Conflict Studies Quarterly

Issue 50, January 2025

Contents

Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: Why Mediation Failed?

Christian Radu CHEREJI

Abstract: The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project is a cornerstone of Ethiopia's economic development and energy security ambitions, and Africa's largest hydroelectric project. It aims to generate significant domestic and export electricity, playing a vital role in Ethiopia's growth strategy. However, this initiative has escalated tensions with downstream nations, particularly Egypt and Sudan, which are concerned about the dam's potential impacts on their water supplies and agricultural systems. The conflict is rooted in deep-seated issues related to water rights and the equitable distribution of the Nile's resources, with Egypt perceiving the GERD as a threat to its historical entitlements established by colonial-era agreements.

Efforts to mediate the GERD dispute have involved various regional and international actors, including the African Union, the United States, and the European Union, but have often resulted in limited progress and inconclusive outcomes. Factors contributing to the challenges in mediation include a lack of trust among the involved parties, differing national priorities, and the absence of a comprehensive framework to address the complex interdependencies within the Nile Basin. This paper seeks to analyze the dispute management process surrounding the GERD, exploring the historical context, national interests, and negotiation challenges. By doing so, it aims to provide insights into the dynamics of the conflict and propose recommendations for future mediation efforts that prioritize inclusive dialogue, trust-building, and sustainable water management practices among all stakeholders.

Keywords: Mediation, negotiation, Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan, African Union, United States, conflict management, dispute resolution.

Christian Radu CHEREJI

Conflict Studies Center,
Babeș-Bolyai University
E-mail: chereji@fspac.ro

I. Background

Ethiopia, with a rapidly growing population and economy, faces significant energy demands. The country experiences frequent power shortages and relies heavily on hydropower for electricity generation. The GERD was conceived as a solution to address these energy needs and reduce dependence on imported electricity.

Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa, with a population exceeding 126 million people as of recent estimates (86.76 million in 2009, 21.74 million in 1974, World Bank estimates). The population has been growing rapidly, with a high fertility rate and a large youth demographic. The annual population growth rate is approximately 2.5%, contributing to the country's youthful population profile. Urbanization in Ethiopia has been increasing steadily, driven by rural-urban migration and natural population growth. Major cities like Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, and regional capitals are experiencing significant growth and transformation.

Ethiopia is also known for its ethnic diversity, with over 80 ethnic groups and languages spoken across the country. The Oromo, Amhara, and Tigrayans are among the largest ethnic groups, each with distinct cultural traditions and languages.

Ethiopia's economy is one of the fastest-growing in Africa, with an average annual GDP growth rate exceeding 8% over the past decade, although coming up from a very low base (925 USD per capita in 2021). The GDP composition is diverse, with agriculture, manufacturing, and services sectors contributing to economic output. Agriculture remains the most significant sector, employing a large portion of the population and contributing to both food security and export earnings. Successive governments have prioritized industrialization and infrastructure development as key pillars of their economic strategy, with modest results, due mainly to poor infrastructure, loss of access to the sea because of the Eritrean secession, and very limited electric power production.

The present government has actively pursued foreign direct investment in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and energy. Investments have been supported by incentives and reforms aimed at improving the business climate and facilitating private sector growth (African Development Bank Country Focus Report, 2024).

But, despite economic progress, Ethiopia faces challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and regional disparities in development. Ethnic conflicts, like the recent war in Tigray and local strife in Oromo and Amhara, are destabilizing the country and raising the stakes for the federal government in its race for development and prosperity. And to prove Sir Paul Collier right, Ethiopian development is severely hampered by being in a bad neighborhood, as with the catastrophic Sudan civil war and the equally disastrous but far more persistent Somali civil war. Paul Collier argued that landlocked countries facing underdeveloped neighboring economies encounter significant barriers to accessing global economic growth. Unlike coastal nations, which can engage directly in international trade, landlocked countries are often reliant on economic exchanges with their neighbors. Consequently, if

these neighbors suffer from poor infrastructure and limited market capacity, landlocked nations face severe constraints in expanding their economic reach and participating in global trade networks. Ethiopia is a good illustration of his arguments (Collier, 2007).

Beyond all these, probably nothing impedes Ethiopia's development more than its lack of infrastructure and access to reliable electric power, a case not quite rare in Africa. Ethiopia's energy sector has historically relied on hydropower, which accounts for the majority of electricity generation. The country has significant hydropower potential, but it remained marginally tapped until recently. Electricity demand has been increasing rapidly due to economic growth, urbanization, and electrification efforts in rural areas. In addition to hydropower, Ethiopia has also undeveloped potential in wind, solar, and geothermal energy. The government investments in renewable energy to diversify the energy mix, enhance energy security, and reduce dependence on imported fuels, have been met with limited success. For the degree of industrial development that Ethiopia needs to overcome poverty, the energy offered by wind or sun is not enough, for obvious reasons.

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is a flagship project aimed at enhancing Ethiopia's electricity generation capacity and reducing reliance on imported electricity. It is expected to play a crucial role in meeting domestic energy demand and supporting regional energy integration (Akamo, 2022).

Ethiopia's demographic, economic, and energetic backgrounds are shaped by its large and growing population, rapid economic growth, and strategic focus on energy development. While the country faces challenges in poverty alleviation and infrastructure development, its dynamic economic policies and investments in renewable energy underscore its commitment to sustainable development and inclusive growth.

II. The Hydro Project

Construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) commenced on April 2, 2011, when Ethiopia's then-Prime Minister Meles Zenawi laid the foundation stone. However, the origins of the project date back to a topographical survey conducted by the US Bureau of Reclamation between 1956 and 1964, during which the current location was identified as suitable for a major hydropower dam. Despite this early recognition, the project was shelved after the 1974 coup d'état in Ethiopia. It was only decades later, in 2009, that the Ethiopian government revived the initiative, reflecting a renewed national commitment to harnessing the Nile's resources for development.

In 2010, the dam's design was finalized by James Kelston, and shortly thereafter, the Ethiopian government awarded the construction contract to the Italian company Salini Impregilo—now known as WeBuild—through a direct procurement process, bypassing a public tender. With an estimated construction cost of $4.8 billion, the GERD is designed to generate 6.245 GW of electricity, making it the largest hydropower project in Africa. Remarkably, the project is entirely financed domestically, with funding primarily sourced

from the Ethiopian government and its citizens through the sale of government bonds and securities. This grassroots financial strategy underscores the dam's significance as a symbol of national pride and a critical component of Ethiopia's broader development strategy.

Feasibility studies for GERD began in the mid-2000s to assess the technical, economic, and environmental viability of constructing a large-scale dam on the Blue Nile River. These studies evaluated various aspects such as hydrology, geology, socio-economic impacts, and potential electricity generation capacity.

The decision to move forward with GERD was driven by strong political commitment from successive Ethiopian governments. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi played a pivotal role in advocating for the dam as a transformative project for national development. The project received strong support in Ethiopia, reflecting broad consensus on the strategic importance of energy independence and infrastructure development.

The technical design of GERD as a roller-compacted concrete (RCC) gravity dam was chosen for its suitability to the local geology and construction requirements. RCC dams offer advantages in terms of speed of construction, durability, and cost-effectiveness compared to conventional concrete dams.

The Ethiopian government officially announced the GERD project on April 2, 2011. The announcement marked a significant milestone in Ethiopia's quest for energy security and economic development. The announcement included details about the dam's location on the Blue Nile River near the Ethiopia-Sudan border and outlined its potential benefits in terms of electricity generation and regional integration.

Construction of GERD commenced shortly after the project's announcement, symbolizing Ethiopia's determination to move forward with its ambitious plans. The primary contractor for the dam construction was the Italian company Salini Impregilo (now part of the Salini Impregilo Group).

The dam is designed as a roller-compacted concrete (RCC) gravity dam, standing at approximately 145 meters tall with a crest length of 1,800 meters. Its reservoir, Lake Nasser, has a total capacity of 74 billion cubic meters. GERD is a roller-compacted concrete (RCC) gravity dam. RCC dams are constructed using a special mix of concrete that is compacted using vibratory rollers, which allows for rapid construction and cost-effectiveness compared to traditional concrete dams.

GERD is designed to have an installed capacity of over 6,000 megawatts (MW) of electricity generation. This capacity is expected to make it one of the largest hydroelectric power stations in Africa and significantly contribute to Ethiopia's energy needs. The dam will house multiple turbine-generator units, likely equipped with Francis turbines. Francis turbines are commonly used in medium to large-scale hydropower projects and are well-suited for the flow characteristics of the Blue Nile. The annual electricity generation potential of GERD is estimated to be around 15,000 gigawatt-hours (GWh) per year, depending on water availability and operational factors.

Technical characteristics of GERD
Height: Approximately 145 meters (475 feet).
Crest Length: 1,800 meters (5,906 feet).
Base Width: The base width is not typically specified in public documents, but it is designed to support the massive structure and the weight of the reservoir behind it.
Capacity: The reservoir has a total capacity of about 74 billion cubic meters (BCM) of water.
Surface Area: The surface area of the reservoir varies based on the water level and covers a large area upstream of the dam.

As we said, construction of GERD began in April 2011, with the primary contractor being the Italian construction company Salini Impregilo (now part of the Salini Impregilo Group). The construction of GERD has involved various phases, including preparatory works, foundation excavation, RCC placement for the dam structure, and ongoing construction of associated infrastructure such as spillways and powerhouse facilities. The timeline for completion and commissioning has been subject to delays and adjustments due to various technical, financial, and geopolitical factors.

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) represents a monumental engineering effort aimed at harnessing the hydropower potential of the Blue Nile River. Its technical design as an RCC gravity dam, coupled with a large reservoir and substantial power generation capacity, positions it as a critical infrastructure project for Ethiopia's energy security and economic development. The initiation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) represented a strategic decision by Ethiopia to harness its renewable energy potential and drive socio-economic development. The project's inception involved rigorous planning, feasibility studies, political commitment, and international engagement to navigate technical, financial, and diplomatic challenges. While GERD has faced criticism and regional tensions, its initiation underscored Ethiopia's aspirations for energy sovereignty and economic transformation through sustainable development.

However, the dam's construction and operation continue to be a source of regional tensions and complex negotiations with downstream countries, particularly Egypt and Sudan, highlighting the challenges of managing shared water resources in the Nile Basin.

III. The warring factions

The Egyptian position regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is shaped by its historical dependency on the Nile River for water, agriculture, and national development. Egypt is heavily reliant on the Nile River for nearly all of its freshwater needs. The Nile provides over 90% of Egypt's water supply, crucial for irrigation, drinking water, industry, and hydroelectric power generation. Historical agreements, such as the 1929 and 1959 treaties (between Egypt and Great Britain, and later Sudan), allocated a significant

portion of the Nile's water to Egypt, granting it a veto right over upstream projects that could affect its water security.

Egypt views the GERD as a potential threat to its water security. The dam's construction and operation could reduce the downstream flow of the Nile during periods of filling and drought, impacting agriculture, drinking water supply, and electricity generation in Egypt. Egyptian officials and experts have expressed concerns about the amount of water that will reach Egypt during critical times, such as extended droughts or periods of low rainfall.

Egypt has engaged in various rounds of negotiations with Ethiopia and Sudan to address its concerns about GERD. These negotiations have been mediated by international parties, including the African Union and the United States. Key issues in negotiations include the filling and operation of the dam, mechanisms for drought management, and dispute resolution mechanisms in case of disagreements. Egypt argues that it has historical and legal rights to the Nile's waters based on treaties and agreements signed in the colonial and post-colonial periods. These agreements have traditionally given Egypt a dominant position in Nile water allocation.

There are also concerns in Egypt about the potential environmental and economic impacts of GERD. Changes in water flow and sediment transport downstream could affect agricultural productivity, biodiversity, and the economy dependent on the Nile's ecosystem services.

Egypt has pursued diplomatic efforts to address its concerns diplomatically and legally. This includes participating in negotiations, proposing technical solutions, and seeking international support for its position. While Egypt has primarily pursued diplomatic and legal avenues, there have been occasional references to the potential for using force should the GERD issue escalate.

Sudan's position regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is influenced by its geographical location between Ethiopia and Egypt, as well as its interests in water resources, agriculture, and hydroelectric power. Like Egypt, Sudan has historically benefited from agreements that allocated a significant portion of the Nile's waters to downstream countries, particularly through the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement between Egypt and Sudan. This agreement established specific allocations for each country, based on historical usage and anticipated future needs, and has influenced Sudan's perspective on water rights and allocations. Sudan recognizes the potential benefits of GERD in terms of electricity generation and regional energy cooperation. The dam's location upstream could provide opportunities for Sudan to enhance its own hydroelectric capacity and potentially benefit from stabilized water flows.

Sudan is concerned about the potential impacts of GERD on the flow of the Blue Nile downstream into Sudanese territory. Changes in water flow patterns could affect irrigation practices, agricultural productivity, and the management of existing dams and water infrastructure in Sudan. Sudan seeks assurances regarding the filling and operation of the

GERD reservoir. The timing and volume of water releases during the filling stages could affect Sudan's water supply, especially during periods of drought or low rainfall. Sudan is also concerned about the environmental and social impacts of GERD, particularly downstream effects on sediment transport, riverine ecosystems, and communities reliant on the Blue Nile for livelihoods and water resources.

Despite concerns, Sudan recognizes the potential benefits of GERD, including increased regional energy integration and potential opportunities for water management and flood control through coordinated reservoir operations. Sudan has actively participated in negotiations mediated by international parties, including the African Union, the United States, and the European Union. These negotiations aim to address Sudan's concerns while promoting cooperation and mutual benefit among riparian states.

Sudan's position on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) reflects its dual role as a downstream country concerned about water security and as a potential beneficiary of increased hydroelectric capacity and regional energy cooperation. While Sudan acknowledges the challenges and uncertainties posed by GERD, it also seeks to leverage the opportunities for enhanced regional cooperation and sustainable development in the Nile Basin. Finding a balanced and mutually beneficial agreement remains a critical objective for Sudan in ongoing negotiations with Ethiopia and Egypt.

Ethiopia's position on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is shaped by its strategic goals for economic development, energy security, and sovereignty over its water resources. Ethiopia views the construction of GERD as a sovereign right to utilize its natural resources for national development. It argues that it has the right to develop the Blue Nile for hydroelectric power generation, similar to how downstream countries have developed their resources. Ethiopia asserts that GERD will not significantly impact downstream water flow or violate international water law principles, including the principle of equitable and reasonable utilization.

Ethiopia's legal justification for constructing the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) rests upon the principles established in international law and its historical context. Central to Ethiopia's argument is the assertion that the 1902, 1929, and 1959 Nile water agreements, which Egypt and Sudan regard as binding legal frameworks, do not apply to Ethiopia. These treaties were signed during the colonial era without Ethiopian consent or participation and were, therefore, not in its national interest. This exclusion represents a historical imbalance that undermines the principles of equitable and reasonable utilization of shared water resources.

Ethiopia further invokes Article 34 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which clearly states that a treaty does not impose obligations or confer rights upon third parties without their consent. As Ethiopia was never a signatory to these colonial-era agreements, nor a colonial subject, it is not legally bound by their provisions. Additionally, the Nyerere Doctrine on state succession to colonial treaties reinforces this position, asserting that newly independent states are not automatically subject to agreements imposed during

colonial rule (Makonnen, 1984). Thus, from Ethiopia's perspective, the 2010 Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA), signed by six of the ten Nile Basin countries, provides a more equitable and contemporary legal foundation for governing the shared use of the Nile's resources, effectively superseding outdated colonial-era treaties (Caruso, 2022).

Ethiopia has engaged in negotiations with downstream countries, particularly Egypt and Sudan, to address concerns about GERD's potential impacts on water flow and downstream water security.

Ethiopia views GERD as a catalyst for regional energy integration and cooperation. It has proposed frameworks for sharing electricity generated from GERD with neighboring countries, promoting energy trade, and fostering regional stability and development. Ethiopia emphasized its commitment to resolving disputes over GERD through peaceful negotiation and dialogue. It has welcomed international mediation and facilitation efforts to reach a mutually acceptable agreement with Egypt and Sudan, but it sought to keep the resolution of the contending issues a matter of tri-lateral negotiations rather than a subject of international meddling.

IV. Key Points of Conflict

As we already pointed out, the longstanding dam dispute in the Nile Basin is intricately linked to the enduring consequences of British colonialism, which has left a detrimental legacy not only in Egypt but also across numerous regions that once comprised the British Empire. This legacy is evident in various contexts, including Palestine, Nigeria, and the India-Pakistan-Bangladesh dynamic, reflecting a pattern of governance and resource allocation that favored colonial interests at the expense of local populations (Miles, 2014).

In 1929, the British government, representing its colonies—Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika (present-day Tanzania), and Sudan—entered into a treaty with the Egyptian government that granted Egypt veto power over any upstream projects that could potentially impact the flow of the Nile River. This arrangement effectively marginalized the interests of the other Nile riparian states, sidelining their voices and needs.

The treaty was subsequently renewed in 1959 between Egypt and Sudan following their respective independence. In this revised agreement, Egypt was allocated 55.5 billion cubic meters of Nile water annually, accounting for approximately 75% of the total, while Sudan received 18.5 billion cubic meters, or 25%. Crucially, this treaty reaffirmed Egypt's veto power over upstream projects, perpetuating a framework of exclusion for the other Nile Basin countries.

This 1959 treaty now underpins Egypt's official stance in the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute with Ethiopia. Egyptian negotiators frequently cite this historical agreement, asserting that Ethiopia's dam project violates established international norms.

Furthermore, there exists a prevailing belief among many Egyptians that they possess an inherent right to the Nile's waters, grounded in a historical monopoly recognized since antiquity. This perception has been reinforced by a long-standing cultural narrative that positions Egypt as the rightful custodian of the river, complicating negotiations and fostering tensions in the contemporary discourse surrounding Nile water rights. The current impasse in the trilateral negotiations regarding the Nile River exemplifies the unrealistic and untenable vision that has led Egypt's authoritarian government to adopt an extreme position, which is increasingly unacceptable to Ethiopia and other riparian countries. This rigidity undermines efforts to establish a cooperative framework for the equitable use of the Nile's waters. The repeated threats by Egypt's dictator, Abdel Fatah el-Sisi to use force to stop the building of the dam weren't helpful, too.

In response to the urgent need for a fair and sustainable resolution to the Nile dispute, Ethiopia and the other riparian states initiated the development of the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) between 1997 and 2010. This agreement represented a significant step toward multilateral negotiations involving all nine Nile Basin countries—Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, as well as Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan. While the CFA was ultimately signed by all nine nations, Egypt and Sudan refused to ratify the agreement, citing fundamental disagreements regarding specific provisions (Caruso, 2022).

The contentious article at the heart of this dispute stipulates that riparian countries must refrain from significantly affecting the security of the waters of any other signatory state. In contrast, Egypt and Sudan sought to modify this language to emphasize a commitment not to adversely affect the security of the waters, the use, and the existing rights of any signatory state. This proposed alteration effectively sought to replicate the provisions of the 1959 treaty within the CFA framework, thereby reinforcing the status quo that has historically favored Egypt and Sudan while effectively blocking any upstream projects initiated by Ethiopia and other nations.

In this context, Egypt and Sudan have positioned themselves as the exclusive users of the Nile's waters, a stance that inherently disregards the legitimate rights and interests of other riparian states. Their insistence on altering the CFA's provisions reflects a desire not only to maintain their historical dominance but also to seek formal recognition of their unilateral claims over the river's resources. Such an approach poses significant challenges to the establishment of a cooperative and equitable framework for Nile water management, ultimately jeopardizing the prospects for sustainable peace and development in the region.

Thus, the failure to ratify the CFA and the insistence on preserving the status quo are indicative of a broader power struggle that continues to shape the dynamics of the Nile Basin negotiations. Without a paradigm shift towards genuine cooperation and recognition of the shared rights of all riparian states, the path to a fair resolution remains fraught with tension and conflict.

The roots of the Nile dispute are deeply intertwined with colonial histories that have shaped the political and social landscapes of the involved nations. The lack of inclusivity in historical treaties continues to influence present-day conflicts, highlighting the critical need for a comprehensive approach that considers the rights and needs of all Nile Basin states.

V. Major dispute areas and official positions of the contending countries

Water Rights and Allocation

Egypt relies heavily on the Nile River for its water supply, with over 90% of its freshwater needs being met by the Nile. Historically, Egypt has had a dominant position over the Nile waters, supported by colonial-era treaties (1929 and 1959 agreements) that granted it the lion's share of the river's flow. Egypt fears that the filling and operation of the GERD will significantly reduce the downstream flow of the Nile, affecting its water security, agriculture, and overall economy.

Sudan, located between Ethiopia and Egypt, also relies on the Nile for irrigation and hydroelectric power. While Sudan stands to benefit from the regulated flow and potential electricity from the GERD, it also worries about the effects on its own dams and water infrastructure. Sudan's position has been somewhat ambivalent, at times aligning with Egypt and at other times showing support for the GERD.

Ethiopia's Development Goals

Ethiopia views the GERD as a vital project for its economic development and energy security. The dam is expected to generate over 6,000 megawatts of electricity, which would significantly boost Ethiopia's power supply and support its aspirations for industrialization and economic growth. Ethiopia argues that the dam will not only benefit its economy but also provide electricity to neighboring countries, fostering regional cooperation.

Regional Power Dynamics

The construction and operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) have significantly reshaped regional power dynamics within the Nile Basin, particularly challenging Egypt's historical dominance over the river's resources. For decades, Egypt's geopolitical influence was anchored in its control over the Nile, enshrined in colonial-era treaties that allocated the majority of the river's waters to Egypt and Sudan. Ethiopia's ambitious project marks a strategic shift, asserting its right to harness the Blue Nile for economic development and energy generation. This reflects a broader realignment in regional influence, where upstream countries, led by Ethiopia, are seeking equitable access

to the Nile's resources. Consequently, the GERD symbolizes not only Ethiopia's national aspirations but also a growing movement among African nations to challenge historically imbalanced agreements and assert sovereignty over their natural resources.

The evolving power dynamics around the GERD also resonate beyond the Nile Basin, drawing the attention of regional and global powers. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates have expressed varying degrees of support or concern, reflecting their strategic interests in the region. This international dimension adds complexity to the negotiations, as the Nile dispute intersects with broader geopolitical rivalries in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East. The GERD, therefore, stands as a microcosm of the shifting balance of power in Africa, where long-standing assumptions about control and access to vital resources are being fundamentally reassessed in light of emerging economic and political realities.

Environmental and Technical Concerns

The construction and operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) have raised significant environmental and technical concerns, particularly regarding its potential impact on the Nile's natural flow and sediment transport. The Nile River, which supports over 280 million people across 11 countries, is a vital resource for agriculture, fisheries, and livelihoods. Any disruption to its flow could have cascading ecological and socio-economic effects downstream, especially in Egypt and Sudan, which depend heavily on the river for irrigation and drinking water. Sediment transport, in particular, is crucial for maintaining soil fertility in the Nile Delta, where nutrient-rich silt deposits replenish agricultural lands. However, the GERD's reservoir, with a capacity of approximately 74 billion cubic meters, is expected to trap a significant portion of this sediment, potentially reducing its downstream flow by up to 50% and impacting the delta's long-term productivity.

The filling process of the dam's reservoir has been a focal point of contention, as it directly affects water availability in downstream countries. Ethiopia has pursued a phased filling strategy, which began in 2020 and continued with the fourth filling completed in 2023. This process, conducted during the rainy season to maximize inflow, has been criticized by Egypt and Sudan for its perceived lack of coordination and transparency. They argue that an unregulated filling process could exacerbate drought conditions and disrupt water supplies. According to Egyptian authorities, a rapid or uncoordinated filling could reduce the water reaching Egypt by up to 25% during drought years, severely impacting its agricultural sector, which accounts for 11.3% of the country's GDP and employs around 24% of its workforce.

Moreover, technical concerns extend beyond water flow and sediment transport. The potential for seismic activity in the region, which could compromise the dam's structural integrity, is also a point of debate. The Blue Nile basin is located in a seismically active zone, and some experts have warned that a large reservoir could induce seismic activity

or exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. These environmental and technical challenges underscore the importance of comprehensive impact assessments and coordinated management strategies. While Ethiopia maintains that the dam will have minimal adverse effects and emphasizes its potential to mitigate flood risks and enhance regional power supply, the lack of a binding trilateral agreement on environmental management remains a critical issue. This highlights the urgent need for a cooperative framework to ensure that the GERD's operation benefits all riparian states without causing significant ecological or socio-economic harm.

VI. Negotiations and Mediation

Efforts to resolve the conflict have involved various rounds of negotiations, often mediated by international actors such as the African Union, the United States, and the European Union.

Key points of negotiation

Filling schedule: determining a mutually acceptable timeline for filling the dam's reservoir to balance Ethiopia's need for electricity generation with downstream water needs.

Operation and management: establishing guidelines for the dam's operation to ensure it does not significantly harm downstream countries, especially during periods of drought.

Dispute resolution mechanisms: creating a framework for ongoing dialogue and conflict resolution to address future disputes and ensure cooperation.

Despite these efforts, reaching a comprehensive agreement has been challenging due to deep-seated mistrust, differing national interests, and the technical complexity of managing shared water resources. The GERD conflict remains a critical issue for regional stability in the Nile Basin, with the potential for both cooperation and continued tension.

Egypt seeks a comprehensive agreement that addresses its concerns about GERD's potential impacts on water flow and downstream water security. This includes mechanisms for managing the dam's filling and operation to minimize adverse effects on Egypt's water supply.

Egypt desires guarantees and assurances from Ethiopia regarding the filling and operation of GERD. This includes commitments to maintain minimum downstream flows during periods of filling and drought, ensuring consistent water supply to Egypt (Cascão, 2009, Mbaku, 2020), which is a major sticking point for Ethiopia, which doesn't agree with any interference in the use of the GERD.

Egypt advocates for legally binding agreements that uphold its water rights and ensure equitable and reasonable utilization of the Nile's waters among riparian states. These agreements would provide a framework for dispute resolution and ensure compliance with agreed-upon rules and procedures.

Egypt emphasizes the importance of regional cooperation and coordination in managing shared water resources. It seeks to work collaboratively with Ethiopia and Sudan, as well as engage with international mediators and stakeholders, to achieve sustainable solutions that benefit all parties involved.

Egypt has engaged in negotiations mediated by international parties, including the African Union, the United States, and the European Union, to address GERD-related issues. These negotiations aim to find mutually acceptable solutions while respecting the rights and interests of all riparian states.

Egypt advocates for increased technical cooperation and exchange of scientific data to assess the potential impacts of GERD on downstream countries. This includes hydrological modeling, environmental impact assessments, and joint studies to inform decision-making and ensure informed negotiations.

Egypt's view on finding a solution to the GERD conflict centers on protecting its water security, ensuring compliance with historical agreements, and fostering regional cooperation. While acknowledging Ethiopia's development aspirations, Egypt seeks comprehensive agreements that address its concerns through legally binding commitments, guarantees of minimum downstream flows, and mechanisms for effective water management.

Sudan desires a comprehensive agreement that addresses its concerns about GERD's impact on water flow, agricultural productivity, and infrastructure. This includes mechanisms for managing the dam's filling and operation in a manner that mitigates adverse effects on Sudan's water resources.

