978, 10,000 people were shot with the purpose of terrifying the population. Further military offensives in the area continued to strain the humanitarian crisis, especially in the regions of Eritrea and Tigray. Another factor that played a role in the deterioration of the famine crises in Ethiopia was also due to their alignment with the USSR, effectively reducing the amount of aid they received, compared to what they might have received if they had followed differing geopolitical shifts and tendencies of times. This was due to the military objectives in the country at the time of this alliance, which also influenced how the aid they received was utilised. For instance, rather than focusing the country's energy and resources towards

relieving the famine crises that lasted from 1985 to 1988, they were used primarily to advance these military objectives (Abate Demissie, 2023). Although the history of Ethiopia and Eritrea requires an increasingly nuanced depiction, this case will be examined more thoroughly later in this paper.

Kenya has also faced political strife as identity politics have contributed largely to ethnic violence (Klopp & Kamungi, 2007). During elections, tensions tend to rise especially as opposition parties often accuse winning parties of election rigging. This was the case in 2007-08, as violence broke out in the country, especially in the Coast and Rift Valley regions as police brutality occurred against protestors. Since then, Kenya managed to find some stability, with the help of mediation processes (Cheeseman & Kanyinga, 2020). However, recently Kenya has encountered political instability once more as citizens protested against the IMF-supported Finance Bill that was proposed and eventually scrapped by current President William Ruto (Al Jazeera, 2024)

Rwanda's history is prominent in East Africa as ethnic tensions exacerbated by Belgium's colonisation of the country lead to what is now known as the Rwandan Genocide. Systems left by the divide and conquer rule used by colonisers focused on identity politics and ethnic inequalities (Prunier, 1997). This created an environment where the risk of violence and repression among ethnicities was elevated, as bouts of violence have plagued Rwanda's history since 1962 - the year in which Rwanda gained their independence (Reyntjens, 2018). Moreover, international perception of the country has been influenced by the participation of Rwandan forces and proxy militias in conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Prunier, 2011). Ultimately, community-based Gacaca courts were crucial to Rwanda's political and reconstruction post-genocide, under the newly ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) (Clark, 2013).

Similarly to Rwanda, Burundi was colonised by Belgium, causing the governance of the country to be entrenched in ethnic conflict. Elites fought for control over power and resources in the system which led to periods of violence and coups . In fact, genocide and ethnic cleansing are also a part of Burundi's history as the Tutsi-dominated

government caused the death of hundreds of thousands Hutus, as they targeted intellectuals and political opponents. Additionally, Burundi's transition to democracy was hampered by the assassination of president Melchior Ndadaye, which culminated in the civil war that lasted from 1993 to 2005 (Lemarchand, 2001). Despite tribulations like political and economic instability and a continuation of sporadic violence, Burundi has tried to rebuild its institutions. In line with the objectives of the Arusha Accords of 2000, the country has tried to work towards a more sustainable peace and transition to democracy (Lemarchand, 2013).

Somalia had an especially complicated past with colonialism as it was split into British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland. Even after the unification of these two territories, ethnic tension increased. Moreover, a resentment was also formed towards neighbouring countries Kenya and Ethiopia after territories were drawn out, as Somalia claimed that these territories were formerly theirs (Lewis, 2021). After the unification, Somalia was led by authoritarian General Siad Barre, who's regime showed favouritism towards certain clans and repressed others (Menkhaus, 2007). In 1991, his regime was overthrown, which caused the state to collapse as clan-based militias and warlords fought for control of resources. This collapse has fragmented the country, forming autonomous regions such as Somaliland and Puntland, albeit they are not recognised as states internationally (Menkhaus, 2015). As it has occurred in other regions of East Africa, the country was plunged into cycles of famine and relocation for many Somalians. Even attempts to bring stability to the country, like that of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), were faced with obstacles such as the aversion of local warlords (Menkhaus, 2013). Another example of international intervention in the country was the deployment of troops since 2007 as part of the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) (Bradbury, 2008). These efforts have continued to be hampered by the country's fragmentation and instability. A consequence of this was the surfacing of terrorist groups such as Al Shabaab in the 2000s, a radical youth wing of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). Their attempt to impose Sharia law in the country has been

prominent in the destabilisation of Somalia and its neighbouring countries (Menkhaus, 2013).

Sudan has a distinctive and divisive history as it was colonised by the British and the Egyptians. In Sudan, Mamdani noted that the divide and rule practice, “The colonial policies of divide and rule reinforced distinctions between the predominantly Arab-Muslim north and the predominantly African-Christian south” (Mamdani, 1996). As a result of these cultural and religious differences, a marginalisation of the African-Christian south Sudanese population ensued. Therefore it can be said that the first Sudanese civil war, which took place from 1955 to 1972, was due to the South Sudanese opposition to the “new Khartoum government.” (de Waal, 2017). The Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972 brought a period of peace between wars, however violence recommenced in 1983 due to what Prunier described as a “persistent northern neglect of the south” and its demands to be autonomous (Prunier, 2005). The second civil war extended across 1983 to 2005 and caused an estimated 2 million deaths and the displacement of a further 4 million people. This detrimental conflict was fought primarily by the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in the south and the Sudanese government in the north (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

The aforementioned cultural and religious diversity and rural marginalisation also created tension in long neglected Darfur for decades, but in 2003 a war erupted that has persisted until today. (Al Jazeera, 2023). The International Criminal Court’s (ICC) investigations regarding the region were centred on the alleged crimes committed by suspects including Sudanese government officials, leaders of the Resistance Front and militia/Janjaweed leaders. These crimes range from genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, in the face of “1.65 million internally displaced persons in Darfur, and more than 200,000 refugees from Darfur in neighbouring Chad (ICC, 2005). This was also a result of the destruction of villages in Darfur, and extensive casualties (de Waal, 2017). Finally, despite the extraordinary secession of South Sudan from Sudan in 2011 under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005, internal security was still at

risk and a civil war started in 2013. This has only aggravated the regional divisions and violence in the country (Brosché, 2011).

In Uganda's case, the period after British rule and colonisation over the country was characterised by the military coup staged by Army Chief of Staff Idi Amin on then president Milton Obote (United States Embassy of the Republic of Uganda, 2024). From 1971 to 1979, the country saw severe human rights abuses which led to an increase in violence, ethnic tension and instability (Mamdani, 2007). At the end of this period the Uganda-Tanzania War - also known as the Liberation War in Uganda and the Kagera War in Tanzania - saw Idi Amin removed from power by Ugandan exiles and Tanzanian military (Mutibwa, 1992). The Tanzanian military got involved after a border clash in the Kagera salient where Tanzanians were killed and property was destroyed, and this eventually turned into a full-fledged war (Nayenga, 1984). This caused the deaths and displacements of many Ugandans (Mutibwa, 1992).

Other ways that Uganda has been involved in conflict include civil insurgencies in Uganda and the intervention in regional conflicts. In northern Uganda the Joseph Kony led Lord's Resistance Army that emerged in the 1980s- that still remains a threat - has brought crisis and instability to the country through cruel methods such as employing child soldiers. In terms of contributing to instability in neighbouring countries, Uganda, like Rwanda, also got involved in the conflict in DRC. This in turn, influenced the country's relations with neighbouring countries and its international perception (Prunier, 2010). Besides the tensions created by these two factors, the country has struggled with ongoing corruption and repression, which has made post-conflict reconstruction more difficult (Branch, 2011).

When examining the prominence of the role conflict resolution has in an East African context, various factors can be considered. Generally, conflict resolution attempts to: address deep rooted causes of conflicts, promote regional integration and stability, build trust and reconciliation among differing ethnic communities, increase economic development and investment, strengthen political stability and governance, and

implement and maintain regional organisations and most importantly keep peace. With a path to peace that is entrenched in identity politics, civil wars and inter-state conflicts, successful mediation efforts remain crucial for East Africa. Although the Tigray region remains unstable, the peace agreements between Ethiopia and Eritrea allowed for regional integration and cross-border trade, whilst also ending conflict that lasted decades (International Crisis Group, 2021). Building trust in countries at risk of ethnic conflicts such as Kenya and Uganda is essential for the maintenance of long-lasting peace. The elections of 2007-8 in Kenya exposed a deep need for national dialogue and reconciliation (Kagwanja, 2009). Considering the tensions that were engendered by the Finance Bill proposed by President Ruto 2024, it seems that this is still the case. In economic terms. Conflict resolution also aims to establish political institutions that have the ability to promote national unity whilst being considerate of the complex clan relations that exist (Menkhaus, 2015). Finally, the peacekeeping missions and mediation processes put in place by regional organisations like the AU and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have played a prominent role in conflict resolution. However, tensions given by issues such as political power sharing and unfair distribution of resources, as is the case in Sudan and South Sudan (Mamdani, 2009), show that mediation processes can require time and patience.

Importance of International Mediation

International mediation generally, is an essential component for conflict resolution as it gives negotiations and resolutions between global conflicting parties a framework to work under. With the aid of governments, international organisations and other respected external actors, impartial third parties can help the process of stopping violence and finding mutual agreements amongst conflicting parties. Leveraging impartiality is of significant value as this allows conflicting parties to feel more comfortable, which in turn increases the likelihood of successful negotiations (Beardsley & Schmidt, 2011). Essentially, when the gap of trust is bridged, communication is facilitated. As such, it can be said that mediation renders communication more manageable, as it can help transition a hostile dialogue to one where parties can

express their grievances and work towards a resolution or peace agreement (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009).