Sudan advocates for equitable benefit-sharing from GERD's electricity generation and regional energy integration. It seeks assurances that Sudan will benefit economically from the dam's operations and potential electricity exports.

Sudan emphasizes the importance of technical cooperation and data-sharing to assess the impacts of GERD accurately. This includes joint studies, hydrological modeling, and environmental assessments to inform decision-making and ensure sustainable water management practices.

Sudan underscores the importance of regional stability and cooperation in managing shared water resources like the Nile River. It seeks to foster dialogue, confidence-building measures, and cooperative frameworks with Ethiopia and Egypt to prevent conflicts and promote mutual understanding.

Sudan has actively participated in negotiations mediated by international parties, including the African Union, the United States, and the European Union. These negotiations aimed to address Sudan's concerns while promoting cooperation and mutual benefit among riparian states.

Sudan engaged diplomatically with Ethiopia and Egypt to find common ground and negotiate solutions that accommodate each country's interests and rights. It advocates for inclusive dialogue and transparent negotiations to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Sudan's desired solution to the GERD conflict revolves around achieving a balanced agreement that ensures its water security, harnesses the benefits of GERD's electricity generation, and mitigates potential environmental and social impacts. Through comprehensive agreements, benefit-sharing mechanisms, and technical cooperation, Sudan aims to manage shared water resources effectively while promoting regional stability and cooperation in the Nile Basin (Cascão, 2009).

Ethiopia's position regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is rooted in its aspirations for national development, energy security, and sovereignty over its water resources (Akamo, 2022).

Ethiopia views GERD as a critical infrastructure project aimed at harnessing the hydroelectric potential of the Blue Nile River. With a planned capacity of over 6,000 megawatts (MW), GERD is expected to significantly boost Ethiopia's electricity production, meeting domestic demand and potentially enabling electricity exports to neighboring countries.

GERD is seen as a cornerstone of Ethiopia's economic development strategy, contributing to industrialization, urbanization, and poverty reduction efforts. The dam's construction is expected to create jobs, stimulate local economies, and attract foreign investment in the energy sector.

Ethiopia asserts its sovereign right to develop its water resources for national development purposes, including hydropower generation. It argues that GERD is essential for addressing energy shortages, reducing dependency on fossil fuels, and achieving sustainable economic growth.

Ethiopia advocates for equitable and reasonable utilization of the Nile's waters among riparian states. It contends that GERD will not cause significant harm to downstream countries like Egypt and Sudan while ensuring that Ethiopia can utilize its water resources for the benefit of its population.

Ethiopia has undertaken environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and implemented measures to mitigate the ecological impacts of GERD. These include sediment management strategies, biodiversity conservation efforts, and sustainable land use practices to minimize environmental degradation.

Ethiopia aims to maximize the social benefits of GERD for local communities, including improved access to electricity, enhanced irrigation potential, and increased agricultural productivity in downstream areas. It emphasizes inclusive development and community participation in the project's planning and implementation.

Ethiopia seeks to foster regional cooperation and dialogue with Egypt and Sudan to address mutual concerns and promote shared benefits from GERD. It advocates for joint management mechanisms, data sharing, and collaborative efforts to optimize water resources management in the Nile Basin.

Ethiopia engaged diplomatically with Egypt, Sudan, and international mediators to negotiate agreements that uphold its rights to develop GERD while addressing

downstream concerns. It supported negotiations, mutual trust-building measures, and peaceful resolution of disputes through diplomatic channels. But it didn't give an inch on the question of its sovereign right to independently make decisions on how the GERD will be used.

VII. The Mediators

The African Union (AU) has played a significant role in facilitating negotiations and promoting cooperation among Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan regarding the GERD. The AU has served as a mediator and facilitator in the GERD negotiations since 2011. It has convened multiple rounds of talks and high-level meetings among the riparian states to address concerns, find common ground, and seek solutions that promote regional cooperation. The AU's involvement underscores its commitment to African-led conflict resolution and its role as a neutral party trusted by all stakeholders involved. The AU has established a negotiation framework aimed at guiding discussions on key issues related to GERD, including the filling and operation of the dam, water flow management, environmental impacts, and dispute resolution mechanisms. This framework provided a structured approach to address technical, legal, and political aspects of the GERD issue, ensuring that negotiations are comprehensive and inclusive.

The AU upholds principles of equitable and reasonable utilization of transboundary water resources. It emphasizes the need for all parties to consider each other's interests and rights in managing shared waterways like the Nile River. The AU advocates for dialogue and cooperation based on international water law principles to achieve sustainable development and peaceful resolution of disputes. Stability in the Nile Basin region is crucial for the AU's broader objective of promoting peace and security in Africa. By facilitating dialogue and cooperation among riparian states, the AU seeks to prevent conflicts that could arise from water-related disputes. The AU encourages confidence-building measures and trust-building initiatives among Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan to foster long-term stability and cooperation.

The GERD negotiations are complex due to the competing interests and concerns of Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan. Issues such as water allocation, environmental impacts, and national sovereignty require careful consideration and negotiation. The AU tried to navigate these complexities by promoting transparency, technical cooperation, and compromise among the parties involved. The AU has collaborated with international partners, including the United Nations, the European Union, and other regional organizations, to support GERD negotiations. International support provided technical expertise, mediation assistance, and financial resources to facilitate the resolution process.

The United States has been actively involved in facilitating negotiations among Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The US has acted as a mediator and facilitator in the GERD negotiations since 2020. This involvement

reflects its commitment to promoting peaceful resolution of disputes and supporting stability in the Nile Basin region, but also deep concern about the conflict involving two of its pivotal allies in the region. The US government, through its diplomatic channels and technical expertise, has sought to bridge differences, build trust, and facilitate constructive dialogue among the riparian states. The primary objective of US engagement in the GERD negotiations was to help the parties reach a fair and equitable agreement that addresses the concerns of Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan and prevent its vital allies in the region, Egypt and Ethiopia, from coming to blows and increase the explosive volatility of a region already much troubled. The US emphasizes the importance of adherence to international water law principles, including equitable and reasonable utilization of transboundary water resources, in managing the Nile River and its tributaries.

The US has also supported African-led efforts, including mediation by the African Union (AU), to resolve the GERD issue. It recognizes the AU as a key regional organization with the mandate and capacity to facilitate dialogue and promote consensus among African nations. The US provides technical assistance and expertise to support GERD negotiations. This includes hydrological modeling, environmental impact assessments, and engineering analyses to inform discussions on the dam's filling and operation. US technical support aims to ensure that negotiations are based on scientific data and analysis, helping the parties make informed decisions about water management and infrastructure development.

The US has engaged at high levels, including through the Secretary of State and other senior officials, to support GERD negotiations. This diplomatic engagement underscores the US commitment to regional stability and conflict prevention in Africa. US diplomats have participated in multilateral meetings and bilateral discussions with Ethiopian, Egyptian, and Sudanese officials to advance dialogue and explore potential solutions to contentious issues.

The United States' position on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam reflects its commitment to promoting peaceful resolution of disputes, supporting regional stability, and advancing sustainable development in Africa. Through facilitation, mediation, and technical assistance, the US aims to assist Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan in reaching a mutually beneficial agreement that addresses their respective concerns while fostering cooperation and shared prosperity in the Nile Basin. Ongoing diplomatic efforts underscore US commitment to constructive engagement and partnership with African nations to address complex transboundary water issues like GERD.

The European Union (EU) has played a multifaceted role in mediating the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute, primarily focusing on facilitating dialogue between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan to foster a peaceful and equitable resolution. The EU's involvement is part of its broader strategy to support regional stability in the Horn of Africa and ensure the sustainable management of transboundary water resources.

The EU's engagement in the GERD dispute began informally in the early 2010s, recognizing the dam's potential to alter the geopolitical landscape of the Nile Basin. As tensions escalated,

the EU sought to provide technical support and diplomatic engagement. In 2013, the EU supported the International Panel of Experts (IPoE), a group comprising representatives from the three countries and international experts, to assess the potential impacts of the dam. The panel's findings emphasized the need for cooperation and highlighted areas of concern, particularly regarding downstream water flow and environmental impacts.

The EU's formal role as a mediator intensified in 2020, as negotiations facilitated by the African Union (AU) faced significant obstacles. Recognizing the impasse, the EU offered to contribute its expertise and resources to support the AU-led process. In July 2020, EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, Alexander Rondos, emphasized the EU's commitment to a balanced resolution, advocating for a legally binding agreement that would address the concerns of all parties involved.

In 2021, the EU participated as an observer in AU-brokered talks, alongside the United States and the World Bank, further demonstrating its active diplomatic role. Despite these efforts, negotiations repeatedly stalled due to fundamental disagreements over the dam's filling and operation. The EU has consistently urged all parties to adopt a cooperative approach, emphasizing that unilateral actions could exacerbate regional tensions.

Beyond diplomatic mediation, the EU has provided technical assistance to the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), a regional partnership aimed at fostering cooperation among Nile riparian states. Through its financial contributions to the NBI, the EU supports capacity-building programs, data sharing, and sustainable water management projects. These efforts aim to build trust and promote transparency in the region, addressing some of the underlying issues fueling the GERD dispute.

In 2023, the EU renewed its commitment to the mediation process, with European Commission officials calling for intensified diplomatic efforts to reach a comprehensive agreement. The EU also expressed concern over Ethiopia's unilateral decision to complete the fourth filling of the GERD reservoir, urging all parties to return to the negotiation table under the auspices of the AU.

The EU's involvement in the GERD dispute reflects its broader strategic interests in regional stability and sustainable development in the Horn of Africa. Through a combination of diplomatic engagement, technical support, and advocacy for cooperative solutions, the EU continues to play a crucial role in facilitating dialogue among the Nile Basin countries. However, the path to a lasting resolution remains complex, requiring sustained international mediation and a genuine commitment to collaboration from all parties involved.

VIII. Obstacles to a mediated solution

Mediation efforts in the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) conflict have faced significant obstacles due to the intricate nature of the issues involved and the divergent interests of the key stakeholders—Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan. At the core of the dispute are deeply entrenched concerns about water rights, regional power dynamics, and national economic development. Ethiopia views the GERD as a vital project for its economic future, aiming to generate 6.45 GW of electricity and provide power to millions. Conversely, Egypt perceives the dam as a direct threat to its water security, given its reliance on the Nile for 97% of its freshwater supply. Sudan finds itself in a precarious position, recognizing both the potential benefits, such as flood control, and the risks associated with uncoordinated dam operations. These multifaceted concerns make it challenging to find common ground, as each nation's priorities and perceived stakes differ substantially.

The complexity of the GERD dispute is further heightened by differing perspectives on the dam's technical and environmental impacts. Downstream countries, particularly Egypt, fear that the dam could reduce water flow during critical periods, disrupt sediment transport, and harm the fragile ecosystem of the Nile Delta, which supports a significant portion of their agriculture. Meanwhile, Ethiopia argues that the GERD will regulate the Blue Nile's flow, potentially reducing downstream flooding and ensuring a more predictable water supply. These conflicting narratives are compounded by a lack of transparency and trust, making technical negotiations contentious. Future mediation efforts require addressing these issues with detailed, impartial hydrological analyses and fostering a cooperative spirit—a task that remains elusive amid ongoing political tensions and historical grievances.

The historical context of water allocation in the Nile Basin has played a crucial role in shaping the deep-seated mistrust and suspicion among Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan. Central to this issue are the 1929 and 1959 treaties, which heavily favored Egypt's water rights. The 1929 Anglo–Egyptian Agreement, brokered under British colonial rule, allocated 48 billion cubic meters of the Nile's annual flow to Egypt and just 4 billion to Sudan, granting Egypt a veto over upstream projects that could impact its share. This agreement effectively marginalized other riparian states, including Ethiopia, which contributes approximately 85% of the Nile's water through the Blue Nile but was excluded from the negotiations entirely. The 1959 agreement between Egypt and Sudan further entrenched this imbalance, increasing their combined allocation to 55.5 billion cubic meters for Egypt and 18.5 billion cubic meters for Sudan, without any consideration for Ethiopia or other upstream countries.

For Ethiopia, these historical agreements symbolize decades of inequity and exclusion, fueling its determination to assert its rights over the Nile through the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Ethiopia argues that these colonial-era treaties are obsolete and do not reflect the modern realities of water needs and contributions. The country sees the GERD as a critical step toward redressing this

historical imbalance, promoting economic development, and lifting millions of its citizens out of poverty through hydropower generation. With a capacity to generate 6.45 GW of electricity, the GERD is expected to double Ethiopia's current electricity output, which could significantly boost its economy and provide electricity to over 60% of its population that still lacks access to reliable power.

In contrast, Egypt and Sudan view the GERD through a lens of existential threat, rooted in their historical dependence on the Nile's waters. Egypt, in particular, relies on the Nile for 97% of its freshwater needs, supporting a population of over 105 million people and sustaining its vital agricultural sector, which employs about 24% of the workforce. The prospect of reduced water flow or uncoordinated dam operations poses a significant risk to Egypt's national security. The 1959 agreement, which established Egypt's annual share at 55.5 billion cubic meters, has become a cornerstone of its water policy. Any perceived challenge to this allocation is viewed with deep suspicion, exacerbating the trust deficit with Ethiopia.

This legacy of unequal agreements has made negotiations fraught with mistrust and has hindered efforts to reach a cooperative framework for the GERD's operation. The historical context has created a zero-sum perception among the parties, where gains for one country are seen as losses for another. Bridging this trust deficit requires acknowledging historical grievances while fostering a new spirit of cooperation. This could involve revisiting the outdated treaties and creating an inclusive, equitable water-sharing framework based on current hydrological data and the needs of all Nile Basin states. Without addressing these deep-rooted historical inequities, building the mutual trust necessary for a sustainable resolution to the GERD dispute remains a significant challenge.

Technical and operational disputes surrounding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) are at the heart of the tensions between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan. Central to these disagreements are the timelines and protocols for filling the dam's reservoir, operational schedules, and mitigation measures during drought periods. Ethiopia aims to fill the reservoir, which has a capacity of approximately 74 billion cubic meters, in stages to align with the annual rainy seasons. By 2023, the fourth phase of filling was completed, reportedly adding about 20 billion cubic meters of water to the reservoir. However, downstream countries, particularly Egypt, argue that Ethiopia's approach lacks transparency and poses significant risks to their water security, especially during dry periods.

Egypt's concerns are grounded in its heavy reliance on the Nile, which provides around 97% of its freshwater. Any significant reduction in flow could threaten its agricultural sector, which consumes about 85% of the country's water resources. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Nile supports approximately 4.4 million hectares of irrigated farmland in Egypt. If the GERD's filling process reduces downstream flow, it could exacerbate water scarcity, impacting food production and livelihoods. For example, during drought years, Egypt fears that a rapid filling process could reduce its annual water

share by up to 25%, which would have severe consequences for agricultural productivity and food security. This has led to demands for a clear, legally binding agreement on coordinated reservoir management to ensure consistent water flow during dry spells.

Sudan shares similar concerns, particularly regarding the regulation of the dam's releases. While Sudan initially supported the GERD, citing potential benefits such as reduced flooding and improved hydropower potential, it has grown increasingly wary of Ethiopia's unilateral actions. Sudan depends on the Nile for nearly 70% of its water supply, and disruptions in flow could adversely affect its agricultural systems and the operation of its dams, such as the Roseires Dam. In 2021, Sudan experienced unexpected water shortages, which it attributed to a lack of information from Ethiopia about the GERD's filling schedule. This highlighted the critical need for transparent, real-time data sharing to manage downstream impacts effectively.

The technical aspects of the dispute also extend to the broader hydrological impact assessments. Detailed studies are needed to model how the dam will affect seasonal water flows, sediment transport, and ecological systems. Ethiopia maintains that the GERD will regulate the flow of the Blue Nile, reduce flooding risks, and potentially improve water availability during dry seasons by storing excess water. However, Egypt and Sudan argue that without a comprehensive, independently verified hydrological analysis, these claims cannot be fully validated. Discrepancies in data and the absence of an agreed-upon framework for joint technical assessments exacerbate mistrust among the parties.

Ultimately, the resolution of these technical and operational disputes hinges on establishing a transparent, science-based mechanism for managing the GERD. This would require robust data-sharing protocols, independent monitoring, and an agreement on adaptive management strategies to respond to varying hydrological conditions. Until such a framework is established, the technical complexities of the GERD will continue to fuel broader geopolitical tensions, complicating efforts to reach a sustainable and equitable resolution.

Mediators' limitations have played a significant part in the failure of bringing the disputing parties to a mutually acceptable solution. The mediation efforts surrounding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute have been marked by significant challenges, particularly concerning the perceived lack of neutrality and impartiality among international mediators. The African Union (AU), the United States, and the European Union (EU) have all played roles in facilitating dialogue between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan. However, each mediator has faced criticism for either favoring certain parties or being influenced by external geopolitical considerations, complicating rather than resolving the conflict.

The African Union, as the primary regional mediator, has sought to emphasize "African solutions to African problems." Yet, its effectiveness has been questioned due to the internal dynamics of its member states. Egypt and Sudan have often expressed skepticism

about the AU's ability to remain neutral, citing Ethiopia's significant influence within the organization. For instance, Ethiopia hosts the AU's headquarters in Addis Ababa, and some critics argue that this proximity has led to implicit biases. Despite the AU's efforts, including multiple rounds of negotiations and summits since 2020, it has struggled to broker a binding agreement, with talks frequently stalling. This perceived partiality has undermined trust among the parties, particularly Egypt, which has called for more robust international involvement beyond regional actors.

The United States has also played a prominent role in mediating the GERD dispute, but its involvement has been similarly controversial. In 2020, the Trump administration, in collaboration with the World Bank, attempted to facilitate an agreement. However, Ethiopia accused the U.S. of favoring Egypt, particularly after former President Trump suggested that Egypt might "blow up" the dam if no agreement was reached—a remark that fueled Ethiopian suspicions of bias. Ethiopia subsequently withdrew from the U.S.—brokered talks, viewing them as an attempt to impose an unfavorable settlement. This episode highlighted how geopolitical interests and external pressures—such as the U.S.'s strategic alliance with Egypt—can undermine the perceived impartiality of mediators and erode their credibility.

The European Union, while generally perceived as more balanced, has also faced challenges in maintaining neutrality. Although the EU has provided technical support and financial aid to the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) and emphasized a multilateral approach, its broader political and economic interests in the region have occasionally complicated its role. For example, EU member states such as Italy have significant economic ties to Ethiopia, including infrastructure projects like the GERD itself, which was constructed by the Italian firm Salini Impregilo (now WeBuild). This economic involvement has led some stakeholders to question the EU's impartiality, suggesting that its positions may be influenced by commercial interests.

These limitations in neutrality and impartiality among mediators underscore the complexities of the GERD dispute. The differing approaches and perceived biases of international actors have often deepened mistrust rather than fostered consensus. For a durable resolution, there is a pressing need for a genuinely neutral mediator or a more collaborative, multi-mediator framework that can balance the interests of all parties without being swayed by external geopolitical dynamics. Such an approach would require a clear commitment to transparency and equitable engagement, ensuring that the mediation process is seen as fair and credible by all stakeholders involved.

Domestically, leaders in Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan faced pressures from their populations and political constituencies, which limited their flexibility in negotiations and compromise. We will allocate considerably more space to these issues.

The Tigray war in Ethiopia, which erupted in November 2020 and lasted until the signing of a peace agreement in November 2022, has significantly influenced the dynamics of the

Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute. Allegations of Egyptian interference during this conflict have further complicated the mediation process, adding layers of geopolitical complexity to an already intricate situation (Sorour, 2021).

The Tigray conflict severely disrupted Ethiopia's internal political landscape, diverting government attention and resources away from external diplomatic engagements, including the GERD negotiations. The Ethiopian government's focus on the conflict hindered its capacity to address the concerns of downstream countries like Egypt and Sudan regarding the dam's construction and operation. This internal strife created a perception of instability within Ethiopia, leading to increased anxiety among its neighbors, particularly Egypt, about the reliability of Ethiopia as a partner in managing Nile waters.

Allegations of Egyptian support for Tigray rebels have further strained relations between Ethiopia and Egypt. Ethiopian officials have accused Egypt of exploiting the Tigray conflict to destabilize Ethiopia and undermine its government. These claims suggest that Egypt may have sought to capitalize on the chaos in Ethiopia to gain leverage in the GERD dispute, potentially viewing the Tigray conflict as an opportunity to weaken Ethiopian control over the Nile. This alleged interference has exacerbated distrust between the two nations, complicating efforts to mediate the GERD dispute.

The Tigray war has also led to a surge in Ethiopian nationalism, which may affect the government's negotiating stance on the GERD. The conflict united many Ethiopians against perceived foreign interference, particularly from Egypt. As a result, the Ethiopian government may feel compelled to adopt a more assertive posture in negotiations, emphasizing its sovereignty and rights over the Nile River. This shift could lead to a harder line in negotiations, making it more challenging to achieve a collaborative solution.

The Tigray war raised broader regional security concerns, particularly for Egypt and Sudan. The potential for instability in Ethiopia, fueled by the Tigray conflict, has prompted these countries to consider their security strategies more carefully. The fear of an increasingly volatile Ethiopia, coupled with allegations of Egyptian interference, has led to heightened military posturing and a reevaluation of alliances within the Nile Basin. This situation has complicated diplomatic initiatives aimed at mediating the GERD dispute, as regional players grapple with the implications of ongoing instability.

The Tigray conflict drew significant international attention, influencing the involvement of external actors in the GERD dispute. Countries and organizations that sought to mediate the Tigray war, such as the African Union, have had to navigate the dual challenges of addressing the humanitarian crisis in Tigray and the geopolitical complexities of the GERD negotiations. The potential for perceived bias or favoritism toward one party can complicate the role of mediators, making it more difficult to achieve a balanced and sustainable resolution to the GERD issue.

The Tigray war in Ethiopia and the allegations of Egyptian interference have profoundly impacted the mediation of the GERD dispute. The internal disruption in Ethiopia,

allegations of external meddling, shifts in nationalism, regional security concerns, and the complexities of international involvement all contribute to a more challenging negotiation environment. To effectively address these issues, stakeholders must engage in open dialogue, prioritize trust-building measures, and consider the broader geopolitical implications of their actions. Sustainable solutions to the GERD dispute will require careful navigation of these intertwined challenges, emphasizing collaboration and mutual understanding among all parties involved.

The outbreak of civil war in Sudan in 2023 has significantly impacted the mediation efforts surrounding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute, adding complexity and urgency to an already fraught geopolitical landscape in the Nile Basin. The civil conflict in Sudan has not only created a power vacuum but also exacerbated existing tensions between Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan, which are crucial stakeholders in the GERD negotiations.

The civil war has rendered Sudan's government largely incapacitated, thereby undermining its role as a key mediator in the GERD negotiations. Before the conflict, Sudan had been positioned as a potential bridge between Egypt and Ethiopia, seeking to balance its interests with those of both nations. However, the absence of a stable and cohesive Sudanese government has disrupted the trilateral talks and weakened the possibility of reaching a consensus.

The internal conflict has shifted power dynamics within Sudan, as various factions vie for control. This fragmentation makes it difficult to ascertain a unified Sudanese stance on the GERD issue, complicating negotiations further. Different factions may have divergent views on the dam, which could lead to unpredictable outcomes. In this context, Ethiopia may perceive an opportunity to advance its position, while Egypt may become more apprehensive, fearing that a weakened Sudan could lead to greater Ethiopian control over Nile waters.

The civil war has heightened regional tensions, with Egypt and Ethiopia both potentially seeking to exploit the instability in Sudan to bolster their respective positions in the GERD negotiations. For instance, Egypt may feel compelled to strengthen its military posture or enhance its diplomatic outreach to other Nile Basin countries, while Ethiopia might seek to solidify its leverage over the dam's operations amidst Sudan's turmoil. This could lead to a more adversarial approach rather than a collaborative one, further complicating the mediation process.

The humanitarian crisis resulting from the conflict in Sudan could divert attention and resources away from diplomatic efforts concerning the GERD. As the international community focuses on addressing the urgent needs of displaced populations and humanitarian assistance, the urgency of resolving the GERD dispute may diminish. This shift in priorities can slow down mediation processes and allow tensions to escalate unchecked.

The civil war may also alter the dynamics of international involvement in the GERD dispute. As Sudan becomes increasingly unstable, external actors such as the African Union, the United Nations, and regional powers may need to reassess their roles. New alliances may form, and previously established diplomatic frameworks could be challenged. This may lead to a shift in mediation strategies, with external mediators facing difficulties in engaging with a fragmented Sudanese landscape.

Even more impactful on GERD dispute management and outcomes might be the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza and its implications for Egypt's position regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute. As a key player in both regional and Nile Basin politics, Egypt's response to the conflict reflects its strategic interests, concerns over national security, and the complexities of managing its relations with Ethiopia and Sudan.

The war in Gaza has diverted Egypt's attention and resources away from the GERD negotiations. As a neighboring country to both Israel and Gaza, Egypt has been compelled to focus on managing the humanitarian crisis resulting from the conflict, as well as addressing security concerns along its borders. This shift in priorities may hinder Egypt's capacity to engage actively in the GERD negotiations and could delay efforts to mediate disputes over water rights with Ethiopia and Sudan.

The escalation of violence in Gaza could also increase domestic pressure on the Egyptian government to assert its regional leadership. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi may feel compelled to adopt a more assertive stance regarding the GERD, leveraging the situation in Gaza to rally national sentiment and project strength in the face of external challenges. In this context, the Egyptian government might emphasize the importance of securing Nile water rights as a matter of national sovereignty and security, potentially leading to a hardening of its negotiating position with Ethiopia.

The conflict in Gaza has implications for Egypt's geopolitical alliances and its relationships with other regional players. For example, the Egyptian government may seek to enhance its standing within the Arab world by taking a more vocal position on Palestinian issues. This could translate into a greater willingness to assert its interests in the GERD negotiations, framing the Nile dispute as an issue of regional importance. At the same time, Egypt must navigate its relationship with Ethiopia, balancing its support for Palestinian rights with the need for cooperation on Nile water management.

The war between Israel and Hamas has heightened concerns over regional stability, which could influence Egypt's approach to the GERD dispute. Egypt may view the conflict as a reminder of the fragility of security in the region and the potential for escalations that could spill over into neighboring countries. This awareness could prompt Egypt to seek a diplomatic resolution to the GERD dispute, emphasizing the importance of cooperation among Nile Basin countries to avoid further tensions and instability.

The international community's response to the conflict in Gaza may also impact Egypt's position regarding the GERD. Increased global attention on the humanitarian situation

could lead to greater pressure on Egypt to engage constructively in regional diplomacy. As a major Arab state, Egypt's actions and decisions will likely be scrutinized in the context of its relations with Ethiopia and Sudan. This external pressure could encourage Egypt to adopt a more conciliatory approach to the GERD negotiations, seeking to balance its national interests with the need for broader regional stability.

The war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza significantly affects Egypt's position regarding the GERD dispute. The diversion of attention and resources, increased domestic pressure, shifting geopolitical alliances, concerns over regional stability, and international involvement all contribute to a complex and evolving diplomatic landscape. As Egypt navigates these intertwined challenges, its approach to the GERD negotiations will likely reflect a careful balancing of national interests, regional dynamics, and the pressing need for stability in both the Nile Basin and the broader Middle East. Effective mediation and conflict resolution will require Egypt to engage in dialogue and cooperation, acknowledging the intricate relationships between regional conflicts and the vital issue of water rights.

Despite multiple rounds of negotiations and mediation efforts over the years, these factors have collectively contributed to the ongoing deadlock in achieving a comprehensive agreement on the GERD. The complexity of the issues, combined with historical grievances and national interests, continues to challenge the prospects for successful mediation and resolution of the conflict.

IX. Prospects of Cooperation

Cooperation among Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan is crucial for resolving the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) conflict. Several elements align in favor of an agreement. First, as the Egyptians half-heartedly admit, the Guda dam would regularize the flow of the Nile and significantly reduce sediment deposition downstream. Properly coordinated, Ethiopia's dam activities would improve the performance of both Sudan's dams, the aforementioned Roseires and Marawi dams for power generation, plus Sinnar for irrigation, and the large Aswan dam in Egypt.

Secondly, GERD would ensure better conservation of the Nile's waters, as the evaporation rate of water in its reservoir is much lower than that at Aswan. Experts calculate that the Ethiopian reservoir would evaporate about 1.8 cubic km of water per year, compared with 7-10 cubic km lost at Aswan, which represents between 12.6 and 18% of the total volume of water allocated to Egypt under the 1959 treaty, due to the much higher temperatures in the desert than in the higher, mountainous parts of Ethiopia.

Thirdly, beyond some outbursts by some of the more bellicose ministers, the Egyptians are aware of the limited military means at their disposal to effectively stop the Ethiopian project—not least because the two countries share no common border and Ethiopia is landlocked. An Egyptian military incursion into Ethiopia would inevitably require tacit approval from either Sudan or Eritrea, a scenario that appears fraught with challenges and

is unlikely to yield favorable outcomes. Additionally, the Egyptian government, already accused by Ethiopia of engaging in less conventional tactics, possesses alternative means of exerting influence, such as sabotage and the encouragement of opposition movements within Ethiopia. These movements, which are numerous and pose a significant threat to the stability of the Ethiopian government, represent a costly strategy that lacks guaranteed success and is relatively easy to detect.

Moreover, the pursuit of such covert actions, particularly the fostering of opposition groups in Ethiopia, risks provoking reciprocal actions from the Ethiopian government. Given the widespread dissatisfaction in Egypt with the authoritarian regime of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who has ruled since the 2013 coup, there exists a potential for reciprocal destabilization. Ethiopian authorities could capitalize on this internal unrest by supporting opposition movements within Egypt, thus creating a cycle of reciprocal interference that further complicates regional stability.

In summary, while the Egyptian government may contemplate various strategies to assert its influence over Ethiopia, the implications of military action or subversive activities carry significant risks and uncertainties. The historical context of regional relations, combined with the current domestic challenges facing both governments, underscores the necessity for a more diplomatic approach to resolving tensions surrounding Nile water rights and broader geopolitical interests.

X. Conclusions

It is a tragic irony that three impoverished nations, beset by internal strife and weakened by governmental instability, find themselves embroiled in a conflict over a resource they are increasingly losing. The waters of the Nile, influenced by the complex dynamics of global climate change, are diminishing. Historically, the Nile has never been abundant in flow—despite being the world's longest river, its discharge is relatively low when compared to that of the Amazon or the Congo. Factors such as desertification, deforestation in the uplands, and exponential population growth in riparian countries—rising from 83 million in 1950 to over 550 million today—coupled with economic development, exert immense pressure on the river's water supply. The prospect of the Guba reservoir filling within the five years projected by Ethiopian authorities, or the eleven to twenty-one years suggested by the Egyptians, appears increasingly uncertain, especially in light of the climate change phenomena affecting the region. Ethiopia's reliance on the GERD for its developmental aspirations may ultimately prove futile, not due to Egyptian opposition, but rather as a result of nature's diminishing capacity to support such ambitions.

Conversely, Egypt continues to utilize the 55.5 billion cubic meters of water allocated under the 1959 treaty, despite an annual water consumption of approximately 80 billion cubic meters, of which roughly one-third is wasted or polluted. This waste equates to the maximum shortfall that the GERD could impose, underscoring Egypt's precarious

water management practices. While Egypt's dependence on the Nile is often framed as an emotional connection, it is essential to recognize that the country, along with Libya, Sudan, and Chad, lies atop the Nubian Sandstone aquifer system—an extensive underground freshwater reserve covering two million square kilometers, with an estimated volume equivalent to 500 years of Nile flow. Thus, Egypt's acute dependence on the Nile can be seen less as a natural necessity and more as a consequence of governmental inertia, which has historically neglected the imperative to mitigate waste and pollution and to systematically exploit this vast underground water resource. The GERD may serve as a crucial catalyst for the Egyptian government to reassess its historical entitlement mindset, rooted in the era of the pharaohs, and to develop a sustainable strategy ensuring that, in the face of climate change, the average Egyptian will have access to clean water in the coming years—regardless of the fate of the GERD.

The failed mediation efforts surrounding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute can be attributed to several interrelated factors, chief among them being the perceived lack of neutrality and impartiality of the mediators involved. Many of the regional and international actors that attempted to facilitate dialogue between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan have been viewed as biased, either favoring one party's interests over the others or lacking a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics at play. This perception of partiality undermined the credibility of the mediators and fostered distrust among the negotiating parties.

Moreover, the historical context of colonial agreements and entrenched national identities exacerbated tensions, making it difficult for mediators to navigate the deeply rooted sensitivities surrounding water rights and resource allocation. The failure to create a balanced and inclusive mediation framework that acknowledged the legitimate concerns of all stakeholders further complicated the process. As a result, parties approached mediation with skepticism, often perceiving it as a means for one side to assert dominance rather than a genuine attempt to reach a fair and sustainable resolution. Ultimately, these challenges stymied efforts to build consensus and foster cooperation, illustrating the necessity of establishing a neutral mediation environment grounded in mutual respect and an equitable approach to resource management.

To enhance the prospects of successful mediation in the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute and similar conflicts, it is essential to select neutral and impartial mediators. Such mediators should be perceived as unbiased facilitators with no vested interests in the outcome of the negotiations. Involving reputable international organizations, governmental and non-governmental, can significantly bolster the credibility of the mediation process and foster trust among the parties involved. This trust is foundational for any productive dialogue, as it allows the negotiating entities to engage more openly in discussions about their concerns and interests.

Fostering inclusive dialogue is also critical for effective mediation. Engaging a broad range of stakeholders—including representatives from affected communities, civil society, and

technical experts—provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted issues at play. This inclusive approach helps identify shared interests among the parties, which can facilitate a collaborative atmosphere conducive to finding mutually acceptable solutions. Emphasizing common goals such as regional stability, economic development, and environmental sustainability further enhances the mediation efforts by creating a sense of partnership rather than confrontation.

Additionally, developing a robust mediation framework that addresses historical contexts, current challenges, and future needs is essential. This framework should outline clear protocols for water allocation and management, as well as dispute resolution mechanisms. Implementing confidence-building measures, leveraging international support, and encouraging flexibility and compromise among the negotiating parties can further strengthen the mediation process. By addressing environmental and socioeconomic impacts through comprehensive assessments, mediators can alleviate concerns and foster goodwill. Overall, these strategies emphasize the importance of neutrality, inclusivity, and shared interests, providing a solid foundation for constructive engagement and sustainable resolutions in managing shared resources.

References

1. African Development Bank. (2024). *Country Focus Report 2024 Driving Ethiopia's Transformation. The Reform of the Global Financial Architecture.* African Development Bank.

2. Akamo, J.O. (2022). *The GERD from an Ethiopian perspective: Actors, interests, and instruments,* IAI Papers 22. Istituto Affari Internazionali.

3. Caruso, F. (2022). *Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam. The law, history, politics, and geopolitics behind Africa's largest hydropower project,* IAI Papers, No.22. Istituto Affari Internazionali.

4. Cascão, A.E. (2009). Changing power relations in the Nile River basin: Unilateralism vs. cooperation? *Water Alternatives, 2*(2), 245–268.

5. Collier, P. (2007). *The bottom billion: Why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it.* Oxford University Press.

6. Makonnen, Y. (1984) *The Nyerere doctrine of state succession and the new state of East Africa,* East Africa Publications.

7. Miles, W.F.S. (2014). *Scars of partition: Postcolonial legacies in French and British borderlands.* University of Nebraska Press.

8. Mbaku, J.M. (2020). The controversy over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. *Brookings.* Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-controversy-over-the-grand-ethiopian-renaissance-dam/.

9. Sorour, A. (2021, November 5). Ethiopia – Tigray: What does Egypt stand to gain or lose from the one-year war? *The Africa Report.* Retrieved from https://www.theafricareport.com/143814/ethiopia-tigray-what-does-egypt-stand-to-gain-or-lose-from-the-one-year-war/.

Kosovo:
Two Decades After Operation Allied Force.
Organized Crime, Ethnic Tensions,
and An Economy in Reconstruction

Andreas-Vlad ECHIM

Abstract: This article seeks to examine the underlying factors that necessitated NATO intervention during the specified period, assess both the immediate and long-term impacts of this intervention, and analyze the elements contributing to the persistence of the conflict to the present day. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of the historical, political, social, and economic dimensions of the Kosovo conflict, the study aims to unravel the intricate nature of the situation. Additionally, it evaluates global efforts aimed at conflict resolution and explores the challenges that hinder the achievement of sustainable peace. Accordingly, this article addresses the following research question: Why, 25 years after the NATO intervention—hailed at the time as the only viable solution to halt ethnic cleansing and suppress opposition—does the Kosovo conflict remain unresolved and largely unaddressed?

Keywords: Kosovo, UNMIK, corruption, economy, conflict, ethnic tensions, organized crime, real estate crisis, gender inequalities, minorities.

Background

Reflecting the culmination of historical, ethnic, and political tensions that ultimately led to international military intervention, the Kosovo conflict stands as one of the most complex and contentious intra-state conflicts of the 20th century. Analyzing this dispute reveals that Europe has yet to establish effective mechanisms for addressing the

Andreas-Vlad ECHIM
Babeș-Bolyai University
E-mail: echimandreasvlad@gmail.com

multifaceted challenges posed by intra-state conflicts. These challenges have the potential to fundamentally redefine core principles of public international law, international relations, and global security frameworks. NATO's intervention not only initiates a prolonged debate regarding the role of the United Nations but also raises significant legal questions surrounding sovereignty and statehood (Duke, 1998).

Between 1998 and 1999, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), composed of Albanian separatist fighters, waged a violent conflict against Serbian security forces in the Kosovo province of southern Serbia. The conflict was fueled by the ethnic and political persecution of the predominantly Albanian population by Serbian authorities, resulting in widespread violence and numerous atrocities. In examining the situation in Kosovo, it becomes evident that the circumstances surrounding this conflict are significantly more ambiguous and uncertain compared to most other intra-state conflicts that emerged in the post-Cold War era.

History provides numerous examples where victims have transformed into aggressors, and defensive actions have escalated into offensive campaigns. This dynamic is evident in the case of Kosovo, where both Serbs and Albanians, depending on the historical context and international perspective, have alternated between being perceived as victims and as perpetrators (Arbatov, 2000).

At the time, NATO's intervention was internationally justified on the grounds of upholding human rights and, more critically, preventing genocide. The North Atlantic Alliance argued that military action was necessary to halt the atrocities committed by Serbian forces against the predominantly Albanian population of Kosovo. Framed as an urgent response to avert an impending humanitarian catastrophe, the bombing campaign lasted 78 days. While the intervention succeeded in part by removing Serbian forces and curtailing the violence, achieving a durable peace proved far more complex and elusive than initially anticipated by global leaders.

Unbeknownst to many, the underlying conflict, coupled with the 1999 bombings, inflicted profound psychological pain on thousands of families, resulting in trauma that has since developed into a "generational legacy". These tragedies are not only difficult to heal but also continue to fuel ongoing ethnic tensions. Additionally, NATO's bombing campaign contributed to political instability in both Kosovo and Serbia, creating an environment where corruption has been allowed to flourish under the guise of relative calm.

Immediate Consequences of the Operation Allied Force

The most evident outcome of the bombing campaign was the cessation of armed conflict in Kosovo. A NATO-led multinational peacekeeping force was deployed to restore stability and ensure the safety of the population, while Serbian forces were mandated to withdraw from the region (Daalder, 2004). However, NATO's air campaign blatantly contravened the UN Charter, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, and the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act. These treaties explicitly prohibited the use of force against a third state unless authorized by

the UN Security Council and in accordance with international law. The campaign marked the first large-scale and devastating application of armed force in Europe since 1945, significantly destabilizing the foundational principles of the European international order established after World War II. By doing so, NATO set a controversial precedent, openly embracing a foreign policy approach rooted in the philosophy that "the ends justify the means (Arbatov, 2000). In this context, while a humanitarian crisis characterized by a clear instance of ethnic cleansing within its borders was exposed and subsequently addressed, the sovereignty of the state in question was disregarded (Tziampiris, 2002).

NATO's intervention in Serbia in 1999, regarded as the first of several Western-led discretionary operations or "wars of choice," is viewed by some as exacerbating global instability and raising questions about the effectiveness of force for purportedly humanitarian objectives. Coupled with inaction during the Syrian crisis, interventions in Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), and Libya (2011) are seen by many nations as contributing to increased instability and insecurity under the guise of promoting fragile liberal values. These actions have inadvertently undermined the legitimacy of the US-led liberal international order, as many critics argue that Western foreign policy and military actions are driven more by self-interest than by a genuine commitment to fostering a stable and humane international system (German, 2019).

Since the 1970s and 1980s, NATO's actions have gradually undermined the cooperative and constructive dynamics carefully cultivated through Moscow's policies, including those developed during the 1990s. Additionally, all forms of engagement with NATO, including the Partnership for Peace initiatives, have been terminated. In private sessions, the Russian State Duma, for the first time since the mid-1980s, began to seriously deliberate the possibility of military confrontation with NATO (Arbatov, 2000). Following the events of September 11, 2001, Russia's relations with its European neighbors experienced a temporary improvement. However, the NATO-led Kosovo campaign in 1999 had already created a rift in these relationships, a divide that continues to persist to this day (German, 2019). Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that US–Russia relations will recover in the aftermath of the events of March 24 (Arbatov, 2000).

At the conclusion of the war, approximately half of Kosovo's total population—around 800,000 people—fled to Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro. Additionally, while estimates vary, up to 500,000 individuals were classified as internally displaced persons (UN, 1999). For an extended period, societal focus remained on addressing the protracted disputes between Serbian authorities and Kosovar Albanians, particularly to prevent a recurrence of such events.

The conflict also inflicted severe damage on infrastructure, with roughly half of Kosovo's housing stock—approximately 100,000 units—either destroyed or rendered uninhabitable. Furthermore, the extensive bombing campaign is believed to have led to the abandonment of up to 75,000 properties (Valstad T. , 2004).

After seven weeks of bombing Yugoslavia, the extent of destruction was staggering: 100% of oil refineries, 70% of the defense industry, 60% of fuel storage facilities, all electrical transformers, and 40% of television and radio stations were destroyed. Among these was the Belgrade TV facility, where missile strikes claimed the lives of sixteen civilians. Additionally, 68 bridges were damaged, 70% of the roads and 50% of the railways were rendered inoperable, and two million individuals were left homeless. Of the estimated 1,500 total deaths, two-thirds were civilians. The damage extended to nearly 300 schools, hospitals, and other civilian structures, as well as 86 historical monuments. The bombing of chemical industries, oil refineries, and storage facilities caused severe environmental harm, significantly contaminating the Danube River—one of Europe's major waterways, which flows into the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean (Arbatov, 2000). The morality of NATO's bombing campaign has also been subject to criticism, given the standards and methods applied in the use of force. It is particularly striking that this operation, marked by its devastating impact, was described as "the first heroic war" (Luttwak, 1999).

The bombing campaign, conducted with a focus on aerial strikes and minimal risk to NATO personnel, prioritized operational safety for allied forces but had far-reaching consequences on the ground. This approach, while avoiding direct engagement, intensified debates about the proportionality and ethics of force used under the justification of humanitarian intervention.

While the campaign was publicly framed as a decisive measure to end ethnic cleansing, the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure and the significant loss of civilian lives drew criticism for undermining its humanitarian objectives. The reliance on airpower alone, without a comprehensive strategy for post-conflict stabilization, raised concerns about the long-term implications of such interventions on the affected regions (Wise, 2013). Furthermore, the resulting damage to essential services and historical landmarks, coupled with the displacement of millions, challenged the effectiveness of the intervention in creating lasting peace. The characterization of the campaign as the "first heroic war" serves as a stark reminder of the complexities and controversies surrounding the use of military force in pursuit of humanitarian goals, highlighting its ethical and practical shortcomings (Luttwak, 1999).

The suffering of the Albanian population was mirrored and compounded by the severe hardship experienced by the Serbian population as the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo escalated. NATO's intervention, while showcasing advanced military capabilities, fell short of achieving sustainable peace and reconciliation. The lack of effective diplomatic engagement, particularly from Russia, highlighted the precariousness of the operation and underscored the potential for a historical failure if such efforts had been entirely absent (Arbatov, 2000). This conflict did not align with the principles of collective security; rather, it exposed the limitations of humanitarian intervention when executed through force alone. The campaign neither introduced a new ethical paradigm nor fostered a more humane international order. Additionally, it proved unlikely to weaken Serbian nationalism

or dismantle the foundations of the nation-state (Tziampiris, 2002). The intervention's inability to address the root causes of ethnic and political strife ultimately underscored the complexity of resolving deep-seated national and regional tensions through military means.

The Real Estate Crisis and Corruption in Public Administration

Upon regaining power, Serbian authorities confiscated the entirety of archival materials from public institutions and municipal cadastral offices in Kosovo. This event constitutes a significant and critical fact in the context of the conflict. As documented in numerous international reports and scholarly literature, these activities were carried out primarily by the Yugoslav Army, and in certain cases, with the involvement of Russian forces. One widely cited account describes how the Yugoslav Army arrived at the municipal cadastral office in Pristina with trucks and proceeded to seize all original cadastral plans, including updates, cadastral archival records, geodetic instruments, and personal computers (Todorovski *et al*., 2016). Evidence from an interview with a former head of the Kuršumlija cadastral office, published in a local source, reveals that the President of the Republic of Serbia ordered the director of the Republican Geodetic Authority to destroy the cadastral archives. Following the withdrawal of the Yugoslav Army and Serbian police at the end of the war, the head of the cadastral office in Vranje, supported by local transport services, facilitated the transfer of cadastral archives from the Pristina office and ten other cadastral offices in Kosovo. These materials were subsequently transported for the purpose of destruction. Kosovo's public officials faced significant challenges as a result of these actions. The destruction of housing, the prevalence of squatters, and the outdated and incomplete property registration system created numerous complications in the post-conflict period. These factors have contributed to ongoing difficulties in land management, the enforcement of property rights, and the provision of adequate housing, hindering efforts toward stabilization and reconstruction (Cordial, 2008). Therefore, the international community recognized that the conflict had created significant gaps and deficiencies in land administration. These shortcomings were understood to impede effective governance, property rights enforcement, and reconstruction efforts in the post-conflict period, necessitating comprehensive interventions to address the resulting challenges (Valstad, 2001).

Prior to the war, Pristina had the largest population in Kosovo. However, in the aftermath of the conflict, the population of the city experienced a dramatic increase. By February 2000, the population was estimated to have reached approximately 500,000, a significant rise from the 1991 figure of 200,000, with an influx of around 200,000 new residents (OSCE, 2006). This rapid population increase resulted in an inevitable housing crisis. Following the war, the land administration system became severely dysfunctional, marked by the absence of a coherent land policy, discriminatory land laws, and a fragile regulatory framework that permitted the confiscation of public and private land by powerful individuals and groups. Additionally, inadequate information systems prevented the maintenance of accurate and

up-to-date records, while the state's limited capacity rendered it ineffective in providing assistance to refugees and displaced persons (Augustinus & Barry, 2006).

These challenges are aptly characterized as *institutional weaknesses*, which encompass a lack of consensus regarding societal direction, intense competition for power that undermines effective governance, limited legitimacy of political leaders, and non-participatory, dysfunctional political and judicial systems. The second category, *economic and social problems*, includes the destruction or degradation of social and economic infrastructure, the expansion of the informal economy, a return to subsistence-level activities, intergroup animosities, and disputes over land and property rights. Finally, the third component identified is the need to address critical *security concerns*. These include the widespread and unregulated distribution of significant quantities of weapons among populations that, under normal conditions, should be disarmed and reintegrated into society (Ball, 2001).

Vikman (1999) identified numerous reports of illegal land and property occupations, alongside evidence that criminal groups were exploiting the prevailing instability to seize control of houses and land. These findings highlight how post-conflict disorder created opportunities for unlawful activities, further complicating property rights and land administration in the affected regions. As a result of the large number of Kosovar refugees who returned to find their homes damaged or destroyed, many occupied properties that had been abandoned by Serbs and other minority groups. This situation gave rise to unauthorized *secondary occupation* of these properties, further complicating property rights and contributing to ongoing tensions and disputes in the post-conflict period (Leckie, 2000). The situation in urban areas proved to be considerably more complex, as significant numbers of Kosovar Albanians migrated from rural regions in search of employment and housing. Abandoned properties, initially designated to serve as humanitarian shelters, were often reallocated by local authorities. However, these reallocations frequently functioned as a form of patronage, with properties being assigned to individuals identified as political or military elites in exchange for their loyalty and support. This practice further entrenched inequities and exacerbated post-conflict challenges related to housing and property rights (Cordial, 2008).

The real estate crisis was significantly mitigated by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) (Weller, 1999). UNMIK played a key role in establishing functional institutions and restoring order, including efforts to stabilize the real estate sector. Although there was a concerted effort to clarify property rights, the absence of essential documentation made this task exceedingly difficult (Caplan, 2005). Prior to the war, the real estate market had been governed by discriminatory laws that exacerbated property-related challenges (Arbatov, 2000). In response, UNMIK, in collaboration with other international organizations, initiated comprehensive reconstruction and rehabilitation programs aimed at rebuilding infrastructure and housing (Daalder, 2004). These programs provided funding for the reconstruction of destroyed homes, the rehabilitation of damaged buildings, and assistance to displaced families (van der Molen,

2002). The success of these initiatives was crucial in preventing renewed hostilities and fostering stability among Albanians who had regained homeownership.

Another significant activity related to housing and property rights was the declaration of ruins by municipal commissions for properties that had been burned or devastated during the conflict in urban areas. In such cases, ownership of these structures was transferred to the municipalities, and the properties were designated as public land intended for reconstruction and development. Despite these measures, the destruction and burning of large, abandoned properties, particularly those previously owned by Serbs, continued even after the conflict ended. Similar to other abandoned properties, these assets were converted from private to public ownership and subsequently redistributed. However, this process often lacked transparency. Beneficiaries of these reallocations frequently included military commanders and members of the new political elite. Evidence supporting these claims can be found in court cases involving individuals accused of fraud and corruption related to property distribution. Some of these cases led to the imprisonment of high-ranking officials within the cadastral department. For instance, the superintendent of the municipal cadastral office in Pristina was sentenced to six months in prison for his involvement in such activities (Todorovski *et al.*, 2016).

The Psychological Impact of Trauma on Young Individuals

The psychological trauma endured by Kosovar Albanians, who were either direct victims of conflict-related violence or witnesses to it, has been extensively documented in numerous studies (Papadopoulos, 2004). Exposure to extreme acts of violence, such as murder, rape, and other forms of abuse, led to widespread cases of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Cardozo, 2000). Furthermore, the profound loss of family members and close associates contributed significantly to psychological distress (Garbarino, 1995). The fragmentation of communities and the disruption of social cohesion exacerbated these issues, particularly among young people. This demographic faced heightened isolation and difficulties coping with trauma, resulting in episodes of severe depression and long-term mental health challenges (Punamäki *et al.*, 2002).

The mental health of Kosovar Albanians was profoundly affected by forced displacement during the conflict. Over 800,000 individuals were compelled to abandon their homes and seek shelter in refugee camps or temporary accommodations, where they endured dehumanizing conditions (Judah, 2002). This loss of stability and security led to a significant increase in anxiety, depression, and other severe mental health disorders (Agger, 2001). Prolonged exposure to traumatic events commonly manifests as anxiety and depression. Among young Kosovars impacted by the war, symptoms of depression often include a pervasive sense of hopelessness, diminished interest in social activities, and persistent feelings of sadness (Garbarino, 1995). Anxiety, on the other hand, is frequently characterized by irritability, panic attacks, restlessness, and impaired concentration (Punamäki *et al.*,

2002). Traumatic experiences during conflict can also lead to severe behavioral issues and challenges with social adjustment. Young individuals may exhibit aggressive behaviors, social withdrawal, or difficulty maintaining interpersonal relationships (Macksoud, 1996). Furthermore, the impact of trauma can hinder academic performance and reduce the capacity to integrate successfully into professional environments (Garbarino, 1995).

Kosovar Albanian infants were particularly vulnerable to psychological trauma, with evidence indicating that exposure to violence and instability significantly disrupts emotional and psychological development during early childhood (Dyregrov, 2000). Similarly, the NATO bombardment had profound psychological repercussions for the Serbian population. The persistent threat of airstrikes and the widespread destruction of civilian and state infrastructure created an environment of pervasive anxiety and uncertainty. Prolonged exposure to danger, coupled with the loss of loved ones, contributed to a high prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorders, and depression among Serbs (Đurić, 2013). Serbian youth were also significantly affected by the conflict, mirroring the experiences of Kosovar Albanian youth. The trauma resulting from bombings and personal loss led to elevated rates of anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Many Serbian children struggled with academic and social adjustment, exhibiting cognitive impairments and various behavioral difficulties (Dyregrov, 2000). These findings underscore the enduring psychological impact of the conflict on the younger generations of both ethnic communities.

Political Instability and the Fight Against Corruption

Kosovo, one of the most recently established states in the Balkan region, is often characterized as a state that has failed to achieve its intended objectives or remains only minimally functional. Its society is marked by deep ethnic fragmentation, and despite declaring sovereignty seven years ago, it continues to face significant challenges from both internal and external sources. The constitutional and institutional frameworks of this newly independent region were unilaterally designed by foreign actors, with little to no input from local residents.

To enhance stability and mitigate inter-ethnic tensions, international actors have urged Kosovo to adopt clear power-sharing structures and enact legislative protections for minority groups. However, despite the persistent efforts of the global community, Kosovo has struggled to establish itself as a fully functioning state. Scholars argue that the escalation of ethnic conflicts and the fragility of the state have been exacerbated by the very practices of power-sharing and the creation of ethnically defined institutions (Loncar, 2016).

Corruption remains one of the most pervasive and persistent challenges faced by Kosovo since its declaration of independence. This issue manifests in various forms, including nepotism, abuse of power, bribery, and electoral fraud (Ker-Lindsay, 2015). Despite repeated promises from successive administrations, anti-corruption efforts have proven

insufficient. The transition from a socialist system to a democratic society is inherently complex, a process further complicated by the rise of nationalist sentiments (Haug, 2015). Frequent elections and shifts in government have led to a lack of continuity in the implementation of public policies and state reforms. In the aftermath of the NATO intervention, Kosovo's primary political parties split into two categories: those that arose directly from the conflict, such as the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK), and those advocating for nonviolent approaches, such as the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) (Krasniqi, 2016). Subsequently, the political landscape expanded with the emergence of the *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* (LVV) party, a populist movement whose ideology is rooted in ethnic nationalism, hostility toward the ruling elite, and skepticism of the international community. This party's stance often reflects conflicted sentiments toward minority groups, further complicating Kosovo's political dynamics and social cohesion (Yabanci, 2016).