Another way in which they promote peace is by giving this space for dialogue a clear structure with potentially viable options. These mediation processes can lead to agreements that can be made up of provisions for ceasefires, transitional justice mechanisms, and power-sharing arrangements. Not only can these be crucial for ending violent conflict, but also for promoting a positive and sustainable peace (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006). For this reason, a mediator's experience and expertise are crucial; and because of the normative frameworks under which they work, such as international law, human rights standards and diplomatic protocols (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009). Finally, effective mediation efforts can also prevent escalation and spillover of conflicts into neighbouring countries, which for example, is key in the context of East Africa (Walter, 2015). Once this has been achieved and conflict has been deescalated, mediation processes can also support the post-conflict reconstruction that a country or region has to go through. This involves reconciliation, socio-economic development, building stronger institutions, whilst ensuring that the process is inclusive. Highlighting this is especially important in the case where identity politics has been at the forefront of a conflict, as inclusivity can reduce the tensions amongst different collectives of identity.

Research Question and Objectives

The persistent conflicts in East Africa have shown the necessity for mediation efforts in conflict resolution. This academic paper aims to address the research question: "What key factors have influenced international mediation efforts in resolving conflicts in East Africa?" The primary objectives of this thesis are to evaluate the effectiveness of mediation efforts, identify the key factors contributing to the successes and failures of mediation, and to extract the lessons that have been learned that can also inform future initiatives. This study will analyse these factors to determine what has worked, what has not, and the reasons behind this. As the geographical scope of this study will be centred on Ethiopia, South Sudan and the Great Lakes region more generally, this will range

from discussions on recurring violence, political instability, inclusivity and accountability (Prunier, 2010).

The rest of this paper will aim to give the reader an understanding of the theoretical framework relating to mediation and conflict resolution, and how it has evolved throughout history. Before explaining the methodology of this paper, a literature review regarding the history of conflicts and mediation outcomes in East Africa will be presented. Consequently, two case studies will be analysed, namely the Tigray War and the South Sudanese Civil War. By examining the mediation processes in these two distinct yet interconnected conflicts, this thesis will try to contribute to the broader discourse on conflict resolution in East Africa. Before making concluding remarks, this research paper will provide actionable insights for the purposes of guiding policymakers, international organisations, and mediators in crafting more effective strategies for achieving sustainable peace.

II. Theoretical Framework

Typology of Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is a field of study that is concerned with transforming states that are involved in violent conflicts into states where there is first an absence of violent conflict, and then the existence of social injustice. John Burton defines conflict as ““an essential creative element in human relationships. It is the means to change, the means by which our social values of welfare, security, justice, and opportunities for personal development can be achieved... The existence of a flow of conflict is the only guarantee that the aspirations of society will be attained.” (Burton, 1972). Similarly Barnett Rubin proclaimed that it is the essence of politics. It is generally acknowledged that conflict is an inherent and natural feature of human life. However, while this process cannot be avoided, what should be avoided in this process is “physically damaging or destroying the property and high-value symbols of one another; and/or psychologically or physically injuring, destroying, or otherwise forcibly eliminating one another,” amongst two or more actors in the pursuit of contrasting interests. (Sandole & Van der Merwe, 1993). While conflict analysis and dispute resolution are centred in the transition from violent conflict to negative peace, conflict transformation is focused on a transition to positive peace. This includes targeting the roots of a conflict and finding non-violent mechanisms to prevent conflict from arising once again. In fact, it is important to make distinctions between the different terminology that revolves around conflict studies. Janie Leatherman and Raimo Väyrynen (1995) define conflict settlement, as the “cessation of overt hostilities, but not the removal of underlying causes,” making an important distinction. Conflict termination is a general term for the ending of a conflict and must be differentiated from conflict resolution and settlement. In fact, it is often intended in a military sense, as an example of this would be a conflict ending after a military surrender (Stefanova & Greco, 1997).

Conflict management is intended as a desired outcome and refers to the “techniques, strategies, and methods employed to arrive at a final objective.” (Stefanova and Greco, 1997) Therefore, conflict resolution and management are “inherently linked.” Jacob Bercovitch (1994) defined conflict management as “a conscious decisional process

whereby parties to a conflict, with or without the aid of outsiders, take steps to transform, de-escalate or terminate a conflict in a sustainable and mutually acceptable way.”

Another important concept is that of conflict transformation. According to the Nordic School of Conflict, conflict transformation is considered as a situation where “the parties, the issues and the expectations are changed, so that there is no longer a fear of war arising from the relationship”(Väyrynen, 1991). This concept is caused by the idiosyncratic nature of conflict, as “an alteration of initial stakes in the contrasting relationships, or a change in the relative value placed by the belligerents on the contended problem” (Stefanova & Greco, 1997).

The last component of conflict typology that will be discussed is regarding prominent conflict categories. According to Raimo Väyrynen, the actors, the issues, the rules, and the structure are the four most prominent conflict categories that can transform in the face of these idiosyncrasies (Väyrynen, 1991). These categories on their own or when combined can create developments in the field of conflict resolution, and potentially stop ongoing violence. Stefanova & Greco consider the prominence of incorporating this concept into our understanding of conflict resolution, as conflict transformation allows for a more appropriate introduction of typology.

Theoretical Approaches to Conflict Resolution

After having considered the typology of conflict resolution, it is also of great importance to consider the theoretical approaches to international relations, and their evolution. There are three classical theoretical approaches to international relations and conflict resolution: Liberalism, Realism, and Marxism. According to realists, states are primarily concerned with survival and power, and thus always act in their own self-interest. This theory is based in a pessimistic perspective of human nature akin to the ideas of Thomas Hobbes or Niccolo Machiavelli, which translates to state relations also being anarchical by nature. If states act in a realist way, this leads to a permanent security dilemma that arises from the need to be able to match another state’s military

power. Inevitably, the potential for conflict is always present. This approach was the main security mechanism for 100 years prior to World War One, in what was known as the Concert of Europe. Michael Banks argued that this approach to international relations and policy encourages deterrence and threat. However, it has been argued that following this perspective does not encourage positive policy-making and long-term and stable peace (Azar & Burton, 1986).

On the other hand, liberalism does not reject anarchy, but it instead places value in “the regulation of power through reason, law and institutions” (Sousa, 2018). Liberalists believe that the potential for conflict can be avoided when common interests and shared values lead to institutionalised cooperation. Having institutions that can work together and come to agreements can bring higher economic interdependence, collective security and shared human rights, which are all needed to achieve peace. This way of thinking became prominent between the two world wars, as a result of the trauma from the destruction and mobilisation of people that came with world war one. The rejection of realism was in hope that another great war could be avoided, as is seen with the establishment of the League of Nations in 1920 and the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact in 1928. However, the “First great debate” in international relations was settled as the rise of nazism and facism in the 1930s demonstrated that the world cannot be perceived simply through liberal values as “hard material considerations of power” must be considered as well (Sousa, 2018).

Marxism is a belief that focuses on the adverse “economic conditions of the subjugated classes and is optimistic regarding the potential for their emancipation.” Principles of Marxist socio economic analysis are used to demonstrate why conflict and economic inequality occurs between states. Therefore, peace can be obtained through the eradication of the structural economic domination of one actor by another actor. Some perspectives include the idea that conflict is necessary to achieve more just economic relations, as this transformation of power would be difficult to achieve non-violently. However, the use of “Satyagraha” (holding firmly to truth), or civil resistance by Mahatma Gandhi in India and South Africa, inspired examples of this around the world.

Well-renowned examples of this are the struggle against apartheid in South Africa or the Civil Rights movement in the United States. As a result, studies and understanding of conflict resolution in the first half of the 20th century was characterised by, “Realist concerns on arms race and war outbreaks and frequencies, Liberal aspirations of peace-making and cooperation and Marxist interest on political revolutions.” (Sousa, 2018)

With the end of the Second World War, the Cold War started to take shape in a time period that would have the concept of security and stability reconceived. The understanding of the relation between military and non-military threats brought a focus on nuclear power and Mutual Assured Destruction in a bipolar world of capitalist and socialist states. As a result, the fear of confrontation between superpowers influenced Western governments’ making and funding of foreign and security policies; and shifted the academic thinking in international relations to issues such as conflict escalation, the military industrial complex and international state behaviour. Therefore, the “second great debate” revolved around the differences in applying methodology between traditionalist and behaviouralist scholars. Whilst traditionalist scholars followed the aforementioned way of thinking, behaviouralists follow an approach that requires the scholar or researcher to be neutral; and in which theory explains the behaviour of states and other actors through the validation of empirical studies. This is how the “scientific revolution” affected the thinking around conflict resolution, strategic studies, and peace research (Sousa, 2018). Behaviourism changed how conflict was studied in the levels of analysis applied to the field and in the rational choice theory applied to this analysis. The causes of war began to comprise the individual, the national state and the international system as different levels of analysis (Waltz, 1979). When analysing individuals the focus is on, “human nature and on individual political leaders and their belief systems, psychological processes, emotional states and personalities.” With regards to the national state, analysis focuses on, “the type of political system (authoritarian or democratic, and variations of each), the structure of the economy, the nature of the policymaking process, the role of public opinion and interest groups, ethnicity and nationalism, and political culture and ideology. Finally, the consideration of

the international system comprises its anarchic structure, patterns of trade and military alliances formed, and the distribution of economic and military power among leading states among other factors (Sousa, 2018).

Rational choice theory became increasingly popular in the attempt to analyse and forecast the behaviour of states, with two specific models standing out: the Graduated Reciprocation in Tension Reduction and the standard prisoner's dilemma. The former involves one party making concessions to another with the intention of signalling an intention to cease conflict. This hope of achieving greater cooperation translates to a hope that the other party will reciprocate when seeing this concession or compromise. On the other hand, the prisoner's dilemma is meant to show two rational individuals will defect rather than cooperate, even if it is in both their best interest to cooperate with each other (Sousa, 2018).

Despite the United Nations and other multilateral institutions having the liberal objective of collective security, the Cold War was instead met with states focusing on the collective defence formed with their military alliances. Namely, these were the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) which formed the capitalist bloc, and the socialist bloc formed with the Warsaw Pact. Negotiation became a prominent factor at the height of tensions created by the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, as John F. Kennedy, the American President, used the GRIT approach to deescalate the tensions. As a result, this policy of detente became a viable option and Richard Nixon, the subsequent American President, also adopted it (Sousa, 2018).