Kosovo's political system is classified as a *"semi-consolidated authoritarian regime"* characterized by widespread political corruption intertwined with local organized crime. The region continues to suffer from high unemployment rates, with approximately one-third of the population living in poverty. Moreover, the economy remains heavily reliant on remittances from the diaspora and foreign aid (Coelho, 2015). These systemic issues exhibit distinct features rooted in the governance structures of the 1990s when Kosovo was under Serbian rule (Krasniqi, 2016). Populist politics further complicate reconciliation efforts with Western institutions due to ideological divides between the general populace and the privileged elite (Yabanci, 2016).

The coalition between the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and the New Kosovo Alliance (AKR), which governed from 2011 to 2014, prioritized securing a majority in the Assembly over adhering to a coherent ideological agenda. This approach weakened governance and adversely affected economic and social welfare. A fundamental issue within Kosovo's party system is the lack of a clear framework for coalition partnerships, which results in uncertainty during election campaigns and contributes to a dysfunctional governance structure (Krasniqi, 2016). As a result, Kosovo operates under a *"restricted access social order"* maintained by implicit agreements between influential individuals and organized criminal networks. This system relies on patronage networks to distribute societal benefits and privileges. Efforts by the international community to strengthen Kosovo's institutions pose a threat to the privileges enjoyed by the governing elite. This powerful group, which monopolizes resources and resists reforms that could dismantle their entrenched structures, is a key factor in the state›s ongoing fragility and institutional collapse (Capussela, 2016).

The politicization of the judiciary in Kosovo can be largely attributed to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which relied on personal networks to appoint individuals to key positions within the new administration. From the outset, systemic corruption was evident within both the police force and the customs

service. Consequently, local courts and prosecutors were pressured to participate in corrupt practices, frequently resulting in the acquittal of prominent political figures (Coelho, 2015). Furthermore, the current leadership frequently employs accusatory rhetoric toward foreign legislators and UNMIK officials, referring to them as "politicians," "corrupt," and "traitors". This populist discourse relies on polarizing language to divide society into two distinct factions: *them*—representing the corrupt elites who undermine national sovereignty by collaborating with Serbia and UNMIK—and *us*—representing the virtuous and legitimate voices of anti-corruption and national integrity (Yabanci, 2016). This divisive strategy reinforces societal fragmentation and undermines efforts toward institutional reform and reconciliation.

Ramush Haradinaj, the former Prime Minister of Kosovo, represents one of the most prominent cases associated with corruption. Despite being accused of criminal activities and corruption, he was acquitted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Similarly, Hashim Thaçi, the former President of Kosovo, faced allegations of war crimes and corruption, which ultimately led to his resignation and the initiation of international prosecution (Weller, 2009). These high-profile cases underscore the pervasive challenges of corruption and accountability within Kosovo's political leadership.

Wise presents a compelling hypothesis, suggesting that despite having lived under undemocratic governance, individuals in post-communist societies often retain an attachment to certain characteristics of former authoritarian regimes (Wise & Agarin, 2017). This attachment may manifest as a preference for centralized authority, stability, and hierarchical structures, reflecting a deep-seated familiarity with, or reliance on, the systems that once governed their lives. Wise's hypothesis underscores the complexities of transitioning to democratic governance, as historical experiences shape societal attitudes toward authority and political structures.

The inability of the independent region of Kosovo to assert authority over its entire claimed territory, particularly the northern areas where the majority population is Serbian, remains a significant and unresolved political challenge. The majority of the Serbian population in this region strongly opposed the separation from Serbia. In April 2013, the European Union initiated a reconciliation process aimed at resolving this issue through mediation between Kosovo and Serbia. However, the Belgrade government showed minimal interest and limited motivation to reach an agreement, as Kosovo's proposals were deemed insufficient.

Consequently, the implementation of the agreement has been hindered by ongoing controversies over the establishment and status of a coordinating organization for municipalities with a Serbian majority. Belgrade and Kosovar Serbs advocate for this entity to be granted constitutional status, while Pristina and its supporters argue that it should function merely as an association (Capussela, 2016). This fundamental disagreement continues to impede reconciliation efforts and complicates the broader process of regional stabilization.

Minorities and Ethnic Tensions in Kosovo

Since Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, the majority Albanian population and the minority Serb population have continued to experience deep-seated tension and mistrust. The region's history has been characterized by the absence of effective and transparent institutions, coupled with inadequate security and stability. These factors have contributed to a significant depopulation of Serbs, leading to a demographic shift in which Albanians now constitute 93.5% of the population, while Serbs represent only 6% (Moraru, 2011).

A key factor contributing to societal divisions in Kosovo is the *Albanian fallacy*, which disputes the origins of the Serbs in the region. Albanians assert that they are direct descendants of the Illyrians, an ancient people who inhabited the Balkans long before the arrival of the Slavs and Serbs. This historical narrative reinforces the Albanian claim to a longstanding presence in Kosovo that predates Serbian settlement (Loncar, 2016). The competing historical claims and identity narratives exacerbate ethnic divisions and hinder reconciliation and unity within Kosovar society.

Despite extensive collaborative efforts by the international community, Kosovo remains an ethnically fragmented state, particularly along its borders. The northern region presents significant challenges, as the Serbian population remains both institutionally and physically isolated, identifying themselves as citizens of Serbia rather than Kosovo (Loncar, 2016). In contrast, the majority Albanian population, representing the largest Muslim-majority group in Europe, often finds its values in conflict with those of the Serbian Orthodox community (Wise & Agarin, 2017). Furthermore, Kosovo exhibits a societal divide between rural areas, where traditional and conservative values dominate, and urban centers, which are the focus of modernization initiatives. The overarching goal is to transform Kosovo into a secular and modern European state (Haug, 2015). However, the enforcement of policies described as *aggressive secularism* has deepened societal fragmentation. These policies are viewed as undermining Islamic cultural and religious values, thereby posing potential threats to state security and social cohesion (Püttmann, 2020).

The social and economic exclusion of Kosovar Serbs remains a persistent issue, characterized by systematic discrimination (Ker-Lindsay, 2015). Serbs frequently face workplace discrimination, barriers to property ownership, and limited opportunities for civic engagement. These exclusions perpetuate inter-ethnic tensions and foster deep-seated feelings of alienation (Capussela, 2016). As a consequence, the Serbian minority in Kosovo continues to live in segregated communities, particularly in the northern regions and southern enclaves (Ker-Lindsay, 2015). This segregation is further exacerbated by mutual distrust between ethnic communities and recurring instances of inter-ethnic violence, often classified as *"hate crimes"* (Capussela, 2016). For example, in North Mitrovica—a city divided between Albanian and Serbian populations—tensions remain high, and periodic conflicts continue to occur (Weller, 2009). These factors collectively hinder the development of social cohesion and impede efforts toward lasting reconciliation in Kosovo.

The systemic discrimination faced by Kosovar Serbs is further reinforced by legislative provisions that were designed primarily through the lens of Albanian state formation, rather than fostering inter-ethnic dialogue and reconciliation. These laws, enacted by government officials, aimed to secure Kosovo's full independence and international recognition, yet they failed to prioritize resolving the longstanding inter-ethnic conflict, which had persisted for over two decades.

This legislative approach reflects a reluctance to challenge international norms, while subtly promoting intolerance among ethnic and minority groups, thereby contributing to societal divisions. The government's strategic framing of Serbs as *the others* played a significant role in consolidating the Albanian nation-state. By leveraging international standards and reinforcing a divisive narrative of *us* versus *them,* a sense of distance and animosity between ethnic communities was cultivated, further entrenching societal fragmentation (Loncar, 2016).

This policy of societal division has posed significant challenges for Kosovar Serbs in accessing essential public services, such as education, healthcare, and social assistance. Numerous cases illustrate how the Serbian minority is compelled to rely on support from the Serbian government, as the services provided by Kosovar authorities are often insufficient or inaccessible (Capussela, 2016). Furthermore, Serbia's involvement has been a pivotal factor in reinforcing these divisions. Since Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, the government in Belgrade has regularly organized local elections in the northern municipalities, where the majority population is Serbian. This practice has further institutionalized the region's fragmentation and obstructed efforts toward societal integration and inter-ethnic reconciliation (Loncar, 2016).

Kosovo's political parties have adopted divergent approaches regarding minority participation and access to public services. While some parties have supported measures to promote Serb involvement in the electoral process and facilitate their access to essential services, others have vehemently opposed such initiatives. Notably, during the 2013 elections, a radical boycott campaign took place in the northern region, utilizing sabotage and intimidation tactics to deter Serbs from participating in the voting process. The primary argument for the boycott was that participation would legitimize Pristina's authority, thereby dismantling Belgrade's parallel governing institutions in the north and transferring control of the four Serb-majority municipalities to Kosovo's administration (Wise & Agarin, 2017).

In addition, gender equality remains a significant challenge in Kosovo. The promotion of women's rights has been hindered by persistent conflict and deeply rooted patriarchal traditions. The political instability following the collapse of socialism has further complicated these efforts (Haug, 2015). Within the education system, gender stereotypes continue to influence both the curriculum and teacher attitudes. Consequently, girls are often discouraged from pursuing careers in technical or scientific fields and are instead guided toward traditionally female occupations (Harris, 2022).

As a result, Kosovo Albanian women have largely been excluded from public life and have exerted limited influence on gender equality, particularly in the labor market. This situation can be attributed to Kosovo's lower level of industrialization compared to other regions of the former Yugoslavia and the enduring impact of patriarchal family structures in rural areas (Haug, 2015).

The Fragile Economy of the Region

Kosovo, as a newly established sovereign state, remains one of the least studied regions in terms of transitional economies and is the least researched country within the Balkan region. This distinctive situation arises from the fact that its institutions were created from the ground up with substantial support and collaboration from the international community (Kryeziu, 2018).

Despite these efforts, economic development in Kosovo is significantly hindered by widespread corruption. The lack of a transparent and predictable legal framework, combined with entrenched corrupt practices, acts as a major deterrent to foreign investment. This pervasive corruption has also eroded public confidence in political institutions, obstructed the acceleration of economic progress, and allowed for the undue influence of vested interests over state governance (Mustafa, 2020).

Research on transition economies indicates that many countries have struggled to establish competitive market economies due to the failure to effectively implement state reforms, build stable institutions, and create clear legal and regulatory frameworks for individuals and businesses (Kryeziu, 2018). Kosovo's economy exemplifies these challenges, remaining one of the most fragile in Europe. The country experiences persistently high unemployment rates and a notably low GDP per capita, particularly affecting the youth population. Kosovo's economy is heavily dependent on international aid and remittances from its diaspora, limiting prospects for sustainable growth and domestic development. This economic fragility has been exacerbated by corruption networks, which exploit institutional weaknesses and scarce resources to advance personal interests (Dzudzevic & Jashari-Sekiraqa, 2018). These conditions hinder the establishment of a resilient and self-sufficient economic system, perpetuating the country's vulnerability and delaying comprehensive socio-economic progress.

These conditions have fostered a political environment characterized by the systematic manipulation of institutions by organized groups and influential individuals. This manipulation is strategically employed to consolidate political power and exploit state resources, thereby obstructing progress toward reconciliation and sustainable development. Such actions have significantly undermined the democratization process in the region.

Kosovo's political and economic landscape is dominated by parties and individuals who promote populist narratives. This populist culture leverages claims of legitimacy to obscure corruption and facilitate state capture, ultimately eroding democratic norms

and governance (Boduszyński & Pavlaković, 2019). The entrenchment of these practices hampers institutional integrity, weakens public trust, and impedes the establishment of a transparent and accountable democratic system.

Corruption is widely recognized as pervasive within Kosovo's public institutions, affecting various sectors, including healthcare, the judiciary, central government, and municipal administrations. Empirical data indicates that corruption is particularly prevalent in the healthcare system (52%), followed by the judiciary (43%), central government (38%), and municipalities (34%) (Yabanci, 2016). These systemic issues undermine institutional integrity, weaken public trust, and significantly impair the delivery of essential services and effective governance. Addressing these entrenched forms of corruption is critical to advancing transparency, accountability, and sustainable institutional reform.

Kosovo's poverty rate exceeds that of most neighboring countries, disproportionately affecting households led by women, families with limited education, and ethnic minorities, in contrast to the Albanian majority (Mustafa, 2020). Despite a formal transition to a market economy over 15 years ago, Kosovo remains classified by the World Bank as a lower-middle-income country, reflecting limited economic growth and development (Uberti, 2015). In 2007, during the final year of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the poverty rate reached a historic low, with 20% of the population living at subsistence levels. However, following independence, poverty levels rose again, albeit not to the extremes seen during the socialist era. Persistent income inequality has remained largely unaddressed, further exacerbating socio-economic disparities (Mustafa, 2020).

Current data reveals that 44% of Kosovo's population lives in poverty, while 14% experiences extreme poverty. Unemployment rates are particularly high, affecting 58% of women and 30% of men (Kryeziu, 2018). This dire economic situation has compelled a significant number of Kosovars to emigrate in search of better economic opportunities and security in other parts of Europe (Coelho, 2015).

In comparison to regions such as East Asia and Latin America, Kosovo remains economically underdeveloped. Additionally, while international donors have focused on advancing individual rights, their efforts have led to the establishment of numerous state agencies tasked with resolving legal disputes, particularly those concerning property rights and industrial assets (Uberti, 2015). These measures, however, have done little to alleviate the underlying economic fragility and inequality faced by the population.

Conclusion

Despite the absence of active warfare, Kosovo's situation cannot be described as genuine peace. Rather, the region remains entrenched in a *frozen conflict*, defined by unresolved political, social, and economic challenges. These challenges, compounded by ethnic divisions, political manipulation, and external geopolitical influences, prevent Kosovo

from achieving sustainable stability and development. While the cessation of violence marked a significant moment, it did not translate into long-term peace or reconciliation, and the conflict merely evolved into a new form of unresolved tension.

One of the key factors contributing to this ongoing instability is the pervasive corruption within Kosovo's institutions. A system that fosters corruption has been created by the close ties between political leaders and organized crime groups, resulting in the neglect of citizens' needs, regardless of their ethnic background. This system has led to the entrenchment of inequality and the perpetuation of a state that benefits only the political and economic elite, leaving nearly half of Kosovo's population living in poverty. In fact, more than 44% of the population is impoverished, with 14% living in acute poverty. Kosovo's economy, one of the most fragile in the Balkans, is far weaker than the economies of some Latin American or East Asian countries, highlighting the state's failure to create an inclusive and sustainable economy.

This economic fragility is intertwined with the failure to address the underlying ethnic tensions. The Serbian minority, constituting only 6% of Kosovo's population, remains marginalized and persecuted by the Albanian majority. Serbs continue to face systemic discrimination, particularly in accessing public services and healthcare, contributing to the persistence of ethnic conflict. The ongoing discrimination faced by Serbs reinforces the sense of alienation and division, hindering any meaningful attempts at reconciliation between the two communities.

The roles of Russia, Serbia, and Western powers further complicate Kosovo's path to peace. Russia's steadfast support for Serbia and opposition to Kosovo's sovereignty, combined with Serbia's continued influence over Kosovo's Serb minority, has prevented any significant resolution of the conflict. At the same time, while the West's intervention in the late 1990s temporarily halted the violence, it failed to address the root causes of the conflict or to foster true political and social integration. The international community's involvement has thus contributed to a situation where Kosovo is neither fully sovereign nor at peace.

International efforts, while instrumental in establishing basic governance structures, have often fallen short of fostering true reconciliation or sustainable development. The unilateral establishment of Kosovo's constitutional and institutional framework, without sufficient input from local communities, has led to a lack of ownership and legitimacy among the populace. The promotion of aggressive secularism has further alienated segments of the population, undermined social cohesion, and exacerbated cultural tensions.

It becomes increasingly evident that the conflict was never entirely resolved but rather evolved into a different form. The political manipulation by elites, exacerbated by organized crime, resulted in a situation where the original victims have now become perpetrators, perpetuating a cycle of division and mistrust. The Serb-Albanian divide remains entrenched, and Kosovo's ongoing instability reflects a broader failure to establish genuine peace, justice, and inter-ethnic trust.

In conclusion, Kosovo's condition reflects a frozen conflict where the cessation of violence has not translated into peace. The absence of active war masks the persistent ethnic divisions, institutional corruption, economic fragility, and societal mistrust that continue to plague the region. Without addressing these fundamental issues, Kosovo remains trapped in a state of unresolved tension and instability. Achieving genuine peace requires more than the absence of war; it demands inclusive governance, economic opportunity, social equity, and a commitment to reconciliation - all of which remain distant aspirations in Kosovo's current reality.

The Kosovo conflict serves as a stark reminder that reconciliation, dialogue, and sustainable development are essential components of any peace process. Military interventions and external solutions are inadequate substitutes for long-term strategies based on cooperation, social justice, and the rebuilding of inter-ethnic trust. Kosovo's situation exemplifies the complexity of ethnic and political tensions and the profound errors made by the international community in its approach to the region. As such, the Kosovo conflict remains a dark chapter in Europe's history, demonstrating the deep challenges of resolving ethnic conflict and the limitations of international interventions that fail to address the underlying causes of division. The future of Kosovo depends not on external interventions but on its ability to foster internal dialogue, address economic disparity, and build a society based on equality, transparency, and reconciliation.

References

1. Agger, I. (2001). Psychosocial assistance during ethnopolitical warfare in the former Yugoslavia. In D. Chirot and M. E. P. Seligman (Eds.), *Ethnopolitical warfare: Causes, consequences, and possible solutions* (pp. 305–318). American Psychological Association. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1037/10396-019.

2. Arbatov, A. G. (2000). *The Kosovo Crisis.* Atlantic Council.

3. Augustinus, C., & Barry, M. (2006). Land management strategy formulation in post-conflict societies. *Survey Review, 38*, 668–681.

4. Ball, N. (2001). The challenge of rebuilding war-torn societies. In C.A. Crocker, F.O. Hampson and P. Aall (Eds.), *Turbulent peace: The challenges of managing international conflict* (pp. 721–722). United States Institute of Peace.

5. Boduszyński, M. P., & Pavlaković, V. (2019). Cultures of Victory and the Political Consequences of Foundational Legitimacy in Croatia and Kosovo. *Journal of Contemporary History, 54(*4), 799–824. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009419838045.

6. Caplan, R. (2005). *International governance of war-torn territories: Rule and reconstruction.* Oxford University Press.

7. Capussela, A. L. (2016). Kosovo: Political evolution and the negotiations with Serbia. *European Institute of the Mediterranean.* Retrieved from https://www.iemed.org/publication/kosovo-political-evolution-and-the-negotiations-with-serbia/.

8. Cardozo, B. L. (2000). Mental health, social functioning, and attitudes of Kosovar Albanians following the war in Kosovo. *Jama, 284*(5), 569–577. DOI: 10.1001/jama.284.5.569.

9. Coelho, J. (2015). Building state failure in Kosovo? *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, *2*(2), 7–15.

10. Cordial, M. (2008). *Post-conflict property restitution – The approach in Kosovo and lessons learned for future international practice.* Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

11. Daalder, I. H. (2004). *Winning ugly: NATO's war to save Kosovo.* Rowman & Littlefield.

12. Duke, S. (1998). *The trouble with Kosovo.* Working Paper 98/W/03. European Institute of Public Administration.

13. Đurić, M. P. (2013). Behavioral response of people in Belgrade to the bombing campaign during 1999. *Srpski arhiv za celokupno lekarstvo*, *141*(3–4), 198–202.

14. Dyregrov, A. G. (2000). Trauma exposure and psychological reactions to genocide among Rwandan children. *Journal Of Traumatic Stress*, *13*(1), 3–21.

15. Dzudzevic, O. & Jashari-Sekiraqa, S. (2018). *Kosovo's services economy: Challenges and opportunities for growth and sustainable development.* Government of Kosovo.

16. Garbarino, J. (1995). The American war zone: What children can tell us about living with violence. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, *16*(6), 431–435. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1097/00004703-199512000-00008.

17. German, T. (2019). A legacy of conflict: Kosovo, Russia, and the West. *Comparative Strategy*, *38*(5), 426–438. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2019.1653040.

18. Harris, L. U. (2022). Challenges and incentives in the management path of female principals in Kosovo primary schools. PhD dissertation defended at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana.

19. Haug, H. K. (2015). Gender equality and inequality in Kosovo. In C.M. Hassenstab and S. P. Ramet (Eds.), *Gender (in)equality and gender politics in Southeastern Europe. Gender and Politics* (pp. 147–168). Palgrave Macmillan.

20. Judah, T. (2002). *Kosovo: War and revenge.* Yale University Press.

21. Ker-Lindsay, J. (2015). Engagement without recognition: The limits of diplomatic interaction with contested states. *International Affairs*, *91*(2), 267–285.

22. Krasniqi, V. (2016). Political parties ideologies in Kosovo. *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques*, *49*, 108–119.

23. Kryeziu, L. (2018). Political and economic institutions and economic performance: Evidence from Kosovo. *South East European Journal of Economics and Business*, *13*(2), 84–99.

24. Leckie, S. (2000). Resolving Kosovo's housing crisis: Challenges for the UN housing and property directorate. *Forced Migration Review*. Retrieved from https://www.fmreview.org/leckie-4/.

25. Loncar, J. (2016). State-building and local resistance in Kosovo: Minority exclusion through inclusive legislation. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *49*(3), 279–290.

26. Luttwak, E. (1999). Post-heroic warfare and its implications. *NIDS International Symposium on Security Affairs*, 127–139.

27. Macksoud, M. S. (1996). The war experiences and psychosocial development of children in Lebanon. *Child development*, *67*(1), 70–88.

28. Moraru, V. (2011). Provocarea Kosovo: separatismul ca generator al tensionării internaţionale. *Revista de Filosofie, Sociologie şi Ştiinţe Politice*, *1*(155), 134–140.

29. Mustafa, A. (2020). Kosovo's social policy during self-management, UNMIK and independence: Persisting high inequality and social exclusion. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, *29*(1), 96–108.

30. OSCE. (2006). *Municipal profile.* Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

31. Papadopoulos, R. K. (2004). Political violence, trauma and mental health interventions. In D. Kalmanowitz and B. Lloyd (Eds.), *Art therapy and political violence* (pp. 55–79). Routledge.

32. Punamäki, R.-L., Kanninen, K., Qouta, S., & El-Sarraj, E. (2002). The role of psychological defences in moderating between trauma and post-traumatic symptoms among Palestinian men. *International Journal of Psychology, 37*(5), 286–296. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207590244000133.

33. Püttmann, F. (2020). Imagining Islam in Kosovo - The social construction of the Kosovar Muslim subject among European political actors. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, *20*(2), 307–325. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2020.1778984.

34. Todorovski, D., Zevenbergen, J., & van der Molen, P. (2016). Conflict and post-conflict land administration – The case of Kosovo. *Survey Review, 48*(350), 316–328. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1179/1752270615Y.0000000044.

35. Tziampiris, A. (2002). Progress or return? Collective security, humanitarian intervention and the Kosovo conflict. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, *2*(3), 95–114. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14683850208454705.

36. Uberti, L. J. (2015). Depoliticising the Balkans? International intervention(s) and economic development in Kosovo. *Capital & Class*, *39*(2), 379–386. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0309816815585198b.

37. UN. (1999). Resolution 1244 S/RES/1244. United Nations.

38. Valstad, T. (2001). *The reconstruction of the cadastre and the development of a land information system in Kosovo.* International Federation of Surveyors FIG.

39. Valstad, T. (2004). Institution building in Kosovo - Failure or success? Paper presented at the 3rd FIG Regional Conference, Jakarta.

40. van der Molen, P. (2002). The dynamic aspect of land administration: An often-forgotten component in system design. *Computers, Environment and Urban Systems*, *26*(5), 81–361.

41. Vikman, L. (1999). Land administration in Kosovo. *United Nation Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE).* Secretariat on Land Administration Issues in the Balkan Region.

42. Weller, M. (2009). *Contested statehood: Kosovo's struggle for independence.* Oxford University Press.

43. Weller, M. (1999). *The crisis in Kosovo, 1989-1999.* Documents and Analysis Publisher.

44. Wise, L. (2013). *Was NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999 'just'?* Aberystwyth University.

45. Wise, L., & Agarin, T. (2017). European style electoral politics in an ethnically divided society. The Case of Kosovo. *Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics and Society, 65*(1), 99–124.

46. Yabanci, B. (2016). Populism and anti-establishment politics in Kosovo: A case study of Lëvizja Vetëvendosje. *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, *3*(2), 17–43.

Ethiopia:
Motivations, Strategies and Interests
of the *Fanno* in the Conflict in Wolkait

Alene KASSAW

Dr. Veneranda MBABAZI

Abstract: The political landscape of Ethiopia has been replete with recurring incidents of intra-state conflicts along class, ethnic, religious, or regional lines. To stem the recurrence of such conflicts, 'ethnic federalism' was adopted as a conflict management strategy in 1991. Yet, rather than preventing conflicts, it has changed the arena in which conflicts take place. Various forms of conflicts proliferated in many parts of the country, putting ethnic federalism at the center of debates on the persistence of conflicts. Hence, the role of local non-state actors responsible for the emergence, escalation, or termination of conflicts has been glossed over. One of the determining factors for whether conflict erupts or lingers pertains to actors' motivations and strategies. Against the backdrop of this, the conflict in Wolkait, Ethiopia will be investigated by shedding light on the motivations and strategies of *Fanno*, one of the local non-state actors involved in the conflict under study. To this end, a critical research approach is employed within a qualitative case study design in the course of data collection and analysis.

Keywords: Ethnic federalism, Conflict, Non-state actor, Motivation, *Fanno*.

Alene KASSAW

Department of Religion and Peace Studies, College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHUSS), Makerere University
E-mail: alekassa942@gmail.com

Dr. Veneranda MBABAZI

Department of Religion and Peace Studies, Makerere University
E-mail: venmbabazi@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

Ethiopia has been portrayed as being synonymous with conflict. Its political landscape is replete with recurring incidents of intra-state conflicts along class, ethnic,

religious, or regional lines. The occurrence or persistence of conflicts in Ethiopia has been perceived as originating from a host of factors. Yet, recent literature tends to characterize conflicts as 'ethnic', while in fact, the real issues that lie behind conflicts are other issues such as territory, resources, competing ideologies, or even personal greed (Gudina, 2003; Kefale, 2009; Ndiyun, 2024; Wonbera, 2024). Adopted in 1991 after decades of civil war, 'ethnic federalism'[1]It was acclaimed for being an antidote to protracted conflicts that plagued the country. However, it was not long before conflicts involving various ethnic groups came to be the dominant feature of the political system. The federal system has failed to prevent conflicts; it rather changed the arena in which conflicts take place. Previously, it was, for the most part vertical- the central government pitted against various armed groups or the general populace. Since 1991, the conflict has become horizontal- pitting ethnic groups against one another (Kefale, 2009; Regassa, 2010; Abbink, 2006).

Because of this, many conflicts came to the political scene. The ones that have been at the center of scholarly debates include Silte-Gurage conflict, the Wogagoda language conflict, the Sheko-Mejengir conflict, the Anyuwaa-Nuer conflict, the Berta-Gumuz conflicts, the Gedeo-Guji conflict, the Oromo-Amhara conflict, the Borana-Garri conflict, and the Oromo-Somali conflict, and 'natives'-'migrants' (as in Benishangul-Gumuz region) or 'titular'- 'highlander' (as in Gambella region) (see Kefale, 2009; Regassa, 2010; Abbink, 2006). Apart from the weakness of ethnic federalism, local non-state actors have a role in the emergence, escalation, or termination of conflicts. Hence, this article probes the conflict in Wolkait[2]—one of the peripheral issues glossed over by scholars (John, 2021) from the perspective of the motivations, interests, and strategies of the *Fanno* armed group.

---

1 The federal system in place since 1991 is often dubbed 'ethnic federalism' to signify that its constituting elements are ethnically defined regional states. Yet, some prefer to call it multi-ethnic federalism or multi-national federalism for its purported aim of ensuring equality among 'nations', nationalities, and 'peoples'. It is also argued that ethnicity was not the sole criterion used for demarcating regional states. For example, multi-ethnic regional states such as the SNNPR, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Gambella were formed on the basis of a mix of criteria such as political exigencies, settlement patterns, and economic considerations (Tesfai, 2015). Such assertions are, however, open to controversial debates as the major provisions for self-determination are not enforced on the ground, for their implementation has been overridden by political pragmatism and economic considerations. It was adopted in 1991 by ethno-nationalist groups coalesced under the EPRDF so as to address what they called the 'national question'- the alleged ethnic domination of the Amhara ethnic group since the formation of the modern Ethiopian state in the early 20th century (Vaughan, 2003).

2 In various literature, Wolkait is also written as 'Welkait' or 'Wolqait'. Yet, 'Wolkait' is used throughout this article. In direct quotes taken from previous literature where other usages appear, they are retained as they are.

2. Methodology and Methods

The study adopts a critical qualitative approach, which allows an investigation of social phenomena by using descriptive, explanatory, and interpretive techniques (Yin, 2003). Critical qualitative research provides a framework for researchers not only to explain the *status quo*, but also uncover values, policies, or processes in the prevailing political system that give rise to injustices in society. As such, researchers using this approach delve deeper into a specific context to deal with critical questions such as: what is the existing political system like? Who is then privileged? Who is marginalized? and how do the marginalized groups grapple with the prevailing oppressive system or group? (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). In this study, Wolkait presents an important case or context for probing a conflict situation in terms of contradictions arising from competing interests and strategies pursued by conflict actors. It specifically centres around the *Fanno* armed group—a non-state actor claiming to fighting for the cause of the marginalized Amhara people in Ethiopia. Data relevant to the study were collected from purposefully selected informants who included individuals acting on behalf of the *Fanno* and Wolkait Amhara Identity Committee, political analysts, and notable members of the community in Wolkait. Moreover, a wide range of pertinent data was gleaned from published and unpublished secondary sources that pertain to the themes of the study such as peer-reviewed journals, books, dissertations, archives, official documents such as reports, proclamations, policy and strategy papers, as well as websites of the actors. According to Creswell (2007), studies anchored in critical approaches are by no means entirely objective, for researchers begin their study with the assumption that systems are biased and there is asymmetry of power in every society. Thus, efforts were made to ensure objectivity by avoiding neglect or misrepresentation of data, use of value-laden words, as well as ensuring inclusivity of contradicting views advanced by other actors on the issues at hand.

3. Conceptual Framework

Conflicts are part of our life and manifest themselves in many forms. Inter-state conflicts comprise a range of disputes between nation-states. These conflicts, considered as ones that mattered the most, received the bulk of scholarly attention in the period before the Cold War. Internal conflicts, those that occur within states, have come to be the most prominent in the wake of the Cold War due to their frequency and intensity. There are also conflicts encapsulated as state-formation conflicts, which include civil and ethnic wars, anti-colonial struggles, secessionist and autonomous movements, territorial conflicts, and battles over control of government (Kaldor, 1999; Wallensteen, 2002).

Most intra-state conflicts in Africa involve the state on the one side and a mix of various non-state armed actors (Mateos, 2010; Baregu, 2011). It is for this reason that scholars direct their attention to the role of non-state organized groups in the dynamics of intra-state conflicts. Having this in mind, this article adopts an actor-based analysis of conflicts with

the view to understanding the role of intentional factors, namely the interests, motivations, and strategies of actors responsible for the onset, perpetuation, or transformation of conflicts. To this end, some of the concepts, namely the nature of non-state armed actors, their motivations, interests, and strategies are explained below.

3.1. Who are the Non-State Armed Actors?

Broadly speaking, non-state armed actors are organized armed groups that operate outside of state control with different organizational structures, objectives, strategies, and ideologies. Yet, they defy a comprehensive definition, as they are fluid in nature (Grävingholt, 2007). It is impossible to lump all non-state armed groups together in one category as they show variations in terms of their attitude towards political power (e.g., do they operate in disregard or in compliance with rule of law?), towards territory (e.g., are they interested in control of territory or not?), social and economic support (e.g., do they garner the support of population or operate in isolation?), use of force (e.g., do they target civilians or not?) and whether they are predatory or engaged in functions beneficial to their community (Grävingholt, 2007)?

Two broad categories of armed non-state armed actors can be distinguished: community-based armed groups (CBAGs) and non-state armed groups (NSAGs). The main difference between them is that NSAGs are politically motivated, and ideologically or religiously driven (as in the case of terrorists or insurgents), while CBAGs are devoid of political motives; if anything, they may be led or manipulated by political entrepreneurs for their parochial political ambitions; or serving as armed wing of political parties (Schuberth, 2015). CBAGs are multifaceted as they operate in various situations or spheres. In the sphere of security, they are considered vigilante groups, acting as crime control groups, self-defense forces, or para-states. They act as ethnic or popular militia, or warlords if considered from a political perspective. Lastly, seen from the perspective of economics, their role can be one of a criminal gang, a youth gang, or a criminal fiefdom (Schuberth, 2015).

Despite their varying nature, non-state armed actors are considered illegitimate/illegal within the state they operate; they have the state as their main protagonist. Since the state is seen as the sole legitimate actor wielding a monopoly of means of violence, they are devoid of legal standing thereby deserving subordination or elimination. Except for some groups such as classical rebels or guerrilla movements, who depend on the population as a source of support, most NSAGs use violence as a strategy to "exploit, intimidate or deter people, to provoke reactions from the government and to undermine the authority and legitimacy of state institutions who are apparently not able to protect the population" (Schneckener, 2009, p. 14).

3.2. Motivations of Non-State Armed Groups

NSAGs by no means come into being in a vacuum. There must be circumstances that give rise to their formation or operation. In this regard, there is a fierce debate on whether it is greed or grievance that drives them. For proponents of greed theory, the greedy behavior of armed groups is the main reason behind conflicts. Conflict brings about possible benefits to those involved in it in the form of pillage, racketeering, an informal market economy, exploitation of natural resources, forced labor, foreign aid, diaspora contributions, etc. Due to these economic benefits, actors are motivated in the onset or protraction of conflicts (Spittaels & Hilgert, 2008). Thus, conflict is a resource-seeking enterprise. By contrast, the grievance model focuses on the salience of identity (ethnic or religious divisions), political repression, and horizontal inequalities between groups along ethnicity, religion, or language as factors behind conflicts. Conflicts are the means for NSAGs to address grievances resulting from economic inequality, political repression, economic incompetence, etc. (Collier, 2000). As such, conflict is a justice-seeking enterprise as groups fight in response to grievances (Murshed & Tadjoeddin, 2007).

Yet, what appears to be greed for one may be a case of grievance for another. For leaders fighting for power, it may be a case of greed; but for the ordinary people, the conflict may appear to be a case of grievance. Moreover, apart from greed and grievance, we need to consider other aspects of conflicts. For example, people are predisposed to fight when they face conditions that threaten their survival (Vinci, 2006). State failure is also another factor having the potency to create a favorable opportunity structure for various non-state armed actors to emerge (Ballentine & Nitzschke, 2003). Not only are fragile states unable to provide basic services for their people, but they are also engaged in activities that result in human rights violations. It is this situation that makes the people question the legitimacy of their government and force them to look for alternative sources of support in the realm of NSAGs (Grävingholt, 2007).

3.3. Interests of Non-State Armed Groups

In a conflict setting, actors and interests are intertwined. Determination of which actors pursue which interests depends on context. For example, in a political system where ethnic politics prevails, contending actors are bound to organize around ethnicity and are likely to articulate and fight over cultural issues. People are mobilized on the basis of ethnic identity markers towards a collective action against an actual or perceived threat. Likewise, where class comes to dominate the political system, actors are conceived in class terms, and their overriding interests pivot around economic issues (Young, 1972). In other words, the nature of their interests varies depending on the type of motivations that derive them. Those driven by greed are more likely to engage in personal economic enrichment. Those actors motivated by grievance tend to work towards political change. Since the state is perceived to disproportionately benefit particular groups, or when state institutions and

social structures are weak, the likelihood of conflict appears high. They feel compelled to fight off the state against real or perceived injustices. They also aim for advance military control of a certain territory, regime change, territorial adjustment (through annexation or irredentism), political change (for increased participation, autonomy, or power sharing), secession, or revolution (Spittaels & Hilgert, 2008).

3.4. Strategies of Non-State Armed Groups

Actors in conflicts deploy a range of ways and means to achieve their objectives. As weak sides in conflict, NSAGs try to avoid the opponent's strengths and exploit their weaknesses (Smith, 2011). In the face of asymmetry of power, NSAGs follow unconventional military strategies including, among others, guerrilla warfare, systematic murder, ethnic cleansing, terrorism, rioting, destruction of certain areas by physical means (laying landmines, destroying civilian buildings, hospitals, and water sources), economic means (famine caused deliberately, forced migration), and psychological means (desecration of elements of social importance through the destruction of symbols, religious institutions or historical monuments) (Grävingholt, 2007).

Unlike non-state actors, the state enjoys the benefits of sovereignty: non-intervention in internal affairs, freedom to manufacture or import arms, and levying tax on the population and extracting revenue for its war efforts. Apart from deploying a conventional army, the state has other strategies at its disposal such as measures of counter-insurgency. The aim is to win back the hearts and minds of the population. Such measures are, however, used in tandem with forced removals, mass killings, political intimidations, etc. (Kaldor, 1999). Despite variations in the amount and kind of violence they employ, states "can deploy police forces to arrest or fire at demonstrators; they can indiscriminately attack population centers; they can ethnically cleanse populations through population exchanges; they can even commit genocide" (Chenoweth & Lawrence, 2010, p. 4). Counter-insurgency measures include a mixture of paramilitary terror, military presence, and targeted social programs.

Having explained the concepts of motivations, interests, and strategies, the following section takes on the *Fanno* and sheds light on its motivations, interests, and strategies.

4. Who is the *Fanno*?

In the long course of its history, Ethiopia has been subjected to a series of invasions mainly from Turkey (Ottoman Empire), Egypt, Mahadist Sudan, and Italy. In the face of such invasions, it was not the monarchs alone that endured the burden of defending the country, the various sections of the society also developed a culture of warriorhood assuming the patriotic responsibility of defending the country. Variously called the *Fanno*, the *shifta*, and the *mekwanents*, these warriors have come to the scene at least since the reign of King Yikuno Amlak (r. 1270-1285), who founded the Christian Kingdom in the 13th

century. These three categories of soldiers are collectively called the *chewa*, meaning a war captive, prisoner, refugee, or one that lives by wandering about. In the 19th century, the *chewa* came to mean a "population of soldiers milling around the courts of the powerful" (Berhane-Selassie, 2018)

These three categories of warriors were different, however. While the *shifta* (bandits) were rebels engaged in fighting mainly for personal reasons, the *mekwanent* were officers or governors engaged in state service. The *Fanno* were volunteer soldiers, receiving support and commendations from their communities by virtue of their personal beliefs, commitments, and operational strategies (Berhane-Selassie, 2018). The term *Fanno* is derived from the Amharic word 'fanene', meaning 'to go out for a campaign or a battle' (a member of *Fanno*, interviewee #3, October 2022, p. 2). It literally means "someone who travels of their own volition or a 'band of leaderless soldiers' who were not accountable to anybody" (Berhane-Selassie, 2018, p. 47)

The *Fanno* engaged in military activities in border areas and thus acted as a guardian of state territories (Berhane-Selassie, 2018). They also propagated pan-Ethiopian patriotism- a shared national spirit in the local communities where they operated. They were strong, self-made warriors, originating in the culture of warriorhood inherent in Ethiopian society for centuries. The *Fanno* is a generic name encompassing all individuals from all walks of life: peasants, leaders, men, women, etc. who felt a sense of responsibility to defend their country and fight the excesses of monarchs. This life of warriorhood did not include monks, priests, merchants, and judges (Berhane-Selassie, 2018). They engaged in military training involving games, horse riding, and roaming around away from their community to be familiar with the ecological environment away from their locality. They shared common traits: being selfless, rising above challenges, forfeiting personal safety or comfort for the interest of the community without distinction in ethnicity, religion, or gender. They are all ready to act in a moment of notice; in times of trouble, they readily act as warriors, in times of tranquility, they engage in their own private lives as farmers, priests, craftsmen, etc. (personal communication with a member of *Fanno*, interviewee #3, October 2022, p. 6).

The availability of these categories of warriors proved a blessing in disguise for the monarchs at various junctures. The victory of Adowa by Emperor Menelik II was a case in point. Apart from the military might he had built in preparation for the war, Menelik rallied the armies of provincial rulers, consisting of infantrymen, archers, horsemen, and musketeers (Markakis, 2011). They were also part of the core of the Menelik's army that achieved another historical project- the southward march that led to the ingathering of the people and recovery of lost territories. With the use of these warriors, Menelik completed the territorial expansion into the various ethnic groups found in the southern part of present-day Ethiopia (Markakis, 2011).

The formation of modern Ethiopia in the 19th century saw the decline of *Fanno* activities. They were viewed by the subsequent monarchs not only as a threat to their throne but also as an impediment to their quest to build a strong salaried army capable of withstanding

foreign invasions. Emperor Tewodros II was the first monarch to undermine these warriors whom he considered as leftovers of *Zemene Mesafint* (Era of Princes). He wanted to overcome regional rivalries by absorbing them under a strong national army (Zewde, 2002). The modernization projects of Emperor Haile Selassie I also made them redundant. Loyal, salaried leaders were appointed to take over the task of collecting tributes and determining access to land. Moreover, rituals of gaming, hunting, horsemanship, *zeraf*[3] Recitations, and other martial activities were banned in the 1920s. Subsequently, traditional warriors were forced either to join the national army of the monarch or continue clandestine self-training continued in far-flung areas (Berhane-Selassie, 2018).

Despite such hostile state policies towards them, the *Fanno* showed resilience during the second invasion of Italy in 1935. They demonstrated their virtue, and a sense of responsibility for defending their land from enemies. For them, land is an ancestral place deserving protection at any cost. The *Fanno* became the force to fall back on, notably after Emperor Haile Selassie I fled the country. Despite a few *bandas*[4] that collaborated with the Italian army, the majority of warriors joined forces with *Fannos* in the fight against the Italian army. At the time, by the estimate of Italy, the population of Ethiopia reached seven million of which the number of the patriots was estimated at 123,350. The geographical distribution of the patriots varied across provinces. Gojjam was the bastion of the majority of the *Fannos*, with the highest number of the patriots (80%), followed by Gondar with 12% of the patriots; Oromo and Sidama accounted for 6%, followed by Shewa, 2% (Wolde-Mariam, 2015, p. 127).

The *Fanno* Resistance movement involved all regions and ethnic groups. The patriots persevered in their struggle, coordinating their attacks and rallying around their leaders in their respective communities. As Berhane-Selassie (2018) recounts: *Yegobez aleqas* (locally elected leaders) "saw the whole country as a large *fanno* territory, in which various similar groups could operate" (p. 378). They made the whole country ungovernable for the Italian army for the duration of five years. Following the liberation of the country, Emperor Haile-Selassie I returned home after five years of exile on 20 January 1941 accompanied by the British troops. To the dismay of the patriotic fighters, the emperor failed to ask the Ethiopian people for forgiveness for his betrayal during his exile. He also pushed aside them for appointments and promotions, while favoring the bandas and exiles (Gudina, 2003). The areas considered as bastions of the patriots were also condemned to neglect and deprivation. Gojjam, Gondar, and other areas that put up fierce patriotic resistance were deliberately left behind other provinces in terms of schools, clinics, and roads (Wolde-Mariam, 2015).

---

3 'zeraf' refers to declamations of patriotism and militaristic candor (Berhane-Selassie, 2018).

4 Not all people and *chewa* soldiers acted in unison with a sense of patriotism. Due to their grudge against the emperor, some regional lords used the opportunity to collaborate with Italy and enjoyed personal glory and spoils (lira-money of Italy). For their betrayal, they earned the name *banda*—group (in Italian) serving as mercenaries; derisively 'deserter' Amharic).

The *Fanno* spirit of warriorhood and resistance did not cease to permeate the psyche of the opposition. The very elites nurtured by the modern bureaucracy of the emperor turned against him. The bastion of such opposition was the Ethiopian Students Movement (ESM), which came to be a common platform for movements that raised ethnic, class, or regional interests (Zewde, 2002). They resuscitated the spirit of *Fanno* as a rallying point against the injustices of the regime:

<div align="center">

ፋኖ ተሰማራ

ፋኖ ተሰማራ

እንደነ ሆቼሚኒን እንደ ቼጉዌቬራ

Get out and about, fanno!

Get out and about, fanno!

Like Ho Chi Minh and like Che Guevara[5]

</div>

Despite the *Fanno* being their rallying point, the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM)[6] Was not a united front advancing a common agenda. Some groups advocated the 'class question', favoring a common class struggles against the 'feudal' regime, while others such as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) advocated the 'question of nationalities'[7]. The latter were ethnic-based armed groups that invoked ethnicity for their disaffections. Influenced by alien values and ideologies such as Marxism-Leninism, they vowed to fight for the right of nationalities to self-determination (Zewde, 2002; Berhe, 2008). They were of the conviction that the various nationalities in the 'empire-state' were oppressed by the 'Shewa Amhara nation' and thus deserved self-determination up to secession. Whether their interpretation of the country's politics was correct or not, they launched an insurgency and toppled the Dergue regime, which came to power by coup d'état against the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1974.

---

5   Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara are among the important figures that fought Western Imperialism in Vietnam and Cuba respectively. The youth that brought about the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia were inspired by these two figures.

6   The ESM was a period of student activism in Ethiopia in the 1960s and 1970s initially protesting against social and economic injustices. It shifted later to a struggle for radical revolutionary ideas such as the self-determination of ethnic groups.

7   The 'question of nationalities' refers to the struggles by ethno-national groups to rectify the alleged ethnic domination and marginalization at the hands of the Amhara since the formation of the modern Ethiopian state in the early 20th c. It served as a mobilization tool by ethno-nationalists that rallied their ethnic folks towards realizing self-determination rights up to secession. Some groups (mainly the OLF) went to the extent of portraying the Ethiopian state as a 'colonial empire' waiting to be decolonized for the people to exercise their self-determination (Vaughan, 2003).

5. Conflict in Wolkait

Against all odds, the *Fanno* movement endured as a symbol of struggle. It showed remarkable resilience among the Amhara ethnic group following the adoption of ethnic federalism in 1991. Its resurgence has been fueled by grievances against ethnic federalism, which was perceived as a political device of the TPLF. For the *Fanno*, ethnic federalism was a misnomer - it was a political strategy devised by the TPLF/EPRDF[8] To punish the Amhara in all ways possible. As an offshoot of the ESM, the TPLF identified the Amhara ethnic group as an oppressor nation imposing its own language, political system, and culture on other 'oppressed ethnic groups' (see the TPLF Manifesto, p. 76). As an oppressor group, the Amhara were depicted as enemies to be eliminated or subdued, while other ethnic groups, being one of the oppressed, are friends (Gudina, 2003). According to Vaughan (2003), despite the reticence among its protagonists to openly admit it for fear of loss of legitimacy, there is no denying that the current ethnic federalism has its ideological precedent in the colonial, fascist Italian system.

The *Fanno* raised a long list of grievances. One such grievances that pertain to our discussion is the annexation of Wolkait. Following the adoption of the current ethnic federal system in 1991, the previous administrative boundaries were demarcated putatively along ethnic criteria. While this was officially lauded as an important measure to respond to the 'national oppression' of ethnic groups through creating ethnic homelands for self-rule, it was perceived as a scramble for territory among the victors, notably the TPLF and the OLF (Gamachu, 1994). The Amhara lost territories they claimed as their own. According to Gudina (2003, p. 124), the victorious Tigrayan elites insisted on ethnic/linguistic criteria for the demarcation of territories to "expanded their Tigrayan home base by incorporating the Walkait and Humera region of Gondar" as envisaged in the TPLF's Manifesto-76. Indeed, the new territorial arrangement was a political process that entailed clear winners and losers. The Oromos, Afars, and Somalis became beneficiaries accruing the largest territories, while Amhara elites lost territories they claimed as their own (Abraham, 1994; Vaughan, 2003).

The redrawing of boundaries was among others the salient factors that became the hotbed of conflicts in Ethiopia. Contrary to expectations, ethnic-based federalism ended up being at the root of grievances for most ethnic groups (Kefale, 2009). Since 1991, the conflict

---

8   The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was a coalition of ethnic-based parties formed with the political patronage of the TPLF out of prisoners of war. When victory over the Dergue loomed large, the TPLF shifted its interest from secessionism to capturing the state. Yet, as one from a minority ethnic group, it had to forge an alliance with other ethnic-based armed groups that readily share its political program/manifesto. Accordingly, it forged an alliance with the EPDM/ANDM, the OPDO, and the SEPDM as its surrogates to govern the Amhara, Oromo, and the various groups in Southern Ethiopia. It then orchestrated a political process ushering in the adoption of ethnic federalism in 1991 (Gudina, 2003; Vaughan, 2003).

has become horizontal—pitting ethnic groups against one another. Incidents of violent communal conflicts became the norm: Oromo against Amhara, Somali against Oromo, Tigray against Amhara, etc. In other words, conflicts have increasingly become localized, pitting ethnic groups against each other (Abbink, 2006). The following section probes the motivations, interests, and strategies of the *Fanno* armed group.

6. Motivations, Interests, and Strategies of the *Fanno*

6.1. Motivations

Wolkait covers a vast swathe of territories south of the Tekeze River that were historically part of Begemedir province (Gamachu, 1994; Fitaye, 2021). The area consists mostly of mountainous areas in the east and plain lowlands in the West stretching over into the Sudan and Eritrea. Historically, it was part of the province of Begemidir/Gondar up until 1991, accommodating not only the indigenous Amharas but also the Tigrayans and Eritreans that crossed into the area seasonally for farmlands and trade (Fitaye, 2021). Quite unprecedently, when ethnicity emerged as the official criterion for defining administrative regions in 1991, Wolkait was officially incorporated into the Tigray Region. Although the issue of Wolkait has been viewed as originating from ethnic federalism, the roots of the conflict date back to the formation of the TPLF in the 1970s (personal communication with a local notable, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 4).

The first instigating factor for the onset of the conflict was the formation of the TPLF in 1976. As its 'Greater Tigray Manifesto' narrates, the foremost objective for which the TPLF was established was to end the alleged domination and exploitation of Tigray at the hands of the Shewan Amhara elite[9]. The TPLF vowed to establish 'Greater Tigray', an independent Tigray Republic, with territories extending to the Sudan in the west, Aluha River in the southeast, and the Port of Assab (Eritrea) in the east. To this end, the TPLF

---

9   The charges of Amhara domination were just political stereotypes exploited by ethno-nationalist groups for their assertions of ethnopolitical ends. Many scholars (e.g., Henze, 1986; Clapham, 1989; and Berhanu, 2000) ascertain that the 'Amhara domination' thesis held by the TPLF is replete with contradictions. First, the people of Tigray have a clear sense of being 'the foremost Ethiopians' as with the Amhara (Berhanu, 2000). The use of Amharic was not an issue for the traditional Tigrayan elites including Emperor Yohannes IV, who used Amharic for official correspondence within Tigray and elsewhere (Berhanu, 2000). Besides, Tigrayan culture was already a culture at the core of Imperial Ethiopia. Second, Tigray was immune from an economic surplus extraction imposed in other regions of Ethiopia (Berhanu, 2000). Third, the Tigray nobility was part of the power struggle in the national politics. The Shewan ruling class represented elites from the traditional Abyssinian core (Eritrea, Tigray, and Amhara) as well as some sections of Oromia. Zewde (2002) also notes that the mode of political struggle in Ethiopia was not ethnic in character, but regional, with Gondar, Yejju, Tigray, and Shewa provinces jockeying for power.

needed to annex territories from the neighboring Amhara and Eritrea. It crossed the Tekeze River in 1978 set foot on Shirela in Dejena, Wolkait, and deployed some of its fighters. The Amhara inhabitants were gathered and told that they were Tigrayans, and Wolkait was part of Tigray. If they wanted to live in the area, they should accept a Tigrayan identity, otherwise, leave the area, Tigray is for Tigrayans (personal communication with a local notable, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 5).

Amharas in Wolkait did not sit idle in the midst of such invasions and brutalities. They launched an armed resistance by organizing an armed group called Kefagn Patriotic Front. The word *kefagni* literally means 'I am aggrieved', for they faced persecution and loss of their ancestral land at the hand of the TPLF. It was formed out of patriots and vigilantes that came from various adjoining places of Gondar, reaching as many as 3000 armed fighters. They unleashed the first military encounter with the TPLF in Mezega, Wolkiat on 29 December 1979 for the aim of deterring the TPLF's further incursions into the rest of Wolkait (personal communication with a member of *Kefagni Fanno*, interviewee #4, October 2022, p. 8). The local notables and administrators of the area who understood the ulterior motives of the TPLF felt the need to fight back against the TPLF. They wondered: while the TPLF was formed for the liberation of Tigray, why did it make inroads into Wolkait? (personal communication with a member of *Kefagni Fanno*, interviewee #4, October 2022, p. 8).

In the initial years of the annexation, the ordinary people were ambivalent towards the TPLF. Since most of the people were frustrated with the brutal Dergue's rule, they readily embraced the TPLF as a liberator. Far from it. As time passed by, the people came to realize that the TPLF's motive was none other than subjugating them under the Tigrayan rule. The people from all walks of life, farmers, women, the youth joined the *Kefagni Fanno* fighters, launching a series of onslaughts on the strongholds of the TPLF in Dansha and Mezega. Indeed, the *Kefagni* fighters were able to protect some important areas such as Humera area from the TPLF's incursions well until1991 (personal communication with a member of *Kefagni Fanno*, interviewee #4, October 2022, p. 9).