John Burton, the well-renowned American politician who made pivotal contributions to negotiation and conflict resolution, importantly noted how first order learning makes socio-cultural systems more resistant to change. Instead the transformation of these systems must come from second order learning, namely the challenging of these "default values" (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2011). Similarly, in the 1960s, Johan Galtung defined peace as "a condition where structural violence is removed by

achieving social justice and developing non-violent mechanisms for conflict prevention,” rather than it just being the negation of war (Galtung, 1969).

In the 1970s, it became prevalent for scholars in conflict resolution and international relations to accept behaviouralism. The inter-paradigm debate became of particular importance thanks to the work by Thomas Kuhn (1996) on “research paradigms.” In turn this influenced the revamping of realism and liberalism as neorealism and neoliberalism, alongside the rise of Marxist-Leninist inspired dependency theory (Sousa, 2018). Analysis of systemic structures and state behaviour in an anarchic world became the focus of neorealism, as shown by Kenneth Waltz in his book, “Theory of International Politics” (1979). On the other hand, neoliberalism was focused on the role of transnational actors and cooperation in this system (Keohane and Nye, 1971). In the 1980s, feminism became more prominent, introducing gender perspectives on conflict. Similarly, a significant rise in post-structuralism occurred, as the discursive construction of security focused on its subjective nature, as opposed to positivism. Ultimately, while this period foresaw a development of the theoretical framework of international mediation, it struggled to integrate these paradigms (Heron & Reason, 1997).

In the 1990s there was another shift in the international system that was characterised by the World Bank. Due to negative consequences of poverty, interventions considered frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as liberal peace policies included human rights, rule of law and development. Conflict resolution studies evolved with this shift as new approaches considered factors such as asymmetry, cultural and religious diversity and complexity of conflicts (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011). Reflectivism, which is one of these approaches, is founded in the idea that identity is socially constructed, as it focuses on normative perspectives. Constructivism looks at how these factors shape behaviour (Buzan & Hansen, 2009). With the rise of these approaches, also came the rise of postcolonialism critiques of Western-centric security and peace studies. As such, attention has shifted further to issues such as human emancipation and challenging state-centric neoliberal security structures. This includes prioritising global social justice, transnational solidarity and human rights

(Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2011), through research, promotion of practical knowledge and political action (Heron and Reason, 1997).

III. Literature Review

History of East African Conflicts

East Africa has suffered a number of intractable conflicts where the magnitude of violence cannot be underestimated. The history of conflicts in the Great Lakes region is a complex tapestry due to factors such as colonialism and neo-colonialism, identity politics and a struggle for resources. Understanding East African historical legacies is key for a better comprehension of socio-political factors and the appropriate aspects of conflict resolution to focus on for each country.

In terms of the evolution of conflict resolution in Africa, the period before European colonialism constitutes a large portion of history. There have been numerous, diverse and complex societies in Africa, with different political, social, and economic systems and their interactions ranged from alliances to conflicts (Lamphear, 2011). Therefore, it cannot be said that each of these societies resolved conflict the same way and it would not be fair to make this generalisation. However for conciseness, some of the methods used in East African history will be considered.

According to Mamdani (1996), inter-tribal conflicts in East Africa were characterised by resource competition, the desire for more land, and to dominate other groups politically. The process of resolving these conflicts was through traditional methods of conflict resolution that relied on norms, customary laws and community consensus. For instance, a council of elders composed of highly-esteemed leaders of the community, was present in Maasai, and Luo societies. The harmony and peace of their societies depended on their ability to hear both sides and make a decision based on this (Mamdani, 1996). Other ways in which disputes were tackled include restitution and compensation, both materially and socially (this could include a service that is supported by the whole community) (Lamphear, 2011); taking oaths that resulted in sanctions if broken (Mamdani, 1996); trials by ordeal that were judged by elders or leaders (Lamphear, 2011); and community reconciliation rituals used for social cohesion and solidarity (Mamdani, 1996). Therefore, as Lamphear noted, not only were mediation and negotiation common in East African history, but their mechanisms were also

founded with the intention of finding mutual agreements and repairing the social fabric of a community in the wake of a conflict (Lamphear, 2011).

East Africa's colonisation changed the region's socio-political landscape, and thus the long-standing structures that allowed for their traditional methods of conflict resolution. The imposition of boundaries led to territorial disputes and the splitting of indigenous communities (Mamdani, 1996). Although some may argue that European colonisers were merely unconcerned of East African ethnic differences, the divide and conquer rule used throughout Africa suggests that their implicit intention was to create this tension. The favouring of certain ethnic groups and subjugation of others was the manner in which European countries kept power and control. Colonial administrations stifled the chance of broader participation in governance by giving power to a select few based on characteristics such as ethnicity. Moreover, it can also be argued that the introduction of capitalism - a system where land must be "brought to a bank as collateral to gain more credit" (Silvia Federici, 2009) - to the region has exacerbated conflicts over land ownership and use due to disrupted traditional land tenure systems (Mamdani, 1996).

Indubitably, the effects of the violent European expansionism on East Africa have been grave. Not only did it have a significant effect on the evolution of conflict resolution efforts in the region, but it also shaped the contours of conflicts that still plague East Africa today. In fact, international mediation is arguably even more important in the post-independence era, as ethnic fragmentation and political marginalisation has led to East African leaders committing atrocities against their own countrymen. Depending on the context, conflicts have also changed shape and taken other forms such as freedom struggles or demonstrations against human rights abuses. For example, the Mau Mau Uprising was a violent conflict that occurred from 1952 to 1960, due to the marginalisation and land alienation of the Kikuyus (Branch, 2009). The British went as far as creating detention camps - also known as "British gulags" - for those suspected of being a part of the secret society, as "hundreds of thousands" of Kikuyus were detained, and even more displaced (Marc Parry, 2016). Even after Kenya gained independence

from British rule in 1963, the alienation of the Kikuyus and the conflict that ensued had a profound and divisive effect on Kenyan society. An example of this is seen in Kenya's challenge to become a full-fledged democracy rather than a mixed regime. In the 2007-8 crisis in Kenya the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) reported that, "more than 1,200 Kenyans were reported killed, thousands more injured, over 300,000 people displaced and around 42,000 houses and many businesses were looted or destroyed... [as] cases of sexual violence were also reported," (OHCHR, 2008). Journalists who covered the crisis gave a more emotional but equally harrowing account of the ethnic violence: "Post-election violence was experienced firsthand as neighbor turned on neighbor, communities were destroyed and the media in some cases became the focus of mob rage," (Katy Migiro, 2015) Ultimately, the importance of mediation of this conflict was shown as, "the 28 February power-sharing agreement reached within the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation process, and noted that important commitments have been made in the context of the dialogue to carry out reforms to address long-standing issues, including inequalities and accountability, constitutional and institutional reforms. The accords include an Independent Review Committee to investigate all aspects of the 2007 Presidential electoral process; a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission; a constitutional review process, and a Commission of Inquiry with a mandate to investigate the circumstances..." (OHCHR, 2008).

Similarly to Kenya, Uganda has also seen acts of repression and human rights abuses with ethnicity being a focal point. Under General Idi Amin in the 1970s, many Acholi and Langi soldiers were killed, after they were detained and had surrendered already by request of the General. This practice extended to highly educated and influential members of these ethnic groups, as Amin recruited mostly northerners in the government and army. In the first half of the 1980s, Obote and his Uganda People's Congress' win at the elections was met with a resistance that led to the formation of several armed groups. This led to the killing and torturing of many innocent civilians of the Baganda population by the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) (Lucima & Otunnu, 2002).

From this it was portrayed how convoluted the local perceptions of these conflicts can get. While the Baganda population was singled out for a perceived support for the armed groups, the NRM/A accused the Acholi of being the perpetrators of these atrocities, in spite of the UNLA being a multi-ethnic army. After Obote was overthrown by a conflict between Langi and Acholi soldiers, their military alliance was shattered and violence between them escalated. In light of these events, Tito Okello's newly formed regime invited all rebel groups and parties to join the military government and all agreed except for the National Resistance Army (NRA). This act was pivotal as Yoweri Museveni seized power with the NRA in 1986. This was in spite of the group signing the Nairobi Agreement under President Moi of Kenya less than a month prior, after prolonged negotiations in Nairobi. After months of relative peace, the NRA committed crimes in Acholiland such as "rape, abductions, confiscation of livestock, killing of unarmed civilians, and the destruction of granaries, schools, hospitals and bore holes escalated," (Lucima & Otunnu, 2002) By some this was considered retribution for the "skulls of Luwero" or the Baganda population that had been targeted. This brought many ex-UNLA soldiers and youth to flee the country, particularly to Sudan, before the rise of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (Lucima & Otunnu, 2002).

At this point, the war received input from other actors as the SPLA was provided military hardware and sanctuary in Uganda and military and political support from the US, whilst the LRA was afforded the same by the Sudanese government (Lucima & Otunnu, 2002). This led to the LRA's insurgency and the rise of Joseph Kony, in a conflict over resources and power that has seen the human rights abuse of countless East Africans. In spite of this, the Ugandan government has not been alone in this fight. Organisations with a prominent role in conflict resolution in East Africa, such as the AU and East African Community (EAC) have made efforts to build positive peace in the region (Lucima & Ottunu, 2002). In 2023, the conflict, which has seen roughly 100,000 fatalities, 20,000 child abductions and 2 million people displaced, took a turn as Uganda started an operation to repatriate soldiers in a harmonious manner. To build enough trust to do this, soldiers are connected with old peers that had been repatriated recently.

Netherlands-based peace organisation, PAX, is optimistic that more soldiers will be repatriated in the future. Similarly, Lyandro Komakech, a regional facilitator in the repatriation, claims this, “marks the twilight of the prolonged LRA conflict,” (Blanshe, 2023).