Yet, the triumph of the TPLF over the Dergue in 1991 did not bode well for the *Kefagni* fighters. The TPLF captured the state and orchestrated the adoption of federalism based on ethnicity. In the guise of the right to self-determination, the TPLF officially declared Wolkait part of the sovereignty of Tigray[10]. The TPLF reinforced its grip on the area by

---

10 The TPLF claim that administrative boundaries have never been static in the history of Ethiopia, and thus there is nothing wrong with boundary restructuring that created nine ethnic regions and two autonomous cities in 1991 out of the old provinces. This territorial readjustment entailed that some ethnic groups take or forfeit territories they historically controlled. Tigray took Wolkait from the former province of Gondar, as it gave away territories on its eastern side to the newly constituted Afar Region (Tesfaye, 2022). The Amhara were given their own regional state out of territories from Gojjam, Gondar, Shewa, and Wollo, which they claim as their ancestral

launching what it termed as *shifta mintera* (a mission of eliminating rebels) throughout Ethiopia. In Wolkait, individuals having links to the *Kefagni* movement were targeted for persecution (personal communication with a local notable, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 5). The TPLF was bent on settling its score with the fighters who killed more than 12,000 of its fighters during its invasion of Wolkait. Elderly people were told that if they wanted Wolkait's restoration to Gondar, they had to pay 1.3 million USD in compensation for the sacrifices of its fighters (Fitaye, 2021).

The TPLF intensified the 'Tigrayanization' of Wolkait. With the declaration of Tigrigna as the official language of the Tigray Region, the use of Amharic was not only prohibited but also punishable as a criminal offense. No one was allowed to use it in schools, marketplaces, churches, festivals, or even for conversations (personal communication with a local notable, interviewee #5, October 2022, p. 6). A resettlement program was also launched to overwhelm the Amhara by Tigrayan settlers. Tigrayan refugees from the Sudan and farmers from other parts of Tigray were resettled on the farmlands snatched from Wolkait farmers (Berhanu, 2000).

In a bid to erase the Amhara identity, the TPLF masterminded acts of genocide such as gang rape, killings, looting, abduction, subjugation, torture, incarceration, displacement, abortion and sterilization of women. It was recorded that Libanos Gebre-Selassie, a Tigrayan, raped and impregnated 15 school girls (personal communication with a local notable, interviewee #5, October 2022, p. 7). The TPLF followed a policy of assimilation (encouraging Tigrayan men to marry Wolkaite women; crowding out Wolkait men out of the area or killing them). Wolkaite women were sterilized through family control programs. Tigrayan men do not bother in their parlance to disclose their intention of taking the land and women (personal communication with a local notable, interviewee #5, 2022, p. 7).

The TPLF built notorious prison cells in Wolkait where Amharas were tortured or killed, such as Minmine Washa, Belesa Mai Hamato, Bahla, Gehaneb, and others in Dejena, Maikadra, Tirkan, Bereket, Fiyel wuha, Dima, etc. The bodies of thousands of Wolkaite Amharas were unearthed recently by the community (Alemu *et al*., 2022). Wolkaite

---

homelands. Thus, the Amhara claim of Wolkait is irredentist—a threat to the rationale of ethnic federalism, which aims to address the national question by ensuring self-determination (Tesfaye, 2022). As the TPLF argues, the old Ethiopia came to an end with the demise of the Dergue regime in 1991. It survived total disintegration after 'sovereign' ethnic groups 'came together' to form a federal system based on self-determination (Melesse, 2022). If anything happens that threatens their sovereignty, ethnic groups are entitled to secede as stipulated under Article 39 of the FDRE constitution. However, the historical fact is that Ethiopia was a unitary state before devolving into a federal system. The federal system that came about in 1991 was not a 'coming-together' federalism, as advanced by the TPLF but that of 'holding together federalism' (Kefale, 2009). The obvious evidence is that sovereign ethnic groups with their own fixed territory as we see today did not exist prior to 1991. Neither Tigray nor Amhara, Oromia, etc. existed as sovereign entities with their own delimited territories.

Amharas were forced to adopt Tigrayan names or modify their names so as to sound like typical Tigrayan names to avoid risks of harassment and discrimination. Original Amharic names of their ancestral lands were given names in Tigrigna. Historical places, palaces (reminiscent of Amhara history), schools, hospitals, towns, hotels, shops, rivers, and local homesteads became targets of name-changing (Alemu *et al.*, 2022).

6.2. Strategies

Amidst such brutalities, the Amhara identity of the population has not withered. All these atrocities and brutalities only reinforced the resolve of the people to pursue their struggle using a range of strategies, both peaceful and violent.

6.2.1. Armed Resistance

As reiterated already, the TPLF relied on brute force to subdue the people and force them to embrace Tigrayan identity. As a reaction, the *Kefagni* armed resistance movement was formed by the Wolkait Amharas. They waged guerrilla warfare with the support of the Dergue for its supplies. When the TPLF defeated the Dergue and captured the state in Addis Ababa in 1991, parts of Wolkait such as Dansha and Humera were still free. The *Kefagni* armed resistance was not, however, a strongly organized armed group with well-defined objectives and hierarchical organization. It was no match for the TPLF. They were only driven by the simple goal of fighting the TPLF after the fall of the Dergue. It was recorded that the TPLF lost around 20,000 of its troops in Wolkait at the hands of *Kefagni* fighters, from the total 65,000 soldiers it had sacrificed throughout its insurgency (personal communication with a veteran of the TPLF, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 8). Yet, the armed resistance faltered in the face of the TPLF's brutal force.

6.2.2. Use of Traditional Mediation

The people persevered in their struggle against the TPLF's annexation by abandoning government channels. Instead of going to courts, for example, they used their traditional conflict resolution system called *shimglina* to settle cases of disputes and disagreements. The government run by the TPLF was considered an alien system hellbent on subjugating them. They boycotted administrative and judicial offices filled by Tigrayan cadres, and rather resorted to their elderly people to resolve issues. They had various reasons for abandoning the local government. First and foremost, their mother tongue, Amharic, was strictly forbidden in schools, markets, or government offices. The TPLF cadres are everywhere to enforce the use of Tigrigna (personal communication with a local notable, interviewee #5, October 2022, p. 7).

Secondly, against their will, Wolkait was re-named Western Tigray zone, whose seat was Shire, which is 500 kms from Humera. Wolkait has many towns (e.g., Humera and

Dansha) that could serve as a seat of the zonal administration if the intention of the TPLF was to serve the people (personal communication with a member of Wolkait Committee, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 6). Mekele City, the capital of Tigray Region is even further, more than 700 kms from Wolkait. It was a hassle and costly for the people to go as far as such cities in Tigray for court appeals, investment, or whatever. They would rather come to Gondar city, 250 kms from their homes for market, schools, and official purposes. They would rather go even to Sudan for various purposes than to Shire or Mekelle in Tigray (personal communication with a member of Wolkait Committee, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 6).

6.2.3. Petitions

At the outset, questions were raised during the Transitional Period (1991-1994) by various political stakeholders on the merits of the redrawing of Wolkait into the Tigray Regional State. For instance, the former governor of Gondar province, Dagnaw Wolde-Selassie, and his friend, Fitaye Assegu, wrote a three-page letter of appeal to the late Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, with a copy to the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) in protest of the annexation of Wolkait by the TPLF. They highlighted the historical solidarity and peaceful co-existence between the Amhara and Tigrayans, also warning that the new territorial annexation would invite mutual hatred, atrocities, and antagonisms between the two population groups (Alebachew, 2020).

Leveraging its dominant position in the federal government, the TPLF prevented the issue from being raised and deliberated in the parliament, media, courts, etc. The TPLF was not willing to solve the issue even by any means. At the time, it did not have the political will to entertain such kinds of cases; it was a transitional period, an important historical juncture when the TPLF was grappling to consolidate its power. It was also aware that the hearts and minds of Wolkaites were Gonder, Amhara, and not Tigray. It would lose the case even if it willed to engage the issue by all means except brute force. Once it consolidated its grip on power, the TPLF remained steadfast in maintaining the *status quo* of annexation of Wolkait (Fitaye, 2021).

6.2.4. Protest Marches

On many occasions, the people of Gondar staged protests in the form of peaceful demonstrations and strikes. A case in point is the one organized in Gondar City on 16 July 2016, making the Wolkait question a rallying agenda of the whole Amhara people. The popular protest was sparked by the TPLF's attempt to arrest members of the Wolkait Amhara Identity Committee (henceforth, the Committee) in Gondar City on 16 July 2016. The Committee was formed in Gondar city in 2015 among the Wolkait Amharas displaced by the TPLF. Its avowed goal was to reclaim the Amhara identity of the people and their land of Wolkait through legal or constitutional avenues (personal communication

with a member of Wolkait Identity Committee, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 3). The Committee came to the scene after the *Kefagni* armed movement fizzled out in the early 1990s under the TPLF's brute force. The TPLF dispatched a military squad tasked with arresting the Committee members from their homes in Gondar city. In the exchange of fire that followed, many of the TPLF forces were killed by Colonel Demeke Zewdu, the leader of the Committee, and the *Fanno* forces led by Gobbie Melkie and Dejenie Maru (Alebachew, 2020).

Apart from the annexation of Wolkait, the protesters raised deep-rooted grievances against the excesses of the TPLF. The popular protest spread to other cities and towns of the Amhara region, sparking the Amhara protest against the TPLF hegemony in national politics. The demonstrators chanted the Amhara grievances: annexation of Wolkait by the TPLF, national oppression of the Amhara under the TPLF minority rule, and ethnic cleansing of the Amhara in other parts of the country, among others (Alebachew, 2020). The popular protests in Amhara coincided with another popular protest in Oromia region, emboldening the ANDM and the OPDO to protest in defiance of the hegemony of the TPLF within the EPRDF. The internal power struggle among the coalition members of the EPRDF led to the shift of power to the OPDO thereby ending the hegemony of the TPLF in national politics (personal communication with a political analyst, interviewee #2, October 2022, p. 7).

The coming of the new leadership under Abiy Ahmed in 2018 appeared a beacon of hope for the Committee. His discourse in favor of unity and forgiveness raised the hopes of many Ethiopians including the people of Wolkait. He alluded to ethnic federalism as the mother of all ills in the country, pledging that it would be reformed. Lemma Megersa, from the OPDO, denounced the prevailing 'national oppression' discourse of the EPRDF, saying: "There is no oppressor nation, and had never been before" (Alebachew, 2020, p. 337). The speech came as a new glimmer of hope for Ethiopians who were frustrated with ethnic federalism, which hinged on antagonism between the Oromo and the Amhara- the two largest ethnic groups in the country.

The Committee seized the opportunity and met Abiy Ahmed on the sidelines of public meetings he made with the residents of Gondar at Goha Hotel in Gondar, on 19 April 2018. They highlighted to him the issues at the heart of their quest: the experience they had gone through: the persecution they suffered, lack of political will to solve the issue by the TPLF and federal institutions. They urged him to stop the TPLF from its heinous crimes and expedite a peaceful way of addressing their identity question. He pledged to them that the issue would be resolved in line with the FDRE constitution, and till then he advised them to cool the heat. Despite the prevailing optimism, the brutalities of the TPLF got worse. Almost three years passed without his promises coming true (personal communication with a member of the Wolkait Committee, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 10).

7. Interests of the *Fanno*

7.1. Recognition of Amhara Identity

The Wolkait Identity Committee stresses that their question is nothing but regaining their Amhara identity. Their struggle has been aimed at restoring the Amhara identity denied and downtrodden by the TPLF for the last four decades. They assert that contrary to their wishes, they were subjected to forceful incorporation to the Tigray Regional State in 1991. The issue of Wolkait is thus as a showcase of the weaknesses of the much-vaunted ethnic federalism to adequately and practically accommodate the demands for ethnic self-determination. The Committee claim that border delimitations run contrary to the provisions of Proclamation no. 7/1992 providing for the delimitations of borders of the 14 national self-governments. Ar. 4 of the proclamation provides that delimitations of borders shall take into consideration a set of factors including adjacency of the territory, previous borders of Woredas pending detailed studies, settlement pattern, and interests of the people.

In view of the provisions spelled out above, Wolkait should have remained part of the adjacent districts of Gondar within the Amhara Region. Contrary to these provisions, Wolkait was severed from the adjacent Gondar districts and lumped into Tigray. Still worse, when the borders of regional states were redrawn upon the ratification of the FDRE constitution in 1994, Wolkait was retained as part of the Tigray Region. According to the Committee, despite the clear provision of Ar. 46 (2) of the FDRE constitution—"States shall be delimited on the basis of the settlement patterns, language, identity and consent of the peoples concerned", the delimitation process was undertaken solely based on the political and economic motives of the TPLF. As Vaughan (2003) confirms despite the criteria set forth in Ar. 46 of the FDRE constitution, the Border Commission, in charge of the administrative divisions, relied predominantly on current language use as an effective criterion, shrugging off other markers of identity such as settlement patterns, consent of the people, or history.

In pursuit of recognition of Amhara identity, the Committee invoked Ar. 39 of the FDRE constitution in support of their claim- any nation, nationality, or people has the right to self-determination up to secession. Ar. 39 (2) specifically provides ethnic groups with the right to speak, write and develop one's own language; express, develop and promote one's own culture; and preserve one's own history.

7.2. Reintegration with the Amhara Region

Apart from demands for recognition of their Amhara identity as per Ar. 39 (2), the Wolkait Committee requested the House of the Federation to pass a decision in favor of redrawing the border so as to incorporate them within the Amhara Regional State. The Committee claimed to have already presented its requests to all hierarchies, exhausting all avenues within

the Tigray Regional State, but to no avail. They lodged their request on 17 December 2015 to the State Council of the Tigray Region, with a copy to the EPRDF parties, the House of the Federation, and the Office of the Prime Minister. In their request letter, they urged the House of the Federation to render its decision on the basis of Ar. 46 of the FDRE constitution (personal communication with a member of Wolkait Committee, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 4). The Committee also invoked Ar. 48 of the FDRE constitution, which provides the House of the Federation with the jurisdiction to settle such disputes on the basis of settlement patterns, or the wishes of the people concerned. Yet, which avenue should be applied is a matter of contention.

For the Wolkait Committee, the use of a referendum (as an expression of the wishes of the people) to settle the issue is not welcome for various reasons. At the outset, the issue of Wolkait is a clear case of annexation; the TPLF had already annexed and incorporated the area before the current constitution was adopted. The people were not consulted either. As such, the area should be restored to the Gondar, Amhara without any legal altercation. Moreover, the TPLF had deliberately undertaken demographic engineering aimed at overwhelming the area with Tigrayan settlers. In such a situation, who is going to vote: the Tigrayan settlers, or the indigenous Wolkait Amharas? The use of a referendum is also a zero-sum game that does not accommodate the interest of all interested parties. So far, it has been tried in other parts of the country, yet with limited effectiveness. Other innovative options should be sought such as "power sharing, joint administration, and bringing disputed territories under federal jurisdiction" (Kefale, 2019, p. 2).

If the issue is to be settled amicably, the best option lies in revising or dismantling the existing ethnic-based federal system. Before the annexation by the TPLF, the area was peaceful allowing not only Amharas and Tigrayans but also Eritreans to co-exist. No ethnic group was the exclusive owner of a particular territory. There is no scope to solve the issue of Wolkait within the framework of the existing constitution that associates a particular territory with a particular ethnic group. It is either for Tigray or Amhara- no middle way. If it is for the Amhara, Tigrayans will be minorities-second class citizens. If it is for Tigray, Wolkait Amharas will be minorities, facing once again the brunt of being a minority within Tigray.

Referendum is not also a preferable option for the people of Wolkait. As provided in Ar. 47 of the FDRE constitution, the referendum is used only for establishing a separate *woreda*, zone, or regional state. Yet, this is not part of their demand. What they are asking is a self-determination right to reunite with their kindred—the Amhara people within the Amhara Regional State. They claim to be ethnic Amhara forced to live in Tigray as a minority. It is for this reason that the Wolkait question has been viewed by the TPLF as an irredentist claim. The TPLF has denounced the request of the Wolkait Committee as an instance of an irredentist claim by the Amhara elites to snatch Tigray's territory. As an identity issue, the TPLF claims, Wolkait is Tigray, which had already been settled in 1991. The issue is merely a political pursuit by Amhara elites to aggrandize territory by claiming territory that belongs to Tigray. The people living in the area are Tigrayans. Thus, the issue is a

boundary claim instigated and spearheaded by the Amhara expansionist elites who desire to bring back the old order of Amhara domination. If anything, the Wolkait issue has to do with governance issues such as corruption, embezzlement, discrimination or lack of infrastructure and facilities, lack of public participation, etc. (personal communication with a veteran of the TPLF, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 9).

The TPLF holds that the right to self-determination is supposed to be exercised only by the nations, nationalities, and people found in one of the established regional states as specified in Ar. 39 (4) and Ar. 47 (3). As such, the right to self-rule is entertained within the host state (Tigray Region) and the jurisdiction lies in the Regional Council concerned. As such, if there is a need to address the issue, the request should be presented to the Regional State's Council (personal communication with a veteran of the TPLF, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 9). Yet, this way of addressing such self-determination quests by the Regional States where the issue has arisen begs the question: how can the host regional state be expected to be fair and impartial on the issue in which it has a vested interest? The Tigray regional State is by no means expected to make a decision that risks losing out a huge land.

For the Wolkait Committee, there are also practical precedents available in support of their claim for redrawing of the border. The case of Waghimra is a case in point. As with Wolkait, it was annexed by the TPLF during its insurgency and delimited to Tigray in 1991. It was later restored to the Wollo province of the Amhara region. Although the TPLF did not provide justifications for its decision to return the territory to the Amhara Region, the possible reasons surmised at the time were: the people of Waghimra fought the Dergue along with the EPDM/ANDM- a party claiming to represent the Amhara; the land was ecologically degraded and as such irrelevant for Tigray; and the area was not deemed strategically important for the TPLF. The Wolkait Committee argues that, by the same token, the TPLF should return Wolkait to the Amhara Region (personal communication with a member of Wolkait Committee, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 4).

Following the loss of its hegemony in the wake of the ascendancy of Abiy Ahmed in 2018, the TPLF was contemplating either reclaiming the national power or failing this, secession. It attacked the Northern Command of the National Army stationed in Tigray on the 4th of November 2021. This was soon followed by the federal government launching what it termed as 'law enforcement operations' against the TPLF (Tedla & Kelklie, 2021). The *Fanno* joined forces with the federal army and the Amhara Special Forces in the fight against the TPLF security forces. Having suffered defeat on the battle lines, the TPLF left Wolkait within two weeks of the start of the full-blown war. Subsequently, the Committee took over the interim administrative responsibility of Wolkait. For them, Tekeze is re-established as the natural frontier between Tigray and Amhara. Currently, Wolkait with four of its woredas, Kabtia-Humera, Wolkait, Tegede, and Awra have been *de facto* under Amhara Regional State Administration constituting a new administrative zone (personal communication with a member of Wolkait Committee, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 9). For now, Amharas regained what they claim as their 'ancestral land' forcefully annexed by the TPLF without their consent.

Meanwhile, the federal government led by the Oromo Prosperity Party (OPP) and the TPLF signed a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities (CoHA) in Pretoria, South Africa on 2 November 2022 to put an end to their military confrontation. Yet, the prospect of the peace deal ensuring lasting peace is suspect due to many sticking points. The peace deal excluded the *Fanno* or the Wolkait Amhara Identity Committee. While it was intended to settle the power struggle between the TPLF and the OPP, the main issue that pits Tigray and Amhara-Wolkait was left unaddressed. The OPP has a vested interest in perpetuating the status quo of ethnic federalism. The PM has made the position of his party clear in stating that the amendment of the constitutional order is out of the frame (Shiferaw & Ishiyama, 2021). The OPP and the TPLF renewed a shared commitment to keep ethnic federalism. In view of this, resolving the Wolkait issue through constitutional amendment seems an impossible reality. It remains a zero-sum issue between Tigray and Amhara over its ownership. It belongs either to Amhara or Tigray, not to both.

Wolkait remains bait for the Abiy-led Prosperity Party (PP), which does not want to give Wolkait to the Amhara, as it will create trouble for ethnic federalism, by creating an unfavorable precedent for future territorial claims. Thus, they object to Wolkait being restored to the Amhara. It has also implications for budget allocation. The Amhara— viewed as a historical foe among the Oromo elites, will get more budget and territory. That is why the Oromo-dominated federal government led by Abiy Ahmed refused to allocate a budget to the area. The PP insists that the area should be under the control of the federal government. Wolkait is one of the most important strategic places that could shape the political dynamics in the country. If it falls into the hands of the TPLF, it will invite a threat to the hegemony of the PP or even the survival of the country itself. Yet, the Wolkait Committee does not trust the PP-led federal government dominated by Oromos, viewing federal control of the area as a ploy for the TPLF take-over, which will subject the people to yet another round of subjugation (personal communication with a member of Wolkait Committee, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 9).

7.3. Indemnity and Compensation

As reiterated already, the people of Wolkait have endured unspeakable abuses that amount to genocide at the hands of the TPLF. They were forcefully incorporated into the Tigray Region thereby losing their Amhara identity and their ancestral lands. They became minorities in their own ancestral land, facing atrocities and brutalities such as gang rape, killings, looting, abduction, subjugation, torture, incarceration, displacement, abortion, and sterilization. All these acts were part of the grand strategy of 'Tigrayanization' of the area. Apart from the systematic homogenization policy, the TPLF orchestrated ethnic cleansing that involved door-to-door killings of the Amhara in Mai-Kadra town on the eve of its military showdown with the federal government in November 2020. The TPLF vowed to leave no stone unturned to settle a score with the Amhara, 'their historical foe'. In the desperate attacks that followed, close to 1600 civilians, most of them Amharas, were mercilessly murdered in Mai Kadera town, Wolkait (Tedla & Kelklie, 2021). Thus,

they stand in need of indemnity and legal justice whereby the TPLF is held accountable (personal communication with a member of the Wolkait Committee, interviewee #1, October 2022, p. 9).

8. Conclusion and the Way Forward

The paper has demonstrated that the issue of Wolkait is not a mere ethnic conflict between Amhara and Tigray ethnic groups. The conflict has its roots in the formation of the TPLF, the motive of which was the establishment of 'Greater Tigray' by carving out territories from Amhara and present-day Eritrea. The TPLF had annexed the area in the 1970s and later lumped to the Tigray Region in the wake of the adoption of ethnic federalism in 1991. Far from being a solution, the new political dispensation and the attendant redrawing of boundaries putatively along ethnicity added fuel to the conflict. In the bitter struggle lasting for four decades, the Wolkait people have endured unspeakable atrocities that amount to genocide. Since November 2020, they have regained their freedom and land after having dislodged the TPLF militarily. Yet, their struggle is yet to be legally/ constitutionally settled. They are still pursuing their struggle on two fronts. They are doing the necessary by arming themselves to face up to a potential invasion from the TPLF. They are appealing for constitutional settlement of their quest for self-determination. There is a growing concern that the issue has been complicated due to vested interests among competing political actors in the country. Unless the situation is solved amicably, it may spark a civil war that even puts the country's survival in danger.

References

1. Abbink, J. (2006). Ethnicity and conflict generation in Ethiopia: Some problems and prospects of ethno-regional federalism. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies, 24*(3), 389–414.

2. Abraham, A. (1994). *Ethiopia from bullets to the ballot box: The bumpy road to democracy and the political economy of transition*. Red Sea Press.

3. Alebachew, C. (2020). *Daget Yaberetaw Ye'Amhara Finot*. [The Uphill Amhara struggle]. Birana Books.

4. Alemu, A. Tekeba, L. Filatie, D., Alemu, M., & Asrade, G. (2022). Invasion of history and identity. In A. Alemu (Ed.), *Annexation and structural genocide in Wolkait Tegedie and Telemit, an investigation* (pp. 27–115). University of Gondar.

5. Ballentine, K., & Nitzschke, H. (2003). *Beyond greed and grievance: Policy lessons from studies in the political economy of armed conflict*. IPA Policy Report. International Peace Academy.

6. Baregu, M. (2011). *Understanding obstacles to peace: Actors, interests, and strategies in Africa's Great Lakes Region.* Fountain Publishers.

7. Berhanu, K. (2000). *Returnees, resettlement, and power relations: The making of a political constituency in Humera, Ethiopia*. VU University Press.

8. Berhane-Selassie, T. (2018). *Ethiopian warriorhood: Defence, land, & society, 1800-1941*. Boydell & Brewer.

9. Berhe, A. (2008). *A political history of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (1975-1991): Revolt, ideology and mobilization in Ethiopia*. PhD Thesis defended at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit.

10. Chenoweth, E. & Lawrence, A. (2010). Introduction. In E. Chenoweth and A. Lawrence (Eds.), *Rethinking violence: States and non-state actors in conflict* (pp. 1–20). The MIT Press.

11. Clapham, C. (1989). The state and revolution in Ethiopia. *Review of African Political Economy*, *44*, 4–17.

12. Collier, P. (2000). *Economic causes of civil conflict and their implications for policy.* World Bank.

13. Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1995, August 21). *Refworld*. Retrieved from https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1995/en/18206.

14. Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications.

15. Fitaye, B. (2021). *The tears of Wolkait, Gondar and the Amhara people: The contribution and plight of the Amhara people in Ethiopian history and civilization*. Signature Book Printing.

16. John, S. (2021). The potential of democratization in Ethiopia: The Welkait question as a Litmus test. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *56*(5), 1007–1023.

17. Gamachu, D. (1994). A nation in perpetual transition: The politics of changes in administrative divisions and subdivisions in Ethiopia. In G. Marcus (Ed.), *The 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (pp. 83–113). Red Sea Press.

18. Grävingholt, J. (2007). *Development cooperation and non-state armed groups*. Studies/German Development Institute.

19. Gudina, M. (2003). *Ethiopia: Competing ethnic nationalisms and the quest for democracy, 1960–2000.* Shaker Publishing.

20. Henze, P. (1986). *Rebels and separatists in Ethiopia: Regional resistance to a Marxist regime*. RAND Corporation.

21. Kaldor, M. (1999). *New and old wars: Organized violence in a global era.* Polity Press.

22. Kefale, A. (2009). *Federalism and ethnic conflict in Ethiopia: A comparative study of the Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz Regions*. PhD Dissertation, Universiteit Leiden.

23. Kefale, A. (2019). *Emerging political reforms and the future of Ethiopian federalism: Policy options for stability, peace, and development*. APN Briefing Note No. 22. Social Science Research Council

24. Kincheloe, J., & McLaren, P. (2000). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research,* 5th ed (pp. 279–313). Sage.

25. Manifesto of the TPLF (Hand-written, February 1976) [Amharic version]. Retrieved from https://tassew.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/tplf_manifesto_-_1968_e-c.pdf.

26. Markakis, J. (2011). *Ethiopia: The last two frontiers*. James Currey.

27. Mateos, O. (2010). Beyond greed and grievance: Towards a comprehensive approach to African armed conflicts: Sierra Leone as a case study. In R. Bowd and B. Chikwanha (Eds.), *Understanding Africa's contemporary conflicts: Origins, challenges and peacebuilding* (pp. 25–59). Institute for Security Studies.

28. Melesse, K. (2022, May 16). To achieve sustainable peace in Ethiopia, ethnic federalism must be replaced. *Ethiopia Insight*. Retrieved from https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2022/05/16/to-achieve-sustainable-peace-in-ethiopia-ethnic-federalism-must-be-replaced/.

29. Murshed, S., & Tadjoeddin, M. (2007). *Reappraising the greed and grievance explanations for violent internal conflict*, MICROCON Research Working Paper 2. MICROCON.