In Rwanda and Burundi the colonial policies that gave prominence to ethnic divides were felt as violence among the Hutu and the Tutsi people happened repeatedly. By late 1990, a civil war had started between the Uganda-based Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the Rwandan government. This came after the RPF attacks, led mainly by Tutsi commanders, on civilian and military targets in Rwanda. Due to this the Tutsi people were perceived as RPF accomplices and were quickly depicted by the Hutu government as renegades. International intervention brought the second Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana to sign the Arusha Accords in August 1993, bringing a momentary ceasefire. In accordance with the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), “The United Nations deployed troops to facilitate the peace process,” (Lawal, 2024). However, this was not a decision that won everyone’s favour from within the government, and on April 6th, 1994, “a plane carrying Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira was shot down over Kigali,” (Lawal, 2024).

This culmination of tension and violence amounted to the tragic Rwandan genocide. The disturbing orchestration of the mass violence that took the lives of roughly 800,000 people in 100 days, occurred through the manipulation of the Rwandan ideological framework. Fear was manufactured through propaganda and harnessed into the conviction that brutality and violence must be resorted to out of “self-defence.” Media such as Kagura and Radio Télévision des Mille Collines, and military leaders like Colonel Théoneste Bagosora, were prominent in spreading this false narrative that incited further violence (Human Rights Watch, 2006). In a report that detailed the meeting to the minister of defence, Chief of Staff General Déogratias Nsabimana recounted how army officers met to organise, “defense of neighborhoods in

Kigali [and] the tracking down and neutralization of infiltrators in different parts of the city.” Ultimately, this mobilisation of violence was systematic and it cost the lives of many Rwandans.

The Somali crisis has constantly evolved over the past two decades. After the civil war in the 1980s, the 1990s saw the country experience “state collapse, clan factionism and warlordism, before the situation mutated to a “globalised ideological conflict.”

Emergence of Islamist movements in Somalia seeking to institute an Islamic State have destabilised the country and the region. These movements have varied from “traditionalist sufi orders, to progressive Islamist movements, inspired groups like Al Itihad Al Islamiya pursuing a regional or global agenda.” One of the causes for the Somali crisis is also caused by wars with neighbouring countries, like the Ogaden War with Ethiopia. Another factor is related to the end of the Cold War. As it ended, the “global war on terror” came into force and this had a direct effect on the reactions to crises around the world. As such, Somalia instantly became a case that needed to be fixed. Paired with discrepancies between the centralised state authority and a short-fused kinship system, and the Somali pastoral culture which is how power is shared in the country (Bradbury & Healy, 2010)

Literature on Somalia maintains a focus on how the country’s borders were demarcated and how this has affected its relationship with bordering countries like Kenya and Ethiopia, instead of on the “cultural intricacies” of their people’s history and culture. These “cultural intricacies” constitute the differences that stem from cultural, socioeconomic and ecological factors. In accordance, Kudow noted that Somali political literature has tended to veer towards accepting the homogeneity of Somalis, rather than truly inspecting where these differences lie (Kudow, 1994). He argues that the question that should be asked is: How did the clans at the base of the lethal conflicts in Somalia gain their identity and strong sentimental value? This question is pivotal in comprehending the current political strife that has claimed countless Somali lives, and forced many others into homelessness. Kusow suggests that there were “long suppressed internal conflicts” within the country, before the Somali National Movement

attack on Barre's regime that led to state collapse. This attack ended up being the catalyst of a cycle of clan warfare that was perpetuated throughout the years. By January of 1991, Barre was forced to flee as the SNM had gained control of the former British Somaliland. In May 1991 the SNM declared the establishment of an independent state of Somaliland and have maintained a functioning government, albeit they have not received recognition from the international community. (Kudow, 1994).

It could be said that one of the factors that hinders international mediation in Somalia is the lack of understanding around how Somali clans formed and left alliances based on the difficult environment that is the Horn of Africa. In accordance with Kusow's perspective on the region, the work of a mediator is rendered more complicated if the general perception of a people (in this case of Somali people) is that of homogeneous and internally unified nation, when history shows the distinctness of clans and they way they collaborated with each other. Unification and diversity are not incompatible, especially as the Somali people share a similar environment, religion and language. However, a suppression of the differences in the people that moved around the region, those same ones that make its history, does a disservice both to the mediators who have approached the Somali conflict and as a result to the Somali people themselves (Kudow, 1994).

Lessons Learned from Past Mediation Experiences in East Africa

Having looked at the historical overview of conflicts in East Africa, it is clearer why determining the success (or failure) of mediation initiatives remains difficult. This is shown by the disagreement in what causes efficacy in mediation. For instance, it has been argued that regional actors are not appropriate candidates for mediation because of the difficulty in remaining partial (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009). On the other hand, international mediators have been critiqued for showing an occasional ignorance to local contexts, and that local knowledge is pivotal for mediation initiatives (Nathan, 2010). Scholar Paul D. Williams (2013) argued that an improvement had to be made to how intersectional issues are treated.

When looking at past mediation initiatives, Nathan concluded that international actors must implement expert units within the UN and OAU in order to deploy mediators that are better equipped to deal with local realities. One example she gives of how local knowledge made mediation more effective is of the World Council of Churches and the All African Council of Churches in Sudan in the 1970s. She compares this to the less successful international interventions of the IGAD in the Sudanese civil war. The formulation of the Declaration of Principles in 1994, attempted to tackle root issues of the conflict, but opposed the Sudanese government, which ultimately made the mediators seem partial. Nathan associated this lack of consideration and sensitivity to an overly prescriptive approach applied. Essentially, it was rooted in pragmatism rather than in circumspection. While Nathan concedes that mediators must “make proposals and tender advice,” she argues that in “the spirit of careful mediation” there should be an avoidance of being too prescriptive (Nathan, 1998).

Francis Deng (1997) came to another important consideration, namely that looking for “quick fixes” to issues that have their roots in deeply-embedded socio-political matters is not a sustainable practice. He concluded that “there is a tendency on the part of diplomatic peacemakers to look for aspects of a problem that lend themselves to relatively easy solutions and to postpone more difficult ones. While this is understandable, and perhaps even practical, it is probably the more difficult ones that eventually provoke people to violent confrontation, making them determined to kill and risk being killed,” (Deng, 1997). Accordingly, it seems reasonable to say that mediation must be practised carefully and thoroughly, especially when lives are at stake.

This avoidance of being prescriptive in mediation practices is also in relation to the idea that parties must own the settlement of their conflicts. Laurie Nathan (1998) cleverly notes the difficulty in finding objectivity as it can occur that both parties feel an acute sense of injustice in their regards: “independent observers might view the stance of one or more of the parties as irrational or unreasonable, the issues in dispute as relatively trivial, or the solution to the underlying problems as fairly obvious. If the parties shared these views, however, there would be no need for mediation,” (Nathan, 1998). As such,

the work of mediators is akin to that of an ombudsman (whose work falls under mediation but perhaps at a different level), in the sense that they should abstain from giving solutions. Instead, the facilitation of problem-solving, in a manner that affirms, acknowledges and gives respect to the conflicting parties, seems to be more effective. Many researchers have shared this sentiment and related the involvement of local communities as one of the ways to empower parties in their settlements (Menkhaus, 2004). In fact, Kiplagat indicated this in his comparison of the failed Ugandan peace talks of 1985, and the more effective mediation of Sudan and Kenya due to its involvement at the grassroots level (Lucima & Kiplagat, 2002).

Other than allowing parties to own their settlements - rather than looking for quick and easy fixes - another key factor influencing the mediation of East Africa is flexibility of mediators. Under the current world order, mediators from international organisations must work under rigid mandates. This influences the ability to adapt to bargaining positions of conflicting parties (which can change quickly) by mediators. Additionally, this means organisations can intervene during mediation processes, which carries a risk of breaking trust. (Nathan, 1998). Touval (1994) argued that the UN should not mediate in international disputes but rather support, “unilateral mediation by great powers or other states who have a vested interest in conflicts within their sphere of influence.” While this could be a solution, it would not be suited to the East African context due to there already being distrust amongst states with a vested interest. As mentioned earlier, there is distrust amongst Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia due to how colonial powers designated territories. In the context of Sudan, three of the member states of IGAD, namely Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda, have been a part of bilateral military conflicts with Khartoum. They have also sponsored extremist movements in Sudan, making Touval’s suggestion less than ideal for the region (Nathan, 1999). Even in the context of entities such as the UN and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the partisan interests of member-states have a significant impact on the decision-making of these organisations. For instance, the Liberian crisis was not addressed by the Security Council for more than two years due to the prevention of African countries (Ofuatey-Kodjoe, 1994; Sesay, 1995) Cyrus Vance and David Hamburg (1997) suggest that it would be more

structurally practical for mediation to go through the UN secretary-general, especially with the reinforcement of their authority. In fact, this would meet the standards for both flexibility and legitimacy. However, their role in mediation is undermined by the authority of the Security Council. As such, their role would benefit from a separation from the Security Council's enforcement measures, especially when members often seek "low-cost and low-risk" ways of ending conflict (Vance and Hamburg, 1997).

Finally it must also be noted that punitive measures, like the ones that are taken by the Security Council, should be avoided. When measures like military force and sanctions are imposed on other countries, this tends to breach the trust of disputants, and makes the institution have the same value of partiality as other major powers. This was seen as mediators lost trust in Somalia, Liberia, Burundi and Sudan. In Somalia, after the killing of Pakistani peacekeepers, the UN bombed a house and killed 50 clan members in a campaign against General Aideed (Nathan, 1999). The UN consequently lost their impartiality and legitimacy by failing "to account for the deep-rooted notion of collective responsibility in Somali political culture ...Actions taken against a clan's militia leader were seen by Somalis not as justice done to an errant individual, but as a hostile action against the entire clan" (Menkhaus, 2004). Nathan concludes that, "The experience of peacemaking in African civil wars suggests that international mediators are ineffective, if not counter-productive, when they deviate from the logic of mediation and apply undue pressure on the disputants. The mediators' motives may be sound but their approach is deeply flawed...This is especially the case where they are in conflict over issues related to freedom, justice, identity, security and survival, and where the conflict has engendered a high level of enmity and fear" (Nathan, 1998). She argues this with the concession that there is no single approach that can be used to conflict resolution. However, this complements the idea that reflectivist approaches can help to address the varying and complex contexts that encompass East African conflict.