30. Ndiyun, R. K. (2024). Central African Republic: The politicization of religion and conflict. *Conflict Studies Quarterly, 47*, 46–63.

31. Regassa, T. (2010). Learning to live with conflicts: Federalism as a tool of conflict management in Ethiopia - An overview. *Mizan Law Review*, *4*(1), 52–101.

32. Schneckener, U. (2009). *Spoilers or governance actors? Engaging armed non-state groups in areas of limited statehood*. SFB-Governance Working Paper Series No. 21. DFG Research Center.

33. Schuberth, M. (2015). The challenge of community-based armed groups: Towards a conceptualization of militias, gangs, and vigilantes. *Contemporary Security Policy*, *36*(2), 296–320. DOI: 10.1080/13523260.2015.1061756.

34. Shiferaw, B., & Ishiyama, J. (2021). Political transition and the rise of Amhara nationalism in Ethiopia. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *56*(5), 1036–1050.

35. Smith, M. (2011, April 28). Strategic Theory: What it is…. and just as importantly, what it isn't. *E-international Relations*. Retrieved from https://www.e-ir.info/2011/04/28/strategic-theory-what-it-is%e2%80%a6and-just-as-importantly-what-it-isn%e2%80%99t/.

36. Spittaels, S., & Hilgert, P. (2008). *Handbook: Mapping conflict motives in war areas*. International Peace Information Service (IPIS).

37. Tedla, W., & Kelklie, M. (2021, April 29). *Wolkait, Ethiopia: Geo strategic importance and the consequential annexation by TPLF. Horn of Africa Insight*. Retrieved from https://www.hornafricainsight.org/post/welkait-ethiopia-geo-strategic-importance-and-the-consequential-annexation-by-tplf.

38. Tesfai, G. (2015). The practice of fiscal federalism in Ethiopia: A critical assessment 1991-2012. An institutional approach. PhD dissertation, Faculty of Economics and Social Science, University of Fribourg.

39. Tesfaye, A. (2022, August 3). Under Ethiopia's federal system, Western Tigray belongs in Tigray. *Ethiopia Insight*. Retrieved from https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2022/08/03/under-ethiopias-federal-system-western-tigray-belongs-in-tigray/.

40. Vaughan, S. (2003). *Ethnicity and power in Ethiopia*. PhD thesis, The University of Edinburgh.

41. Vinci, A. (2006). Greed and grievance reconsidered: The role of power and survival in the motivation of armed groups. *Civil Wars*, *8*(1), 25–45.

42. Wallensteen, P. (2002). *Understanding conflict resolution: War, peace and the global system.* Sage Publications.

43. Wolde-Mariam, M. (2015). *Adafne: Firhatina Mekshef* (Amharic version). Mesfin Wolde-Mariam.

44. Wonbera, T., W. (2024). Ethiopia: Ethnic conflict and tragedy. A comprehensive analysis of the Hamar, Karo, and Arbore communities. *Conflict Studies Quarterly, 47*, 64–79.

45. Young, O. (1972). The actors in world politics. In J. N. Rosenau, V. Davis and M. East (Eds.), *The Analysis of International Politics* (pp. 140–145). The Free Press.

46. Yin, K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Sage.

47. Zewde, B. (2002). *A history of modern Ethiopia (1855-1991)*, 2nd ed. James Currey.

Cameroon:
Façade of Autonomy?
The Special Status as A Solution to The Anglophone Crisis

Robert Kosho NDIYUN

Ricky Munyaradzi MUKONZA

Abstract: The legacy of colonialism in Africa, characterized by artificial boundary imposition, has resulted in engrained conflicts rooted in ethnic and cultural divisions. The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon illustrates this enduring socio-political unrest, with the North-West and South-West regions demanding greater autonomy and recognition of their socio-cultural, linguistic, and legal identity. In response, the Cameroonian government granted special status to these regions in the 2019 decentralization law, promising greater self-governance. This study critically gauges the effectiveness of this special status in responding to Anglophone demands through the lens of autonomy and conflict resolution theories. It explores whether this measure genuinely empowers these regions or merely represents a façade of autonomy. Employing qualitative methods, the research includes textual analysis, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions with government officials, Anglophone leaders, and civil society. The findings reveal that despite hastily granting the special status, its implementation has been ineffective in addressing the grievances of the Anglophone regions. Consequently, the special status has remained a façade of autonomy because of excessive state control over regional institutions and a lack of political will to effectively devolve powers and resources. This paper emphasizes the need for inclusive strategies to address protracted conflicts and advances the discourse on sustainable autonomy solutions in subnational conflicts.

Robert Kosho NDIYUN

Post-Doctoral Research Fellow,
Department of Public Affairs,
Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria,
South Africa
E-mail: ndiyun2@gmail.com
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6435-0494

Ricky Munyaradzi MUKONZA

Associate Professor,
Department of Public Affairs,
Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria,
South Africa

Introduction

The tendency for conflict in post-colonial African states and regions often transcends the divisions established during colonial rule. Tensions frequently emerge along linguistic and colonial lines, affecting Anglophone, Arabophone, Francophone, and Lusophone nations (Araoye, 2012). Cameroon with about 250 ethnic groups, 270 national languages, and diverse cultural heritage (Aime, 2020), has grappled with the Anglophone crisis since 2016 which further escalated into an armed conflict. The crisis stems from the French-speaking majority government's perceived marginalization of the country's English-speaking North-West and South-West regions, commonly known as the Anglophone problem (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003; Bang & Balgah, 2022; Atom, 2023). Ngoh (2019) defines the Anglophone problem as:

> "*a minority problem; linguistic/language (Anglo-Saxon culture and values) minority as against linguistic/language (Gaullic culture and values) majority ... The problem is/was a "clash" between the majority Gaullic (French) culture and values and the minority Anglo-Saxon (British/English) culture and values"* (p. 382).

Fanso (2017) contends that it is the political, socio-economic, and linguistic relegation of Anglophones and their consideration as second-class Cameroonians. Anglophone Cameroonians refer to those who, originate from the English-speaking regions of Cameroon (North West and South West regions), formerly the British Southern Cameroon, constituting about 20% of the Cameroon population. This population asserts its identity based on colonialism-induced political, economic, social, and cultural features (Ngam & Budi, 2021). Ndi (2013) holds that historical indicators in the North West and South West have established a nearly inseparable bond between the Anglophones in Cameroon.

The Anglophone population has nurtured a sustained feeling that their linguistic and cultural identity is not sufficiently represented in the socio-political institutions of Cameroon, resulting in mounting resentment and requests for broader autonomy or even secession (Bang & Balgah, 2022). To respond to the Anglophone crisis, the Cameroonian government integrated into the 2019 decentralization law (hereafter referred to as 2019 law), a special status for the Anglophone regions (Crisis Group, 2023). This legislative innovation intended to endow the Anglophone regions with greater autonomy and policy-making authority within the context of a unitary state in Cameroon. However, the features of this special status and its potential impact on the Anglophone crisis remain a theme of enduring discussion and research. Autonomy is a form of territorial self-rule in which a special status is granted to a territorially defined entity, accompanied by broader powers than other territorial regions of the same state (Wolf, 2013). According to Wolf and Weller

(2005), such autonomy to a specific region does not alter the state's institutional structure. Contrary to the view that autonomy intervenes as an interim step towards absolute self-governance, this research examines autonomy arrangements that safeguard national unity and excludes options for separation and independence.

This paper aims to critically scrutinize the special status mechanism and its implications for the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. Specifically, the study seeks to respond to the following research question: How does the special status of the Anglophone regions of Cameroon signify a frank effort to address the Anglophone crisis? Or is it purely a façade of autonomy that fails to tackle the fundamental issues? This research draws on existing scholarly outputs on the Anglophone crisis and empirical data collected through interviews and textual analysis, to offer a holistic understanding of the special status mechanism and its possible impact on the Anglophone population.

The available literature on Cameroon's Anglophone crisis affords a dense underpinning for this study. Researchers have broadly written on the historical and political features contributing to the marginalization of the Anglophone regions (Keke, 2020; Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003; Shulika & Tella, 2022) including socio-cultural marginalization and dominance by the francophone-led government (Agwanda & Asal, 2021; Caxton, 2017), ethnonationalism (Fonchingong, 2013), and economic marginalization of natural resources rich Anglophone regions (Wanie & Tanyi 2013; Pommerolle & Heungoup, 2017). Other scholars have focused on the eminent disaster emergency of the crisis (Bang & Balgah, 2022).

These studies have emphasized the long-lasting protests of the Anglophone population, including the perceived disparity in resource distribution, the supremacy of the French language in the public sphere and education, and the insufficient representation in policy-making processes. Moreover, scholars have investigated the numerous efforts by the Cameroonian government to address the Anglophone crisis, including the application of decentralization strategies and the establishment of regional councils (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003; Crisis Group, 2023). However, these solutions have witnessed criticisms for their narrow scope and inability to respond to the essential desires of the Anglophone population, such as greater autonomy or federalism.

This study aims to contribute to scholarly discourse by concentrating on the special status governance mechanism and its potential to tackle the Anglophone crisis. It is imperative to note that the special status is a comparatively novel development in Cameroon, and its implications have not been investigated. This paper critically analyses the special status, unveiling its main features, the rationale for its enactment and application, and the possible obstacles and limitations it has encountered in addressing the Anglophone crisis. The paper adopts a qualitative research method, drawing on primary and secondary data sources.

The results of this paper contribute to painting a better picture of the Anglophone crisis and the likelihood of the special status in addressing it. The research also discloses the extent to which the special status embodies a genuine attempt to provide the Anglophone

regions greater autonomy or whether it is merely a façade that is ineffective in responding to the underlying problems. Furthermore, the research provides an understanding of the weaknesses and limitations of the special status to address the Anglophone crisis and its implications for autonomy arrangements and conflict resolution.

This paper examines the theoretical framework and empirical studies on autonomy arrangements in conflict resolution. Then it outlines the methodology that guided the study, and later presents the findings, focusing on an overview of the special status policy adopted in Cameroon and an assessment of its implementation. The findings result in discussions, evaluating the effectiveness of the special status in addressing the Anglophone crisis. This leads to drawing conclusions and recommending the way forward to fill the gaps of the autonomy policy while emphasizing its implications for policymakers and future cases of autonomy arrangements.

Theoretical framework

The study proceeds from the lens of the autonomy and conflict resolution theories. Autonomy theory contends that minority or regional groups should possess the right to self-governance, control of socio-political affairs, and acknowledge their distinct identity (Lapidoth & Lapidoth, 1997). This theoretical view highlights the significance of transferring power and resources to enhance local policy-making and preserve ethnic and linguistic plurality (Ghai, 2000). Conflict resolution theory on the other hand advocates for understanding the primary roots of conflicts and designing approaches to resolve them, such as power-sharing, decentralization, and wide-ranging peacebuilding processes (Ramsbotham et al., 2016). This theory pinpoints the need for establishing relationships and responding to the fundamental causes of conflicts to attain sustainable conflict transformation (Lederach, 1997).

The notion of autonomy is essential to understanding the Anglophone population's aspirations in Cameroon as it unswervingly focuses on the main issue of the Anglophone population's demand for greater autonomy within Cameroon. The theory has been effectively tested in some case studies to analyze the transfer of power and the success of autonomy arrangements. For instance, Wolff (2013) applied this theoretical framework to study the implementation of autonomy in South Tyrol, Italy, and discovered that a well-designed autonomy framework results in actual power-sharing and conflict resolution. Similarly, Ghai (2000) also adopted the theory to investigate the experiment of self-government in countries like South Africa, Ethiopia, Spain, India, and China, stressing the role of genuine decentralization and acknowledgment of minority rights.

In this study, autonomy theory is employed to critically appraise the extent to which the special status adopted for the Anglophone regions in Cameroon effectively empowers them and complies with the principles of local decision-making, management of political and cultural affairs, and acknowledgment of ethnic and linguistic identity. This theoretical

perspective facilitates assessing the gap between the Anglophone community's demands for self-rule and the realities of the special status application, eventually highlighting whether the special status constitutes a genuine devolution of power or merely a façade of autonomy.

Equally, considering the prolonged and intricate nature of the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon, conflict resolution theory offers an appropriate investigative framework. This theory has been successfully used in various contexts to study the success of conflict management and transformation initiatives. For instance, Lederach (1997) applied this theory to research the dynamics of conflict resolution in societies with entrenched divisions, underpinning the essence of establishing relationships and tackling the key causes of conflicts. Similarly, Kaldor (2013) used conflict resolution theory to assess the role of international interventions in addressing conflicts, highlighting the necessity for locally-driven and context-specific remedies.

The conflict resolution theory is adopted in this paper to assess the special status tool as a conflict management and resolution strategy in Cameroon. This theoretical lens sheds light on the political dynamics between the government and the Anglophone regions in implementing the special status, and its potential to address the main sources of the Anglophone conflict and establish pathways for durable conflict transformation.

Background to the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon

The crisis plaguing the Anglophone regions in Cameroon is rooted in the country's colonial legacy and the intricate political dynamics that have occurred since its independence (Keke, 2020; Ngoh, 2019). To paint a clear picture of the issues surrounding the special status as a solution requires exploring the historical background of this enduring conflict. Cameroon experienced German imperial rule from 1884, but after World War I, the territory was disproportionately partitioned and administered by France and the United Kingdom as League of Nations mandates from 1916 to 1939 and later as trust territories of the UN after World War II (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003; Awasom, 2020). The French-governed territory became known as East Cameroon, while the British part became known as West Cameroon. This division established distinct linguistic and cultural identities for the two parts of Cameroon which would subsequently become a source of tension and conflict (Ngoh, 2019).

The French-administered territory of Cameroon attained independence on 1 January 1960, while the British-administered Southern Cameroons through an UN-supervised plebiscite on 11 February 1961, opted to reunite with the already independent East Cameroon, founding the Federal Republic of Cameroon (Awasom, 2020). This federation was proposed to establish a balance of power between the Anglophone and Francophone regions but was accompanied by challenges. According to Konings & Nyamnjoh (2003), the federal system of Cameroon progressively transformed into a more centralized, unitary

state. This shift was motivated by the policies of Ahmadou Ahidjo, the country's pioneer president Ahmadou Ahidjo who sought to consolidate power and foster national unity. Many Anglophones viewed the 1972 referendum—eradicating the federal system and introducing a unitary state—as a breach of the initial reunification arrangement (Awasom, 2020; Takougang, 2003).

The passage to a unitary state intensified the Anglophone population's grievances, as they perceived more centralization and an erosion of autonomy and representation within Cameroon's political system (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003; Song, 2015). Anglophone Cameroonians started feeling marginalized, with fears over the extinction of their linguistic, cultural, and legal identities. This bitterness ultimately resulted in the rise of Anglophone separatist movements, such as the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) in 1995 (Agwanda & Asal, 2022; Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003; Takougang, 2019). This group and subsequent movements[1] promoted the secession of the Anglophone regions, known as Southern Cameroons or Ambazonia, from the rest of Cameroon (Pommerolle & Heungoup, 2017).

The Anglophone crisis gained momentum in 2016 after non-violent protests by Anglophone lawyers and teacher syndicates were responded to with a violent crackdown by the Cameroonian government (Agwanda & Asal, 2021). This triggered a cycle of demonstrations, government suppression, and the radicalization of Anglophone separatist movements, resulting in an armed conflict between the Cameroonian defense forces and Anglophone pro-separatist groups. The conflict has subsequently deteriorated, leading to systematic human rights abuses, the involuntary displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians, and thousands of casualties (Crisis Group, 2019). The Cameroonian government's response through military repression has received criticism for further alienating the Anglophone population and fueling the secession sentiment (Agwanda & Asal, 2021).

Cameroon legislated the 2019 law, in which a special status was granted to the Anglophone regions in addressing the crisis (Crisis Group, 2023). The special status was intended to provide the Anglophone regions substantial autonomy and self-rule based on historical, legal, and cultural specifics while preserving their incorporation within the Cameroonian decentralized unitary state. However, this policy has been accepted with mixed feelings. Some Anglophone leaders have articulated incredulity, contending that the content of the special status does not adequately address the demands of the Anglophones for greater autonomy or even secession (Crisis Group, 2023). Meanwhile, others have cautiously

---

1 See the following statistics of armed groups in 2017 by Agwanda & Asal (2021) Ambazonia Defence Force with approximately 300–500 fighters; Southern Cameroon Defence Forces (SOCADEF) with approximately 400 militiamen; Red Dragons (approx. 400 militants); Seven Karta (approx. 200 fighters); Swords of Ambazonia and Ambaland Quifor (approx. 400 fighters); Ambazonia Restoration Army (few dozen fighters); and the Vipers (few dozen fighters).

hailed the governance strategy, considering it an appropriate measure, but have highlighted the necessity for inclusive participation and genuine policy enforcement.

Literature review

Special status measures, often considered autonomy, self-governance, or devolution of power have been applied in many countries in responding to the demands of distinct ethnic, linguistic, or regional minority groups within a larger political entity. These arrangements aim to address the grievances and aspirations of distinct ethnic or regional groups; provide some degree of self-rule and policy-making in some key policy spheres; preserve the linguistic, cultural, and historical features of the beneficiary group; maintain the unity and territorial integrity of the main state; and avert or address violent conflict and separatist tendencies (Coakley, 2012; Wolf, 2013; Sahadžić, 2023). While the specific foundations and mechanisms of special status vary in various contexts, the primary goal, which aligns with this study's position is often to achieve national unity and regional self-determination.

Autonomy has emerged as a popular policy option among decision-makers seeking to resolve ethnonational conflicts (Fujikawa, 2021). According to Caspersen (2017), the ideal approach within the international community entails achieving self-determination through various forms of autonomy. This autonomy-inclined shift as a conflict resolution mechanism gained traction in the post-Cold War, having hitherto been perceived with a degree of uncertainty (Wolff & Weller, 2005).

Proponents of the autonomy approach argue that it allows subnational entities to achieve their desires of self-governance over their territories, without the national government having to forfeit its sovereignty (Caspersen, 2017; Kymlicka, 2015). This, in turn, provides guarantees to minority populations who may otherwise fear that the central authorities would undermine their security and continuous existence (Rothchild & Hartzell, 1999). In contrast, opponents contend that the devolution of territorial self-rule reinforces the group identity and the administrative capacities of subnational entities. This, they argue, enables the mobilization of people along identity lines, which can subsequently result in sensitive demands for separation (Cornell, 2002). Triggered by these contrasting views, Cederman *et al*. (2015) sought to examine the circumstances under which territorial self-governance is likely to avert self-determination conflicts. Their findings suggest that in the aftermath of conflict, autonomy deals should be accompanied by genuine integration of the minority group in the national government's executive to moderate the peril of renewed hostilities and mitigate future separatist tendencies.

An analysis of the literature on conflicts with separatist tendencies has highlighted some reasons for the failure of autonomy solutions to subnational conflicts. First, there exists an inconsistency between the degree of concessions states are willing to make and the aspirations of minority groups demanding autonomy. States are generally unwilling to grant substantial concessions to secessionist groups perceived to be militarily frail, even though these insurrections tend to be difficult to defeat and become protracted (Buhaug *et al*., 2009).

Some states opt to contain these conflicts rather than undertake substantive dialogue or war, as insurgence in remote areas does not threaten their political survival (Mukherjee, 2014). This lack of motivation to grant significant franchises is exacerbated in multiethnic states due to concerns that granting concessions to one party could set a precedent for demands from other groups (Walter, 2009; Fujikawa, 2017; Sambanis *et al*., 2018). Consequently, separatists demand substantial concessions, including independence, especially when they have been constantly sidelined and marginalized by the central government (Toft, 2006; Wucherpfennig *et al*., 2012). This results in a deadlock without a commonly acceptable response for both parties as opposed to continuous conflict (Fearon, 1995).

Second, even when the protagonists agree to a negotiated autonomy arrangement, the rebel group fears that the state may later violate the agreement. This commitment problem, where the government may be motivated to revoke the autonomy concessions once in a stronger position, prevents rebels from signing peace deals (Fearon, 1995; Lake & Rothchild, 2005). Addressing these two challenges of a lack of bargaining range and the commitment problem is essential for successful conflict resolution through autonomy arrangements.

Scholars seeking solutions to the commitment problem in conflict resolution above have proposed power-sharing deals and third-party safeguards (Walter, 2002). Power-sharing agreements enable warring parties to hold some degree of political power to defend themselves, meanwhile, mere autonomy deals may not be sufficient for subnational rebel groups, as they could be singly withdrawn by the state (Lake & Rothchild, 2005). To be effective, autonomy should be granted along with meaningful participation of the minority in the government (Cederman *et al*., 2015). However, this is unlikely feasible since the rebel groups are usually peripheral.

The solution of third-party guarantees—in the form of mediators, guarantors, or observers—has received significant scholarly interest in ensuring autonomy or future referendums in the long term in conflict resolution (Caspersen, 2017; da Rocha, 2019). Caspersen (2017) applauds the Belfast Agreement in Northern Ireland as an innovative approach to guaranteeing autonomy. Wolff (2011) on the other hand suggests that signing a bilateral or multilateral agreement to secure the deal could be suitable and effective. Such agreements between Finland and Sweden effectively guaranteed the autonomy of the Aland Island, likewise, the autonomy status of Hong Kong was safeguarded through the Sino-British declaration. Zartman (2000) postulates that rebel groups' fear of breach of commitment can be quenched if they are assured that the autonomy granted them is internationally safeguarded. To be more credible, such guarantors should be reputable and powerful states, or international organizations with the means to deter the state from backing out of its obligations for autonomy. The exact form of the guarantee, whether a formal treaty or other arrangement, is less important than the perception and conviction of the rebels that their autonomy is internationally protected.

The reviewed scholarly publications contend that autonomy arrangements are often implemented in response to the demands of distinct ethnic, linguistic, or regional groups within a larger political entity. These demands are typically rooted in a perceived sense

of marginalization, inadequate political representation, and the ambition for greater autonomy and self-governance (Kymlicka, 2015; Muro & Vlaskamp, 2016). In some cases, the state's recognition of the beneficiary population's cultural, linguistic, or historical specificities is crucial in establishing special status arrangements (Wolff, 2013).

The studies also indicate that special status strategies can take various forms and involve different tools for devolving power and policy-making. These mechanisms may include asymmetric federalism, in which the target region is granted a greater degree of autonomy than other subnational units, as in India, Ethiopia the case of Quebec in Canada, Aceh in Indonesia and Sardinia in Italy (Brown, 2005; Fessha & Bezabih, 2019; Stepan, 1999; Sahadžić, 2023; Tillin, 2017). Another form of autonomy identified entails the wide-ranging decentralization of administrative and law-making powers at the regional level (Wolff, 2013). Moreover, autonomy involves establishing regional legislatures, governments, and institutions with varying degrees of authority (Muro & Vlaskamp, 2016); the acknowledgment of the target region's unique linguistic, cultural, and legal features, and provisions for the devolution of resources and the running of certain domains, like education, healthcare, or natural resources (Coakley, 2012).

The literature reviewed paints a panoramic portrait vis-à-vis the outcomes and challenges of special status policies. On the one hand, several studies have emphasized the potential advantages of these mechanisms in responding to the grievances of specific regional or ethnic groups, mitigating the menace of violent conflict, and conserving cultural and linguistic pluralism (Coakley, 2012: Sahadžić, 2023). In some contexts, autonomy arrangements have fostered political stability, economic growth, and enhanced intergroup cohesion (Kymlicka, 2015).

Nevertheless, scholars also highlight some challenges and limitations of autonomy governance strategies. Muro & Vlaskamp (2016) point out ongoing strains and conflicts between the state and the beneficiary region over the scope and application of the special status. Some scholars raise fears of possible attrition of national unity and possible secessionist tendencies (Toft, 2006; Wucherpfennig *et al*., 2012). Autonomy policies also encounter uneven allocation of resources and authority challenges between the state and the target region, resulting in inequalities. This adds to the challenge of matching the demands for self-rule with the requirement for national coordination and integration (Coakley, 2012). Kymlicka (2015) identifies the issue of resistance from other subnational territorial entities or minority groups within the beneficiary region, who may feel sidelined or marginalized by the special status implementation. These setbacks emphasize the underlying complications and compromises in designing and implementing special status policies, stressing the need for cautious negotiation, trade-offs, and constant monitoring and fine-tuning (Wolff, 2013).

As the Cameroonian government and the Anglophone community continue to explore the special status proposal, the insights from this systematic review can provide a valuable reference point for understanding the complexities and trade-offs involved in such

arrangements, and the factors that may contribute to their success or failure. Ultimately, the design and implementation of special status arrangements must be tailored to the unique context of Cameroon, while drawing upon the lessons and experiences from other parts of the world.

Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative research design to critically investigate special status as a political solution to the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. Qualitative methods facilitate the exploration of the aspirations, perspectives, and experiences of the various actors in the Anglophone crisis and the application of the special status (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Such in-depth understanding is essential for examining the factors shaping the effectiveness of the special status in addressing the Anglophone population's demands.

The study conducted a thorough textual review of the Anglophone crisis and its special status, including government policies, legal documents, and scholarly publications to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Anglophone revendications, the government solution, and the academic discourse on the subject matter (Bowen, 2009). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders and participants including identified Anglophone community leaders, government officials, and civil society, allowing for open-ended discussions to gather diverse perspectives (Legard *et al.*, 2003). The study also collected data through focus group discussions with members of the Anglophone community, to enable a deeper consideration of the experiences, insights, and aspirations of the Anglophone regions (Krueger & Casey, 2014). The discussions permitted the participants to disclose their opinions on the special status and its potential to respond to their core demands and protests.

The gathered data was assessed through a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This entailed identifying recurrent themes, patterns, and differing perspectives arising from the data. This aimed to critically assess how the special status has addressed the Anglophone crisis and the fundamental political and structural challenges that undermine its effectiveness. The study observed strict ethical decorum to safeguard participants' rights and well-being (American Psychological Association, 2017), by procuring informed consent, guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity, and offering participants the choice to withdraw from the research at any time.

Overview of the Special Status Policy

As the Anglophone crisis erupted in 2016, one of the key demands was not effective decentralization as enshrined in the 1996 constitution, but rather a return to the pre-1972 federal system or secession from Cameroon. As the crisis persisted, President Paul Biya in 2019 promised to respond to the roots of frustration endured by the North West

and South West populations by expediting the decentralization process. The 2019 Major National Dialogue organized in Yaounde recommended the application of Article 62(2)[2] Of the 1996 constitution for the two Anglophone regions due to their specificities. Based on this constitutional provision, the government designed a special status in the 2019 law on the general code of Regional and Local Authorities. This section presents the legal and institutional foundations of the special status for the Anglophone regions, the perspectives of stakeholders on the governance mechanism, and the political impact of the policy from the lens of autonomy and conflict resolution theories and based on textual analysis and data from key informant interviews.

The legal foundations of the Special Status in Cameroon's Anglophone regions

The special status arrangement in Cameroon is rooted in Article 62(2) of the 1996 Cameroon constitution. This arrangement aimed to respond to the prolonged grievances of the Anglophone regions by creating a formal mechanism for governance and autonomy. The 2019 law in its Section 3 grants the North West and South West regions of Cameroon a special status. This status which distinguishes the two regions from the other 8 in Cameroon operates within decentralization and is visible in the unique organization and functioning of the two regions. The 2019 law defines a region as a "local authority composed of several divisions ... covers same territorial boundaries of the region which is an administrative unit" (Section 259(1)). The law emphasizes respect for the unique Anglophone educational system and the common law legal system in the two regions. In its section 327(2), the 2019 law further underscores that the special autonomy arrangement bestows on the two Anglophone regions a distinct organizational and functional regime, that aligns with their historical, cultural, and social values while acknowledging "the primacy of the state and national unity and solidarity."