IV. Methodology

Research Design

In order to measure the success of international mediation in East African conflicts and to research efficiently, key objectives were set for this academic paper. To assess the effectiveness of mediation efforts, key factors contributing to success or failure have to be identified. In the context of East Africa, the lessons that can be drawn upon are crucial for future interventions in East African conflicts. Not only are there ongoing conflicts in the region, but there is always potential for others to arise as the region struggles with numerous other problems, such as famine, corruption and extreme poverty. It is equally as useful to consider where international mediation was limited in its ability to resolve conflicts, as this can provide insights regarding the complexity of conflicts and how grievances are perceived by differing conflicting parties.

Conflict resolution will be interpreted as centred in promoting sustainable peace through the addressing of the deeply embedded social, political, and economic factors. The overall design of this study consists primarily of qualitative research methods as I felt this complements the field of conflict resolution, and the methodological approach that I align with the most. This was done in order to emphasise understanding of what characterises East African conflicts and how each context has differed in spite of intersections in history amongst East African countries. Nuances such as the influences of colonialism and identity politics on the East African landscape cannot be quantified. As such, addressing the difficulty that can arise in the solution and mediation of these conflicts is more effective when done with qualitative data.

Data Collection Methods and Selection Criteria for Case Studies

The type of data used for this academic paper is a mix of primary and secondary sources. Although structured and semi-structured interviews were examined in the course of this research, this paper focuses on two specific case studies in East Africa as primary sources. The first of these case studies focuses on Ethiopia and Eritrea. This case study especially considers the Tigray region and ethnicity, and their role in the war. The second case study revolves around the South Sudanese Civil War. These two case

studies were chosen due to the tumultuous histories of these countries, and for the insights they could give on the future of international mediation in Africa. Additionally, these case studies were picked due to their relevance, as both countries are still facing humanitarian crises. Although it could be said that East Africa has an abundance of conflicts to examine and case studies to choose from, these conflicts were also picked to show the effect they have had, and the response they have garnered from the rest of the community. Although Somalia would have also fit under the criteria mentioned above, it remains a complicated case to study as there is disagreement on the homogeneity of the Somali population in academic literature. Furthermore, it can be said that the Somali crisis is a more perplexing case to consider from the perspective of international mediation, and thus was excluded as an option for a case study in this paper. This is in no way a judgement of how significant the conflict would be for further conflict resolution studies, but merely an issue related to practicality for this paper.

Theoretical Approach of Data

As mentioned before, there are differing ways to approach this subject. Depending on the way that one perceives human nature, and the behaviour of principal actors in conflict, will affect the manner in which they approach international mediation. This thesis attempts to answer the central research question from a reflectivist or interpretivist perspective. Although a certain scientism - and the prioritisation of objectivity, replicability, and falsifiability - prevailed in early conflict studies, it feels as though “mathematical precision” or “universal correctness” should not be the main focus when analysing East African conflicts. Rather, interpretivist research revolves around “contextual understanding,” (Reshetnikov & Kurowska, 2017). This consists of developing a hermeneutic sensitivity and reflexivity and understanding the contextual variations that bring people to interpreting even basic concepts differently. As such, this academic paper will also look to utilise and implement qualitative analysis methods such as narrative analysis, phenomenological and grounded research, and as mentioned before, case studies.

One limitation that could arise in this paper's methodology is the risk of succumbing to personal bias, as research positionality will certainly influence the manner in which data interpretation is performed. This is also due to the subjective nature of interpretivist work, which also makes holding a consistent criteria for analysis. Other issues that may arise are related to a lack of generalisability, a potential of ambiguity arising from diverse interpretations, or a complexity in data comparison due to context specific and nuanced findings into a topic. Despite these possible limitations, one could argue that an interpretivist approach to the interpretation of international mediation of East African conflicts is necessary due to the underlying causes of these conflicts. In the face of ethnic conflicts that have been at least exacerbated by colonialism, it is paramount to consider the differing perspectives that have caused tension and keep a conflict ongoing. Moreover, a vital component of international mediation rests in interpreting the perspective of conflicting sides, in order to provide them with a process suited to their reconciliation and peacebuilding (Diehl & Greig, 2013). Even when looking past a ceasefire or negative peace as an outcome, comprehending local narratives and perceptions and how they influence behaviours and decisions is crucial for the promotion of long-lasting, sustainable peace (Rothchild & Lake, 2011).

Although it might have been easier to follow a positivist rationale due to a large amount of research already being centred in this thinking, one could argue that an interpretivist approach is more rewarding due to a broader understanding of the nuances that have caused conflict (Reshetnikov & Kurowska, 2017). Therefore, due to the enhancements an interpretivist approach can bring to analysis of international mediation in the Great Lakes region, the possible limitations can be outweighed if an effort is made to avoid them.

V. Case Studies

Case Study 1: Mediation in the Tigray Conflict

The political reforms set in motion by Abiy Ahmed in mid-2018 were only the beginning of what would become a renewed conflict in Tigray. What has now unfolded into an Ethiopian tragedy, finds its roots in a deeper misunderstanding between two political parties. As Richard Reid wrote for Georgetown, it is a “political journey that had come full circle,” as the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) declined to join the replacement for the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the Prosperity Party (Reid, 2021). Once the dominant faction of the EPRDF, the TPLF met the more liberal approach to politics practised by the Prosperity Party with hostility. However, in order to understand why mediating the crisis between these two groups is so difficult to do, one must investigate the historical background of this part of the Horn of Africa.

The TPLF was created in February 1975 in the turmoil that was left in the Tigray region after the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie. This was one of multiple insurgent movements that was born amidst the killing of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians and Eritreans. In fact, the Marxist and authoritarian Derg were accused of committing severe human rights violations, including genocide, crimes against humanity, torture, rape and forced disappearances, as they targeted educated and idealistic students, academics and political opponents. In the face of the Red Terror, the TPLF was a successful regional liberation front which is why they became a prominent force in the EPRDF. This coalition of guerrilla movements eventually overthrew the Derg in 1991, with the TPLF’s dominance against the Dergs in the late 80s being pivotal. Despite student radicalism being a prominent part of the TPLF’s manifestation, their formation was founded in the marginalisation that dominated imperial Ethiopia. The ethno-nationalism that followed suit, was present even in the 1940s, and represented a resentment and dissonance found in Africa against those that cooperated with colonisers, namely the British and Italians. From a Tigray perspective especially, the strengthening of their nationalist sense came from their prominence in the formation of Ethiopia over centuries, being denied. The position the Tigrays felt was their rightful

inheritance in modern Ethiopia, was not given to them in the Amhara state as Ethiopia became ethnically demarcated and increasingly influenced by identity politics (Reid, 2021).

The Tigrinyas in Eritrea - who share cultural and linguistic linkages with the Tigrays in Ethiopia - shared the sentiments of the Tigrays that came with marginalisation. In the Eritrean plateau, they found limited space and struggled with the power blocs in the highlands in Ethiopia and coast of the Red Sea. Their relations in this limited space became even more complex with the Italian occupation of Eritrea; and an armed struggle - dominated by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) - had already commenced at the time of Eritrean annexation by Haile Selassie in 1962. This is the reason, that despite their ideological differences in nationality and military tactics, the TPLF and EPLF found a common enemy in the Derg oppression in the 1970s. Although they briefly severed contact in the mid-1980s, the end of the decade saw them become allies in their overthrowing of the Derg, and in gaining Eritrea its independence (Reid, 2021)

However, this post-liberation era arose with great underlying tensions between the two parties even though relations were generally friendly in the wake of independence. The TPLF saw the EPLF as dangerous. On the other hand, EPLF felt they had the right to claim political and military influence in Ethiopia, especially as they helped in the fight for liberation. This culminated in 1998 when the TPLF-led Ethiopia went to war with the EPLF-led Eritrea. Whilst Ethiopia has found significance in the region and in the world, Eritrea was weakened by the conflict and the following two decades were characterised by a militaristic authoritarian rule (Reid, 2021)

This frozen conflict ended in 2018, as a peace agreement with Eritrea's president Isaias Afewerki was a part of the liberal reforms implemented by the then newly-appointed PM Abiy Ahmed. However, this inter-regional and inter-ethnic divides have contributed to lack of balance and cohesion that the country faces now. Although mediation has brought an end to this conflict, these tensions are still present. Robert Reid proposed

that, “All parties would do well to refresh themselves on the country’s past, both recent and deep, and arrive at the only sensible way forward – to seek consensus and reconciliation; to build a political system that is genuinely inclusive and representative.” (Reid, 2021)

In terms of mediation initiatives, the African Union struggled to gain Tigray trust. Principles of non-interference and a disengagement from Ethiopian dynamics effectively lead to their inability to organise an efficient peace process. However, increasing criticism of the AU’s passiveness towards the matter led to the appointment of former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo as AU High representative for the Horn of Africa region, with a mandate centred on Ethiopia. Challenges to reassert authority over the situation ranged from staffing, budgeting and scheduling issues to difficulty in establishing trust amongst Tigrayans due to being suspected of an affiliation with the GFDRE. An agreement was only reached on the back of severe military defeats and attacks on Tigrayan civilians, and when former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and South Africa’s Phumzile Mlambo-Ngucka joined as co-mediators of Obasanjo. The Pretoria negotiations lasted a matter of days as it is likely that the Tigrayan leadership understood their growing military weakness, worsening humanitarian crisis, and their consequent loss of authority in the region. In the face of a peace process or a prolonged guerrilla war, the TPLF agreed to disarm and to the federal government’s sovereignty over Tigray (Abate Demissie, 2023).

In the aftermath of the conflict, the TPLF faced increased international pressure to do right by its people. The Council on Hemispheric Affairs (CoHA) called for TPLF accountability, whereas the UN and US suspended food aid in Tigray. This was done amid alleged misappropriation of these resources during a humanitarian crisis. This was only to be expected as peace must be maintained in a sustainable manner. Although the GFDRE proposed a four-step approach to stabilising relation with Tigray and important advancements in disarmament being made, the National Election Board of Ethiopia refused the TPLF’s request to be considered as a legal political party. This threatened to derail the progress made in the Tigray region thus far. Although the

GFDRE suggested holding elections in Tigray, this has fallen in the list of their priorities until now (Abate Demissie, 2023).

A consolidation of the positive achievements of the Pretoria agreement remains complex, as the conflict has developed layers of interest and influence that lie outside of Ethiopia's borders. Eritrea forces committed grave human rights violations and war crimes in Tigray, whilst the Sudanese military regime supported the TPLF (it has been suggested that there was also engagement from Egypt through a proxy). Amidst growing concerns of other countries in the great lakes region, the GFDRE received support from regional and international actors, such as Turkey, China and the UAE (they mainly received military equipment from these three specific countries). Similarly, the United States' prominence in mediation processes was seen in their attempt to coordinate a regional mechanism alongside the AU, IGAD, UAE, Djibouti and Kenya (Abate Demissie, 2023).

The interests of international actors is another factor that is influencing the mediation processes in the East African region. Firstly, although relations between Ethiopia and Khartoum had improved, this has been halted by the war that broke out in 2023. On the other hand, Egypt (an ally of the Sudanese regime) might not be favourable to the idea of these relations improving as their interests lie in the resolution of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). If their relations were to ameliorate, this could prove to be an obstacle for future Egyptian plans. As Djibouti's ports are currently being used by landlocked Ethiopia, there is a concern from the state that conflicts and instability in the Tigray region, and Ethiopia generally, could further debilitate its economy. As Djibouti's neighbouring countries all have a prolonged history with conflict, the stability of the region is of immediate concern to the state. Similarly, Somalia's fight against Islamist insurgent groups might also be affected due to the support the state relies on (including Ethiopian troops). In Kenya, conflicts in Ethiopia can become a matter of security as Ethiopians can fly to Kenya without a visa. Although the US and the EU played a crucial role in mediation processes, it can be said that a more direct influence from East African

countries is needed to consolidate the peace in Northern Ethiopia (Abate Demissie, 2023).

Considering the state of the Tigray region currently, it does not seem as though enough progress has been made towards achieving sustainable peace. In favour of the mediation that has been undertaken in Ethiopia, the AU must be credited for initiating peace talks amongst the disputants. It can also be said that their persistence in a mutual ceasefire agreement and focus on the humanitarian crisis in the region, provided a basis for long term peace initiatives (Abebe, 2021). However, these peace initiatives have had suboptimal results thus far due to continued hostilities. Moreover, the crisis still remains dire. Not only is the Tigray region under a blockade of essential services, but there has also been a re-escalation of conflict due to the status of contested territories in the Western part of the region (Joel, 2021). Another factor that has affected the outcome of mediation efforts is the lack of a unified mediation approach. Due to the differing interests and priorities among regional and international actors, there has been a fragmented approach to mediation in the region, reducing its effectiveness (Joel, 2021). These factors highlight the prospects and obstacles that diplomatic interventions face in these conflicts. In order to achieve a positive peace in Ethiopia, a nuanced and coordinated approach will be needed. In order to meet the humanitarian and political needs of this region, continued engagement from the international community, based on sensitivity for the context of Ethiopia, will be necessary for reaching a durable resolution.

Case Study 2: Mediation in the South Sudanese Conflict

South Sudan is currently the world's youngest country, having gained its independence from Sudan only in 2011 on the 9th of July. Independence came after a long history of occupation injustice and international intervention dating as far back as the Anglo-Egyptian occupation where British rule favoured christian missionaries and the Arab North leaving the majority black south lacking in the necessary resources and infrastructures to develop solid institutions and economic systems (Peacemaker, 2002).

In 1956 Sudan obtained its independence from England. Meanwhile in 1955 the First Sudanese Civil War had broken out between the richer and more developed north and the relatively poorer south. The war went on until 1972 and the South Sudanese Liberation Army/ Movement was born. The war ended with the Addis Ababa agreement led by the emperor of Ethiopia. The agreement allowed Southern Sudan to govern as an autonomous region even though limits were imposed such as that of not being allowed to have their own military (Tefera, 2015).

Ten years of peace later the second civil war would break out. Turning out to be one of history's longest civil wars lasting almost 22 years. The reasons are grossly the same as those that brought to the first war but in the years since inequality between north and south had deepened and discussions on the imposition of Sharia law to the mostly non-muslim south had started getting heated. North Sudan wanted to retain control of the south's oil seeing as northern Sudan lies at the feet of the Sahara and resources are scarce. When the Addis Ababa agreement was infringed by the President Nimeiry attempting to take control of southern oil fields and, after pressure by northern islamic groups, declaring all of Sudan an Islamic State (Tefera, 2015).

The war started in 1983 by the SPLA/M, in 1985 a coup was mounted to rescind the decree making Sudan an Islamic State. In 1986 the new government began peace talks with the SPLA/M in Ethiopia agreeing to abolish Sharia law and convening a constitutional conference. In 1988 the Democratic Unionist Party and the SPLA/M agreed on a peace plan calling for the abolition of military pacts with Egypt and Libya, nonetheless the war worsened in lethality and the country's conditions deteriorated. In 1989, a second coup replaced the government with a military junta (UN Peacemaker, 2002).

In 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was reached in Nairobi, briefly ending hostilities. The agreement was stipulated between the Government of the Republic of Sudan and the Sudan's People's Liberation Army. It was mediated and facilitated by the government of Kenya, the African Union, the United Nations and the Intergovernmental

Authority on Development Peace Process (IGAD). Some support was also given to the IGAD peace initiative by the governments of Italy, Norway, United Kingdom and United States of America. The agreement's goals were to recognize South Sudan's sovereignty while facilitating the 6 year interim period that would occur before the public referendum was to be held in 2011. This period was intended to facilitate the shift to independence with the creation of the necessary infrastructures. An interim National Constitution and Government of South Sudan were formed (UN Peacemaker, 2002).

After independence the constitution left significant gaps in assuring power was properly managed by the governing authority. The liberties and powers granted to the president, rapidly led to a centralization of power in the governing body's hands. Kiir took advantage of this, becoming increasingly authoritarian. Ethnic divisions were exacerbated by informal and unfair justice systems often leading to ethnic discrimination within local communities. (This was depicted in 2011, as a 98.8% majority voted to secede from Sudan when the country of South Sudan was born). The economy was in a pitiful state as 20 years of civil war had brought national expenditure in arms to reach 44% of total national expenditure at its peak. Expenses in infrastructure were sorely lacking and funds from oil were syphoned into the pockets of corrupt politicians (Gebremichael, 2018).

The ruling party after independence was the Sudan's People Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M), whose head of the party was President Salva Kiir, of Dinka ethnicity. Support for the SPLM/A came from various militias and neighbouring countries. After uniting the military and political functions of the government, was quickly accused of discriminating in favour of Dinka people for the control of oil resources and government jobs. The struggle that led to the 6 year long war started when president Kiir arbitrarily removed hundreds of generals from the army, after which he accused the Vice president of attempting a coup and Machar immediately responded with violence. The uprising was met with a brutal massacre of Nuer civilians leading to tens of thousands being displaced and seeking refuge in UN encampments. This has come to be known as the Juba Nuer massacre (Center for Preventive Action, 2024).

As the conflict continued and diffused through the ranks of warring factions, president Kiir proceeded to redivide the nation's states leading to increased Dinka control of the land. The opposition, known, aptly, as the Sudan's People Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO) was born in 2013 after these internal struggles between President Salva Kiir (of Dinka ethnicity) and his deputy Riek Machar. Machar created the SPLM-IO as a result of the split and South Sudan's Civil war began. Clashes were sparse and badly organised as SPLM-IO lacked resources to properly fight government forces. The opposition's demands were mainly aimed at removing Kiir and his allies from power and removing his foreign allies from South Sudan's territory. As the need for international intervention increased, IGAD got more involved, eventually getting the conflicting sides to sign the ARCSS in August 2015. This also brought the movement to support the IGAD approach to unity so as to ensure an inclusive national dialogue. However, the objectives set by the agreement ended up being more complex than predicted, as the ceasefire failed quickly with repeated military strikes from both sides. The peace talks that would begin in 2016 after the president opened the conversation to unity, would be constantly ridiculed by the government's military attacks. fighting broke out again in 2016 following three years of unsuccessful peace talks, Machar fled the country and kept leading the movement first from the DRC and then from South Africa. Deng, his government-appointed substitute, was not accepted by the majority of the opposition (Center for Preventive Action, 2024).

The ethnic divides underlying the political struggle brought the Nuer ethnic group to support the opposition as President Kiir kept favouring people of his own ethnicity over others. The Nuer White Army Militia and the Arrow boys both supported the movement while foreign allies were neighbouring Ethiopia and Sudan.

Myriads of other factions split from and gave their support to the two main opposing groups over the years, increasing the conflict's complexity and making peace talks unsuccessful as chaos reigned. In 2017 multiple ceasefire violations were reported as a new faction was born from defecting lieutenant-General Cirillo. The IGAD led ARCSS

agreement failed in its proposed objectives and new political groups started forming from Cirillo's National Democratic Movement. The newly formed South Sudan Opposition Alliance (Cirillo) declared its seven objectives among which: freeing the country from ethnic disparity and despotism which they saw as the root of the ongoing conflict (Gebremichael, 2018).

As attention shifted to removing Machar and Kiir from power The U.N. and U.S. started discussing sanctions to be imposed and consequentially Ethiopia and Sudan among others started intensifying their mediative efforts in the hopes of reaching an agreement before the sanctions were decided upon. The president and vice president met in Addis Ababa in talks hosted by Ethiopia's prime minister Ahmed. This first round of talks did not allow an agreement to be reached while still marking a historical first face to face since 2016 between Machar and Kiir. In June 2018 the Revitalised agreement on the resolution of the conflict in South Sudan was reached. The agreement aimed to reinstate the points made by the ARCSS in the original IGAD led talks but its implementation has been constantly delayed and violence continued relentlessly.

Soon after, Sudanese President Al-Bashir hosted a second meeting with other political parties as well and the Khartoum Declaration Agreement was born calling for another permanent ceasefire and improved plans for the transitional period, a few hours later it came into effect, on the 1st of July, the ceasefire was violated and President Kiir attempted to extend his term by another two years, worsening the tensions (Tefera, 2015).

The next attempt at peace talks was made by Uganda with their president Museveni hosting. The Entebbe Proposal was formed delineating a power sharing agreement. Four vice presidents were to be nominated but the deal failed to restrict Kiir's powers and was, as many before it, rejected (UN Peacemaker, 2002).

This case study allows for a wide observation of international intervention in Eastern Africa as multiple players have been involved in differently targeted attempts at

mediation, most of which unsuccessful. From prevention to resolution, approaches were made from countries with different vested interests and international organisations alike.

The first attempts were made by the AU and the South Sudan Church before the war had even started. After 2013 IGAD stepped in with a fact-finding mission and on the 27th of December they established a team of representatives from Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya. The agreement overseen by these mediators was violated repeatedly and the mediators themselves had diverging vested interests (Sudan for example had openly demonstrated support to opposition forces) (Centre for Preventive Action, 2024).

A new team was formed with members from AU, UN, EU, Troika and China which managed to get the original ARCSS deal signed. The next year in 2016 the deal was violated once again, before a more inclusive approach began to be considered for the implementation of ARCSS. The UN's RPF force involvement hoped to create space for dialogue but has up to now resulted in catastrophic conditions for soldiers and poor organisation of ground troops. In 2017, in an attempt to revitalise the ARCSS, an AU-South Sudan court was formed to try war crimes committed during the conflict. The project was quickly hindered by disagreements on the clauses and the admission of responsibility and violence broke out once more. In 2018, the power sharing agreement was finally reached and signed between Khartoum and Kampala. With low expectations and more violations of conditions the AU and UN authorised sanctions which were widely criticised as ineffective (Center for Preventive Action, 2024).

Since then instability has been high and violations repeated. Whilst the transnational power-sharing government was only formed in 2020 after numerous disagreements over the power-sharing agreement and the authority granted to the SPLM-IG. Violent conflict has left a scarred and famished country lacking in resources and infrastructure to maintain a young population with incoming refugees. The humanitarian crisis worsened and starvation ensued. The UN mission started building large scale camps to house refugees, and as war has broken out in neighbouring Sudan once more, more

refugees are entering the country. However, in the south, Cirillo has begun a new armed insurrection (Gebremichael, 2018).

The latest attempt at mediation was by the Kenyan government in June 2024 as they hosted peace talks in Nairobi. A new peace agreement was formed with Vice President Machar calling for the old agreement to be respected as well. Opposition mediators have refused to sign until the law allowing for people to be detained without warrant is abolished. The latest intervention in Kenya is too recent to judge its effects, although official elections are set to be held this year (Gebremichael, 2018).

While the official peace declaration could be considered a potential success. The weaknesses of these international mediation initiatives reveal themselves when observing the de facto situation on the ground. The IGAD's prescriptive approach must ensure a higher level of inclusion of different parts of the conflict at the same time, it cannot properly understand and implement the changes needed community by community to be able to maintain a positive peace once the official declarations have taken place. As such, a critique of these interventions can be aimed at their ambiguity and general lack of enforcement. When the South Sudan parliament approved president Kiir's motion to extend his own term, negotiations screeched to a halt. It was at this point the UNSC imposed an arms embargo and sanctions on six individuals. IGAD and AU both criticised the move as sanctions risked further deteriorating the region's stability. It was at this point the UNSC imposed an arms embargo and sanctions on six individuals. IGAD and AU both criticised the move as sanctions risked further deteriorating the region's stability (Gebremichael, 2018).

The failures brought forth by the many attempts by third actors of finding reconciliation between SPLM-IO and SPLA/M highlight just how dangerous foreign intervention can be in destabilising local social and political hierarchies, if not approached cautiously. Consequently, Civil Society Organizations are believed to hold a potential role in peace discussions than previously realised. Many of them lamented the IGADs lack of representation of marginalised communities. The argument in favour of CSOs is built on

their presence and understanding of the territory and its weakest communities. Women in South Sudan are a majority and the quotas represented in peace talks are constantly criticised. As women take the bluntest side of the war's effects on the population and have very little voice in what will happen (Gebremichael, 2018).

VI. Evaluation of Mediation Success, Challenges and Limitations

Identification of Factors Contributing to the Successes and Failures of the Case Studies

In the Tigray region, mediation initiatives were spearheaded by the AU, with pressures coming from regional and international actors. The Pretoria Agreement was pivotal for the resolution of this conflict, as it was a first step in de-escalation and cessation of hostilities. Another successful mediation outcome has been the addressing of the humanitarian crisis that saw numerous fundamental human rights violated, in the Tigray region. In spite of this, the development of positive peace in the past couple of years has been tricky. In the Tigray region, a climate of fear has persisted. Many Tigrayans are still displaced as they feel their security is at risk due to the continued presence of Eritrean forces, and amid sustained violence in neighbouring Oromia and Amhara regions (Plaut & Seifu, 2024). Other issues that have arisen relate to the logistical and political aspects of humanitarian access as further efforts must be made to improve the lives of the affected populations. Finally, there remains a need for increased accountability and transparency regarding the crimes that were committed. In order to promote positive peace, the grievances caused by the atrocities committed must be confronted. However, the Ethiopian government has only shown inaction in this regard, whilst geopolitical dynamics make it unlikely that international mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) will intervene (Wyss & Ratner, 2023).

In the South Sudanese Civil War, a broader array of actors intervened such as the IGAD, the AU, and the UN. Most notably, the R-ARCSS was signed in 2018 albeit success has been fairly limited. Crucial outcomes of the mediation process in South Sudan include the transitional government formation, including representatives from disputing parties; and desperately needed political reforms, such as the drafting of a new constitution in preparation of elections. Other outcomes include security arrangements for the integration of armed groups into the national army, although this process has had setbacks. Finally, ameliorations to the humanitarian crisis have been disrupted continuously by the persistence of violence and instability, similarly to the Tigray situation (Saddam, 2021).

When comparing the conflicts examined in the case studies in this paper, there are similarities that can be found. In terms of scope and implementation, both mediation processes were successful at finding ceasefire agreements that included disarmament and reintegration of fighters. In the sets of agreements that were signed, priority was given to addressing respective humanitarian crises and the protection of civilians. This includes the provision of supplies. Despite this, it might be overly optimistic to say that the root causes of these conflicts are being addressed effectively as of right now, especially in the Tigray region where there has been a lack of accountability. In the long-term this could be detrimental for reconciliation, especially as victims continue to face injustices. In South Sudan the mediation efforts included a more robust and comprehensive framework addressing political and humanitarian security, even though these efforts are yet to be implemented to their potential. In both cases, the addressing of respective humanitarian crises has been slow.

In order to reach long-term positive peace, it is therefore crucial for mediation processes to address certain issues such as the development of inclusive political dialogue and comprehensive accountability measures. In both regions, inclusive political processes must be highlighted, in the face of ethnic conflict. Representation is a democratic way of addressing grievances that preceded and caused these conflicts. Developing effective accountability mechanisms to ensure that justice and reconciliation are reached, is another credible mediation tactic to expel tensions. This is also crucial for preventing future conflicts from arising. Furthermore, a focus on economic recovery, infrastructure development and strengthening of institutions must be placed in both cases. Both war-torn communities must be reconstructed to reduce poverty-driven tensions that could escalate. Ultimately, the mediators must be recognised and international actors must be credited for their efforts, however, both cases show there is still a long way to sustainable peace for both regions.

The implications and the lessons learned from the Tigray War and the South Sudanese Civil War can be taken by the rest of East Africa. Not only does it directly affect many

countries in the region as they are neighbours, but it could also be applied to aspects of their context. Firstly, both of these conflicts have highlighted the necessity for a holistic approach to peacebuilding. Comprehensive peace agreements can lead to more sustainable peace, as they are better tailored to deal with the deeply entrenched political, social and economic factors relating to conflict (Plaut & Seifu, 2024). Merely addressing the cessation of hostilities cannot be enough, despite it always being the first step in mediation efforts (Saddam, 2021). Despite the relative successes of the R-ARCSS, it also portrayed the need for a framework that has provisions regarding transitional justice, integration into the army and political reforms (Wyss & Ratner, 2024). Mediation efforts in East Africa should therefore include inclusive socio-political frameworks with clearly organised processes for post-conflict reconstruction. Since states have gained their independence from colonial powers, ethnic tensions have played a significant role in East African history. As such, the inclusion of all major stakeholders, must include representatives in government (Saddam, 2021). This can also be achieved through community engagement and grassroots participation. The engagement and aspiration of local actors is crucial for addressing tensions and conflicts, as was seen by the perception of the Tigray peace agreement (elite pact) (Wyss & Ratner, 2024).

Perhaps even more difficult, is the amelioration of coordination that is needed amongst regional and international actors. Although South Sudan's peace process was fairly diversified in terms of support, the Tigray War did not garner the same international support (Wyss & Ratner, 2024). Future mediation initiatives should leverage the strength of regional and international collaboration, in order to reach more inclusive and comprehensive mediation processes. In relation to this, the need for the strengthening of regional institutions such as the AU and IGAD is highlighted. Their role in East African mediation cannot be understated and will be vital for the leveraging of international support, but also generally for the effectiveness and timeliness of future efforts in mediation (Saddam, 2021). Mediation processes should also be centred in providing justice for victims through holding assailants accountable (Plaut & Seifu, 2024). Furthermore, the implementation and monitoring of peace agreements must also

be worked on, as localised violence in South Sudan and Tigray showed the need for this (Saddam, 2021). Although peace agreements demonstrate an intention to work towards peace, the cessation of hostilities must be sustained for these agreements to hold significant value. As such, it can be said that the experiences from the Tigray War and the South Sudanese Civil War provide valuable insights for the future mediation efforts of the great lakes region.

Challenges and Limitations

Various obstacles can hinder the chances of success of mediation in East African conflicts. One prominent example is resistance from disputants, as this can essentially halt mediation in its tracks. Some of these have already been highlighted throughout this paper, such as lack of trust in IGAD as mediators in Sudan or internal factionalism in Somalia in the wake of the UN bombing. Another reason that can engender resistance is linked to economic interests of leaders and elite groups. Conflicts that revolve around resource competition can remain ongoing due to who is profiting from it. Other obstacles that have been discussed are cultural and ethnic tensions, and regional and global geopolitics, with the latter contributing to external interventions of conflicts. Examples of this include historical tensions between states like Ethiopia and Somalia. In the context of international intervention in the great lakes region, there are several examples of global powers aggravating conflicts (Clapham, 2001).

Another challenge that mediators face is in relation to spoilers. Spoilers or spoiling can be defined as “groups and tactics that actively seek to hinder, delay, or undermine conflict settlement through a variety of means and for a variety of motives...”

Understanding the sources, impact and nature of ‘spoiling’ is essential for peacebuilding and for the success of the new UN Peacebuilding Commission” (Newman, 2006). Some papers follow a stricter definition that focuses on spoiling as the violent obstruction of mediation by disputants in a given conflict. However, for the purposes of having a broader understanding of East Africa and the challenges mediators face, this concept will be interpreted under looser terms.

Spoiler strategies can have the objective of interfering with mediation efforts, perpetuating cycles of instability and violence due to vested interests. Strategies that can be employed can include violence, manipulation of ethnic tensions, spread of propaganda and misinformation, forming parallel institutions, exploiting external support, economic sabotage, targeting peacekeepers and aid workers, political manoeuvring

Strategies used by spoilers can include violence and intimidation to diffuse fear into a community. This can range from individual attacks to terrorism (Nyakyi, 1998). As has been seen in East Africa with colonial policies, another strategy would be to accentuate or exploit ethnic or religious divides. Another way to influence the sentiments of a community in hindrance of international mediation can be through propaganda and misinformation. This can include the spread of inflammatory rhetorics and false accusations (Touval, 1994). A more direct manner of spoiling can be stalling or walking out of negotiations. This stalling can also consist of having unreasonable demands (Romano, 1998). Burundi saw all three of the aforementioned spoiler strategies used in its crisis as opponents were targeted by propaganda. Moreover, the Imbonerakure, a youth wing dedicated to the National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), has been involved in violence and human rights abuses to consolidate power (Human Rights Watch, 2023). In South Sudan, the undermining of peace processes has been prevalent, as the government and the opposition forces as they consistently failed to disarm (Jok, 2015). In Somalia, for example, the forming of parallel institutions or armed groups was a spoiling strategy that was employed. This can harm peace processes as these alternative governance structures create instability. In the case of Somalia, this can hinder the unification of a state, as groups like Al-Shabaab continue to control territories (Menkhaus, 2004). Other spoiler strategies include economic sabotage, targeting peacekeepers, political manoeuvring and exploiting external support.

When spoilers succeed, the results can be extremely dangerous. This was seen in 1994 in the Rwandan genocide where over 800,000 Rwandans died in less than three months. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate strategies to counter these spoilers.

Stedman (2000) offered three strategies: inducement, socialisation, and coercion. Inducement can be defined as the integration of spoilers to mediation processes or agreements by conceding to their demands. Although this can be a very diplomatic way of compromising with spoilers and addressing their possible fears or sentiments of injustice, it must be applied appropriately as it can be abused or overused. Secondly, socialisation consists of setting behavioural norms for negotiations. This can be reinforced by a carrot-and-stick method or through the persuasion of normative values. This implementation targets both at elite groups, and at a grassroots level as the objective is to promote better governance practices such as transparency. Thirdly, the last countering strategy is coercing spoilers. Actions that align with this strategy include threatening punishment, or undermining their ability to disrupt peace processes. Finally, Stedman notes that it is pivotal to match each countering strategy to the type of spoiler that has presented itself.

Another factor that was considered in this paper is in relation to the data limitations and possible gaps in the literature regarding conflict. In relation to the Tigray War, the first limitation comes from limited access to conflict zones. As researchers have difficulty entering the Tigray region, this has led to the unavailability of on-the-ground reports and reliable data that could depict a more realistic picture of the full extent of atrocities, displacements, and the humanitarian crisis (Wyss & Ratner, 2021). This is also affected by the fact that statistics regarding displaced persons in a crisis are always difficult to measure or obtain (Saddam, 2021). In relation to the challenges Ethiopia has had with accountability and transparency, a limitation arises from the government control of information. This means that available information may be biased or incomplete.

In Sudan, the data regarding the displacements in the population are difficult to obtain, similarly to the Tigrayan context. However, there are also other factors that have influenced these limitations and gaps. Firstly, in Sudan there is continued insecurity due to ongoing violence. This makes gathering valuable and accurate data on the conflict's impacts difficult for researchers, NGOs and humanitarian agencies. Secondly, the literature regarding this civil war is commonly fragmented due to differing organisations

focusing on specific parts of the conflict. This has led to reports with inconsistencies, making understanding of the conflict difficult. Finally, there is a lack of longitudinal studies examining the long-term impacts of the civil war on South Sudan's social, economic, and political fabric. Instead, studies generally focus on the immediate humanitarian need for aid and the short-term solutions to the conflict (Saddam, 2021). Other factors that have had a significant impact on the literature are underrepresentation of local perspectives, gender-specific impacts, economic dimensions and mental health impacts (Plaut & Seifu, 2024).

In order to conduct conflict research responsibly, the following ethical considerations were made: cultural sensitivity, transparency, and respect for local knowledge and expertise. When writing about conflicts, it is important to respect cultural sensitivity in order to enhance the quality of one's work. This includes being sensitive to traditions and social norms (Smith, 2024). Understanding cultural context is also crucial when approaching conflicts and their deeply-embedded causes from an interpretivist perspective. This also involves the inclusion of local researchers and local media to diversify the content of this research paper. This allows for a more open-minded approach to the research question, which is known to be an essential component of mediation. Essentially, East African conflicts will not be resolved unless an understanding of their perspectives is cultivated, which is why this has been of great importance for this paper as well.

VIII. Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis regarding the key factors influencing mediation efforts has shown there is still much work to be done in East Africa. In South Sudan and in Tigray, the successes of the R-ARCSS and the Pretoria Agreement have been undermined by breaches and continued instability. These lessons taken from this paper highlight the significance of making positive peace, an absolute priority in Africa. When considering the recommendations that could be made for policymakers, practitioners and scholars, there are a few that could be made. Academically, it is crucial that more thorough longitudinal research on the impacts of mediation processes in East Africa, and the effects this has on the socio-political development in societies post-conflict. For policymakers, the three relevant recommendations revolve around the strengthening of accountability mechanisms, enhancing inclusivity and improving the implementation and monitoring of peace agreements.

Corruption has been a longstanding issue in Africa. The accountability and transparency problems that are encountered as part of this, intersect with those in conflicts. Unfortunately, many East African countries have weak institutions that are not equipped to provide more transparent frameworks for their countries to operate by. When this issue is paired with poverty and a high level of dependence on natural resources, this creates an environment that is ripe for conflict. Regardless of this, the atrocities and dehumanisation against countless lives must be addressed if East African leaders and governments are to foster trust among their people. As such, mediation processes must focus on holding the perpetrators of violence accountable by strengthening the mechanisms involved, such as the International Criminal Court. Any further mediation approach must also be centred on inclusivity if East African identity politics are ever to be confronted. The legacies left behind by colonialism are indubitable, but the unity of ethnically diverse people must be cultivated through grassroot projects and local empowerment. This can also include implementing East African pre-colonial mediation structures, or by giving a louder voice to other marginalised groups in the community such as women. The ethnic diversity in Africa does not need to impede Africa by any means. Instead, this diversity can be used in the process of stable development.

Elbadawi suggests that this can happen positively as he said, “these processes can be peaceful if ethnic groups feel adequately represented by their national political institutions and if the economy provides opportunity for productive activity” (Elbadawi, 2002). Finally, as was critically seen in the two case studies, peace agreements must be monitored more efficiently. It is clear that this is an extremely difficult task, especially when regional actors are involved in conflict, but it is pivotal for conflict resolution in East Africa. As part of a strengthening of institutions in Africa, improved mechanisms for promoting the coordination of other East African states in solving conflict must be looked for. This would include the amelioration of regional institutions like the AU as well, as this could also enhance the relations amongst member states. As such, conflict resolution in the Great Lakes region will remain complex and challenging for the foreseeable future. The increased tensions in the region have had effects on its general stability, making insights into this field more important now, than ever. Ultimately, East Africa will require a multifaceted approach and time, if positive peace is to be reached.

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