The fundamental features of the special status legislated in favor of the Anglophone regions of Cameroon are elaborated in section 328 of the 2019 law. Apart from benefitting from the prerogatives devolved to the other 8 Cameroon regions, the North West and South West regions due to their autonomy status exercise special powers to: participate in the design of "national public policies relating to the Anglophone education sub-system." (2019 Law, Section 328(1)). The two regions are also empowered to establish and manage regional development entities and partake in defining traditional authorities' status. The 2019 law in section 328(2) also grants discretionary powers to the central government to consult the two special status regions on matters related to public administration of justice policies within the common law subsystem, and to integrate the Regions in "the management of public services established in their respective territories (2019 Law, section 328(3)).

---

2 Without prejudice to the provisions of this Part, the law may take into consideration the specificities of certain Regions with regard to their organization and functioning.

Institutional Framework and implementation of the special status

The distinct institutional mechanisms of the Anglophone regions involve a bicameral Regional Assembly, the Regional Executive Council, and the Public Independent Conciliator (2019 Law, Sections 330 and 367(1)), as opposed to the other 8 Regions of Cameroon which have two organs, the Regional Council and the President of the Regional Council (2019 Law, Section 274). The Regional Assembly which is the deliberative organ is composed of the House of Divisional Representatives—made up of 70 Regional Councilors and five committees—and the House of Chiefs—constituted of 20 traditional authorities and two committees (2019 Law, Sections 332, 334, 336 & 338).

The Regional Executive Council is the managerial organ of the special status regions and comprises members elected through indirect universal suffrage from among Regional Councilors (Section 352(1)). It is headed by a President emanating from, and who presides over the House of Divisional Representatives (Section 359) and also the Regional Assembly (Section 344(1)), and a Vice President, a traditional ruler (Section 360(1)) who doubles as Chairperson of the House of Chiefs (Section 339). The Regional Executive Councils for the special status regions also comprise three Commissioners, each for economic development; health and social development; and educational, sports, and cultural development; two Secretaries, and one Questor (Section 352(2)).

The third institution for each special status region is the Public Independent Conciliator (Section 367), appointed by Presidential decree (Section 368), with ombudsman-like attributes for each Anglophone region. These personalities amicably resolve disputes between citizens and regional institutions, defend the rights of citizens, and submit recommendations to the President of the Republic on policies related to enhancing the special status. The established institutional mechanisms highlight a significant disconnection between the regional institutions, and the Councils found within the region. The only visible link operates between the Public Independent Conciliator and the Councils, wherein the former amicably resolves disputes between the latter and local public service users. The state ensures the supervisory authority through the appointed governor, over the region with excessive powers of control and sanction over regional institutions.

The expectations and outcomes of the Special Status

The initial expectations of Anglophone communities about the special status were that of full autonomy mostly in the form of a federation to address some of their grievances, including marginalization, low representation in government institutions and decision-making level, and the recognition of their historical, educational, cultural, linguistic, legal and political specificities. Interviews reveal that these expectations of significant change in the governance and control of resources in the two regions have not been achieved. The aspirations of improving public service delivery, significant political representation, and cultural recognition remain unmet. Faced with a contrary reality, the Majority of the

Anglophone population expressed disenchantment about insignificant development, emphasizing a pervasive feeling of betrayal. Consequently, the vacuum between the special status policy expectations and the ground realities has fostered frustration and violence in the regions.

Assessing the implementation of the special status

This section examines the impact of the special status policy on certain key indicators underscored by the autonomy theory, including decision-making and power-sharing, resource allocation and financial autonomy, the preservation of cultural and linguistic specificities, and stakeholder perceptions and lived experiences.

Decision-making and power-sharing

The theoretical background of the special status advocates for power-sharing to promote collaborative governance. However, the actual implementation has revealed the concentration of powers on the central government, with subnational governments feeling excluded in the primary policy-making process (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003). The national government retains tight control over the administration of the special status regions. While the special status Regional Assemblies mimic the federal institutions that existed in the former West Cameroon before 1972, they tend to be weaker. The Francophone Governors in the two regions appointed by the Presidential decree possess veto prerogatives over the Regional Assemblies' decisions, including budgetary and expenditure approval, loan arrangements, and international cooperation agreements (2019 Law, Section 76(1)). The President of the Republic retains the powers to suspend or dismiss the President of the Regional Executive Council and dissolve the Regional Assembly (2019 Law, Section 314 & 315).

The omnipresence of the central government at every stage of the decision-making processes of the special status regions has resulted in some interviewed Regional Councilors seeing the appointed Governors as the actual decision-making authorities of the Regions. The Governors as of right participate in all Regional Assembly sessions, causing the Regional Councilors to avoid raising debatable issues relating to the Anglophone crisis for deliberations. As a result, the tasks of the Regional Assemblies have mostly revolved around routine administrative duties, sensitization campaigns, and supervision of projects in the regions (Crisis Group, 2023). Interviewed residents of the Anglophone Regions attest that the central government has retained decision-making powers and is unwilling to share powers with the Regional Assemblies, leaving the Assemblies to be puppets of the central government.

Resource allocation and financial autonomy

The theoretical underpinning of autonomy and conflict resolution contends that devolution of significant power, responsibility, and resources to subnational governments constitutes a remedy to conflict and fosters local governance. The 2019 law grants regional entities in Cameroon financial autonomy (Section 11). However, no legal frameworks have been adopted to empower regional bodies to enjoy fiscal autonomy. The 2019 law also establishes a Common Decentralization Fund to which the central government is expected to allocate a minimum of 15% of its annual revenue to the fund for regions and councils (Section 25). However, the central government has never allocated the total amount to decentralized entities. For instance, in 2022, the allocation was 7.2 percent of the annual budget and 8 percent in 2023, including 3 billion FCFA each for the 10 regions, the two special status regions inclusive.[3] The limited resource allocation and financial dependency significantly impact autonomy governance, resulting in a disempowerment feeling among regional authorities who often find themselves limited by bureaucratic feet-dragging and restrictions on their autonomy. These Central Government maneuvers substantially undermine the effectiveness of local governance, fostering a sense of neglect and abandonment by the Anglophone regions.

Cultural and Linguistic preservation efforts

To address the Anglophones' cultural and linguistic identity grievances, the central government created a National Commission on the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism in 2017.[4] This commission was mandated to promote bilingualism and multiculturalism in Cameroon, maintain peace, consolidate national unity, and strengthen the will and daily practice of living together. The rationale was that the commission would address the linguistic marginalization raised by the Anglophone population, however, interviews and focused group discussions revealed that since 2017, the commission has inadequately addressed the linguistic issues in particular and the Anglophone crisis in general. For instance, some judicial personnel interviewed deplored that in Courts of the North West and South West regions, judicial police authorities still write their reports in French and submit them to the courts, likewise the dominance of the French language in judicial processes before the military courts in the Anglophone regions.

Some part of the Anglophone population feels that the mechanisms adopted by the government to ensure the equality of English and French as official languages and integrate Anglophone values into the education system and public life remain shallow.

---

3 Decree No. 2023/405 of 6 September 2023 setting the distribution of the General Decentralization Grant for the 2023 financial year.

4 Decree number 2017/013 of 23 January 2017, the President of the Republic of Cameroon created the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism.

Some Anglophones contend that these efforts do not respond to the entrenched systemic grievances like representation in policy-making and participation in national consultations and dialogues.

Stakeholder perceptions and lived experiences of the special status

Exploring stakeholder engagement and community integration discloses a deficit in the inclusive governance approach to the special status. While the government claims to have carried out consultations before establishing the special status at the Major National Dialogue, some members of the Anglophone communities and civil society hold that only the pro-government Anglophone elite was consulted who are insensitive to the grassroots realities of Anglophones, making the process politicized, top-down and with low-level stakeholder engagement. Also, the government prevented the holding of popular consultation of Anglophones before the Major National Dialogue and did not invite separatist leaders to the dialogue, making the special status a form of unilateral act of the government (Crisis Group, 2023). Moreover, the dialogue excluded debates on federalism and secession, and the special status was recommended during the Major National Dialogue without a consensus on its content. The government then proceeded two months later to legislate the content of the autonomy to suit her taste, leading to increased distrust of government unilateral policies by the Anglophone population.

Most Anglophone community members affirmed that they did not understand the special status and what it offers. Effective engagement is necessary for promoting local ownership, a bottom-up approach that ensures the policy responds to the community's needs. Also, many Anglophones argue that the special status institutions are mostly flooded with former senior pro-government officials or top ruling party militants who have been compensated for their loyalty to the regime rather than selected to address the grievances of the Anglophones. The government's approach to the special status exacerbates a disconnect from the political strategy, which is further worsened by enduring violence and instability, alienating the population from government efforts.

Discussions: Evaluating the effectiveness of the special status

The effectiveness of the special status in addressing the demands made by the Anglophones in 2016 is assessed from the lens of the autonomy and conflict resolution theories. This section interrogates how the special status policy has addressed the Anglophone population's fundamental grievances, mitigated the underlying causes of the Anglophone crisis, and promoted reconciliation and conflict transformation.

Addressing the key demands of the Anglophone population

The findings of this study reveal that the effectiveness of the special status in responding to the main aspirations of the Anglophone community remains debatable. The institutions for implementing the special status—Regional Assemblies, Regional Executive Council, Public Independent Conciliator—have been created and are functioning. To address the linguistic and cultural demands, the government created the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism, with an Anglophone as Chairperson. In addressing the demands relating to the Common Law subsystem, the government created a Common Law Division at the Supreme Court, a Common Law section for the training of judicial personnel in Common Law at the National School of Administration and Magistracy (NSAM), redeployed Anglophone judicial and legal officers to replace some the Francophone personnel in the courts in Anglophone regions (Bang & Balgah, 2022).

While the rationale of this policy was to acknowledge and remedy the legacies of inequalities, many Anglophones highlighted the enduring sense of neglect and marginalization. The demand for autonomy for instance has not been addressed, as the central government retains significant control over Regional Assemblies' decisions, and the special status institutions are still substantially dependent on the central government for funding. Also, the 2019 Law makes the special status insecure, empowering the President of the Republic to dissolve the special status institutions. Also, instead of granting Regional Executive Councils supervisory powers over the councils in the regions, the 2019 Law places the councils under the control and supervision of central government-appointed representatives. This creates a coordination gap between the Region and the councils under it. Some institutions like the Public Independent Conciliator have received hundreds of complaints from local public service users but have not addressed them effectively as it only recommends solutions without constraining powers to enforce their decisions.

These shortcomings cause many Anglophones to consider that the special status has remained on paper and the grassroots population has not felt its impact. Also, the persistent domination of the French language in some public institutions in the Anglophone regions like the Military courts and National Gendarmerie, the absence of substantial economic development projects, the reluctance of the central government to devolve full powers and resources to the special status institutions, and consult these institutions on decisions on the regions makes the policy to be perceived as ineffective in addressing the key demands of the Anglophones.

Mitigating the underlying causes of the Anglophone crisis

The underlying drivers of the current Anglophone crisis included the dominance of the French language in schools and courts in Anglophone regions (Bang & Balgah, 2022), low representation in decision-making, marginalization, and perceived threats to the educational, legal, cultural, linguistic and sociopolitical identity of the Anglophone regions.

These grievances, also triggered by the centralist model of governance (Crisis Group, 2017) resulted in moderate calls for autonomy through federalism and extremist calls for secession (Crisis Group, 2019). Anglophones and civil society argue that the special status has mitigated the major causes of the crisis to a lesser extent. The persisting grievances highlight the central government's inability to respond to the situation adequately.

While most of the interviewed local population know little about the autonomy policy, those informed of the arrangement hold that it was received with mixed feelings. While the pro-government Anglophone elite contends that the policy has slowly addressed the triggers of the crisis, separatist armed groups received the policy with hostilities and outright rejection. As such, the visible lack of political will to address the situation, the persistence of high cost of living and hardship, violence, killings, and other human rights abuses daily supports the view that the special status has not mitigated the crisis. The lack of significant policy reform has enhanced persistent unrest in the two regions.

Promoting reconciliation and conflict transformation

The potential for the special autonomy arrangement to promote reconciliation and transform the conflict has been restricted by deep-rooted political dynamics and persistent violence. Although some strategies aim to promote dialogue, the prevailing context of mistrust undermines the strive to build consensus and social cohesion (Crisis Group, 2023). Anglophone voices highlight that as a top-down policy unilaterally imposed on Anglophones, it has not impacted the grassroots population. The conflict and ghost towns have continued, with high crimes, kidnappings for ransom, school shutdowns in some areas, and regular confrontations between government forces and separatist fighters. Anglophone crisis victims continue blaming the government for the conflict-related ordeals and the lack of genuine political will to invite the major stakeholders to an inclusive genuine dialogue table involving diverse community voices and chart a way to effectively address the crisis, achieving grassroots reconciliation and mechanism for conflict transformation and economic empowerment.

The findings of this study align with Mukherjee's (2014) argument, as the Cameroon government opted to use military means to suppress the protesters rather than dialogue with them, as the conflict is occurring in the periphery and not significantly affecting the seat of political institutions, Yaounde. The calls for secession by Anglophone separatist leaders also corroborate Toft (2006) and Wucherpfennig *et al*. (2012) positions that such extreme demands are made when the protesting minority has endured long-standing marginalization from the central government, resulting in deadlock solution perpetual conflict (Fearon, 1995).

The study results' implications are relevant for conflict resolution and autonomy theories. The arguments of these theories that adopting an autonomy governance policy can facilitate stability and foster peace are contested by the realities monitored in the Anglophone crisis,

where autonomy has been granted, but political instability and conflict perpetuate (Crisis Group, 2023; Keke, 2020). Also, while the autonomy theory has mostly been tested in contexts of ethnic minorities, this paper introduces a new perspective by applying the theory to autonomy arrangements addressing a conflict rooted in colonial heritage. The affected Anglophone communities have expressed the desire for a genuine and inclusive dialogue in the presence of third-party guarantees to secure the effective implementation of a possible autonomy deal. It becomes apparent that secessionist conflict resolution strategies do not end with granting autonomy. The calls by Anglophone separatist leaders for a dialogue in the presence of a third-party guarantor stems from what Lake and Rothschild (2003) referred to as the fear that the central government may later unilaterally violate the autonomy agreement.

Beyond legal recognition, there is a need for genuine political will and sustained commitment from the central government to enforce policies that respond to the underlying drivers of Anglophone grievances and empower the local population. Failure to transform legal autonomy into actual power and resource control escalates violence, emphasizing the need for a well-designed and nuanced governance approach. Policymakers must acknowledge that shallow efforts will not be appropriate. Only substantial engagement with the local population is crucial to boost trust and foster sustainable peace. The current experience of the special status arrangement as a solution to the Anglophone crisis emphasizes that in conflict resolution, autonomy void of genuine devolution of power and resources can result in further alienation and conflict.

Conclusion and the way forward

The above analysis reveals several significant findings relating to the special status of the Anglophone regions in Cameroon. Initially designed as a strategy to respond to historical grievances and foster governance, the special status has been unable to achieve the set goals. The legal frameworks designed to enhance the implementation of the autonomy policy and empower local governance have proven abstruse and inconsistently applied, resulting in a pervasive feeling of marginalization among the Anglophone population.

Notwithstanding the initial optimism in 2019 when the special status policy was legislated, the expectation that this legal acknowledgment would translate into significant policy reforms has not materialized. This has kept a majority of Anglophones, including those who initially supported the policy from the inception with a sense of frustration and increased marginalization. The research findings answer the research question in the affirmative, that the current special status for the Anglophone regions is a mere façade of autonomy, mostly strong on paper and void of devolved powers and resources to the autonomous regions. Despite the low support from Anglophones and the outright dismissal by separatist leaders, the special status has the potential to be a crucial avenue for fostering consensus during peace negotiations. It establishes a legal framework that acknowledges Anglophone identity and enhances regional autonomy within the decentralization context.

The complexities identified in this research analysis present the need for recommendations to address the lapses of the special status policy and for future policy frameworks and research initiatives. There is a need to promote genuine dialogue and strengthen local governance structures. Each reconciliation strategy must prioritize genuine engagement with the Anglophone population, including substantive consultations that recognize the opinions of all stakeholders, including marginalized groups and separatist leaders. Such dialogues will permit the stakeholders including separatist leaders to suggest how a more operational local governance arrangement would work. A compromise could be reached between the central government's total rejection of separation and the separatist's push for federalism.

Local governance mechanisms should also be reinforced with a participative approach to integrating the grassroots population in decision-making processes, linking the gap between policy and practice by empowering local authorities and facilitating their involvement in every governance stage. To ameliorate Anglophone identity and relations with the central government, the special status should be reformed to empower regional authorities, particularly in education, language, and judicial matters which constitute the core grievances. Regional assemblies should be empowered to recommend legislation in these crucial domains, permitting them to respond to longstanding grievances and contribute actively to policy-making. While the head of state may still need to promulgate new laws, this legislative initiative would enhance a greater sense of agency among Anglophones. The central government should guarantee adequate and sustained funding—15% of the national budget as mandated in the 2019 law—to regional institutions to achieve their expanded mandates. Accountability measures should accompany this financial transfer to ensure regional assemblies effectively manage the allocated resources.

The reviewed special status policy should include mechanisms that promote effective representation of Anglophone concerns. One of the key reforms should include provisions for joint sessions between the Regional Assemblies for the North West and South West regions, facilitating deliberations on shared matters like language, Anglo-Saxon education, and common law without central government approval. Additionally, adopting direct universal suffrage in regional assembly elections—as opposed to the current indirect suffrage—would increase the legitimacy of the institutions and the ownership feeling of voters. Expanding voting rights to individuals previously prohibited from voting could foster diverse perspectives and deter violent political expression. Furthermore, establishing a commissioner for marginalized groups like women within the regional executive would ensure their representation and address their specific needs, reinforcing their role in framing governance and post-conflict resolution. The authority of the Public Independent Conciliator should be expanded to include addressing disputes between national civil institutions and users.

Cameroon's 2019 Special Status granted to the North West and South West regions aimed to acknowledge Anglophone identity but has witnessed notable weaknesses and criticisms. The central government imposed it on the two Regions without significant

consultation with key Anglophone leaders and community resulting in regional assemblies with restricted law-making prerogatives and no formal collaboration framework. These indirectly elected figures fail to represent the local population effectively and often overlook significant educational, judicial, and linguistic issues that triggered the conflict. Given the ongoing conflict, reforming the special status could empower these assemblies and address Anglophone grievances, potentially enhancing trust and establishing a trajectory toward an inclusive political response between the government and separatists. These sustained initiatives would rectify the misalignment between policy goals and lived realities, resulting in a stable and inclusive governance. The Anglophone regions' experience represents a glaring indicator of the significance of understanding and responsiveness in governance. Acknowledging the voices of all communities in conflict context is not an issue of policy, but a fundamental rock for peace and democracy.

References

1. Agwanda, B., & Asal, U. Y. (2021). The Anglophone problem in Cameroon – The change from crisis to conflict, and a possible way forward to resolution. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, *21*(1), 9–34.

2. Aime, C. C. C. (2020). Rethinking the façade of decentralization under the 1996 Constitution of Cameroon, *Global Campus Human Rights Journal,* 4, 135–175. DOI: http://doi.org/20.500.11825/1697.

3. American Psychological Association. (2017). *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct*. APA.

4. Araoye, A. (2012). Hegemonic agendas, intermesticity, and conflicts in the postcolonial state. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, *12*(1), 33–60.

5. Atom, V. N. (2023). Cameroon: Local communities and conflict resolution during the Anglophone conflict in the South West Region. Initiatives and challenges. *Conflict Studies Quarterly, 45*, 3–18.

6. Awasom, N. F. (2020). The Anglophone problem in Cameroon yesterday and today in search of a definition. *Journal of the African Literature Association*, *14*(2), 264–291.

7. Bang, H. N., & Balgah, R. A. (2022). The ramification of Cameroon's Anglophone crisis: Conceptual analysis of a looming "Complex Disaster Emergency". *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, *7*(1), 1–25. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-022-00114-1.

8. Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *9*(2), 27–40.

9. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

10. Brown, D. (2005). Who's afraid of asymmetrical federalism? A summary discussion. *Special Series on Asymmetric Federalism, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations.* Queens University.

11. Buhaug, H., Gates, S., & Lujala, P. (2009). Geography, rebel capability, and the duration of civil conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *53*(4), 544–569. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002709336457.

12. Caspersen, N. (2017). *Peace agreements: Finding solutions to intra-state conflicts*. Polity Press.

13. Caxton, A. S. (2017). The Anglophone dilemma in Cameroon: The need for comprehensive dialogue and reform. *Conflict Trends*, *2*, 18–26.

14. Cederman, L.-E., Hug, S., Sch€adel, A., & Wucherpfennig, J. (2015). Territorial autonomy in the shadow of conflict: Too little, too late? *American Political Science Review*, *109*(2), 354–370. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000118.

15. Coakley, J. (2012). *Nationalism, ethnicity and the state: Making and breaking nations*. Sage.

16. Cornell, S. E. (2002). Autonomy as a source of conflict: Caucasian conflicts in theoretical perspective. *World Politics*, *54*(2), 245–276. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2002.0002.

17. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

18. Crisis Group. (2017). *Cameroon's Anglophone crisis at the crossroads*, Africa Report No. 250. Crisis Group.

19. Crisis Group. (2019). *Cameroon's Anglophone crisis: How to get to talks?* Africa Report No. 272. Crisis Group.

20. Crisis Group. (2023). *A second look at Cameroon's Anglophone special status*, Africa Briefing No. 188. Crisis Group.

21. da Rocha, J. P. (2019). The Changing Nature of International Mediation, *Global Policy*, *10*(2), 101–107. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12683.

22. Fanso, V. G. (2017), *Cameroon history for secondary schools and colleges. From pre-historic times to the Twenty-first Century* (Revised and Updated Combined Edition). Work Press

23. Fearon, J. D. (1995). Rationalist explanations for war. *International Organization*, *49*(3), 379–414. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300033324.

24. Fessha, Y.T., & Bezabih, B.N. (2019). Federation among unequals. A country study of constitutional asymmetry in Ethiopia. In P. Popelier and M. Sahadžić (Eds.), *Constitutional asymmetry in multinational federalism. Federalism and internal conflicts* (pp. 137–162). Palgrave Macmillan.

25. Fonchingong, T. (2013). The quest for autonomy: The case of Anglophone Cameroon. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, *7*(5), 224–236. DOI: 10.5897/AJPSIR10.033.

26. Fujikawa, K. (2017). Drifting between Accommodation and Repression: Explaining Indonesia's policies toward its separatists. *The Pacific Review*, *30*(5), 655–673. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2017.1293713.

27. Fujikawa, K. (2021). Settling with autonomy after civil wars: Lessons from Aceh, Indonesia. *Global. Policy*, *12*(2), 204–213. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12949.

28. Ghai, Y. P. (Ed.). (2000). *Autonomy and ethnicity: Negotiating competing claims in multi-ethnic states*. Cambridge University Press.

29. Kaldor, M. (2013). *New and old wars: Organised violence in a global era*. John Wiley & Sons.

30. Keke, R. C. (2020). Southern Cameroons/Ambazonia conflict: A political economy. *Theory & Event*, *23*(2), 329–351. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/tae.2020.0030.

31. Konings, P., & Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2003). *Negotiating an Anglophone identity: A study of the politics of recognition and representation in Cameroon* (Vol. 1). Brill.

32. Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (Eds.) (2014). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (4th Edn.). Sage.

33. Kymlicka, W. (2015). The essentialist critique of multiculturalism: Theories, policies, ethos. In V. Uberoi and T. Modood (Eds.), *Multiculturalism rethought: Interpretations, dilemmas and new directions* (pp. 209–249). Edinburgh University Press.

34. Lake, D. A., & Rothchild, D. (2005). Territorial decentralization and civil war settlements. In P. G. Roeder and D. Rothchild (Eds.), *Sustainable peace: Power and democracy after civil wars* (pp. 109–132). Cornell University Press.

35. Lapidoth, R. E., & Lapidoth, R. (1997). *Autonomy: Flexible solutions to ethnic conflicts*. US Institute of Peace Press.

36. *Law No. 2019/024 of 24 December 2024 on the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities*. Retrieved from http://www.minjustice.gov.cm/index.php/en/instruments-and-laws/laws/298-law-no-2019-024-of-24-december-2019-bill-to-institute-the-general-code-of-regional-and-local-authorities.

37. *Law No. 96/06 of 18 January 1996 on the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon.* Retrieved from https://www.prc.cm/en/multimedia/documents/6285-loi-n-96-06-du-18-01-1996-revision-constitution-1972-en.

38. Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. USIP.

39. Legard, R., Keegan, J., & Ward, K. (2003). In-depth interviews. In J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, C. M. Nicholls and R. Ormston (Eds.)*, Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (pp. 138–169). Sage Publications.

40. Mukherjee, S. (2014). Why are the longest insurgencies low in violence?

41. Politician motivations, sons of the soil, and civil war duration. *Civil Wars*, *16*(2), 172–207. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2014.927702.

42. Muro, D., & Vlaskamp, M. C. (2016). How do prospects of EU membership influence support for secession? A survey experiment in Catalonia and Scotland. *West European Politics*, *39*(6), 1115–1138. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2016.1149993.

43. Ndi, A. (2013), *Southern West Cameroon revisited: North-South West nexus, 1858-1972, myth, history and reality.* Paul's Press.

44. Ngam, C. C., & Budi, R. N. (2021). The Anglophone question in Cameroon: Historical context and evolution from "everyday" resistance to armed conflict, 1961-2017. *Africana Studia*, 17–31.

45. Ngoh, V. J. (2019), *Cameroon 1884-present (2018): The history of a people*. Design House.

46. Pommerolle, M. E., & Heungoup, H. D. M. (2017). Briefing: The "Anglophone crisis": A tale of the Cameroonian postcolony. *African Affairs*, *116*(464), 526–538.

47. Ramsbotham, O., Woodhouse, T., & Miall, H. (2016). *Contemporary conflict resolution.* Polity.

48. Rothchild, D., & Hartzell, C. A. (1999). Security in deeply divided societies: The role of territorial autonomy. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, *5*(3–4), 254–271. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/13537119908428579.

49. Sahadžić, M. (2023). Asymmetric federalism. In J. Cremades and C. Hermida (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Constitutionalism* (1-14). Springer.

50. Sambanis, N., Germann, M., & Schädel, A. (2018). SDM: A new data set on self-determination movements with an application to the Reputational Theory of Conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *62*(3), 656–686. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002717735364.

51. Shulika, L. S., & Tella, O. (2022). Cameroon's Anglophone crisis and the question of the right to self-determination. *The Round Table*, *111*(5), 612–627. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/0035 8533.2022.2131225.

52. Song, W. I. (2015). *The clash of the titans: Augustine Ngom Jua, Solomon Tandeng Muna, and the politics of transition in post-colonial Anglophone Cameroon, 1961–1972.* Doctoral dissertation, Howard University.

53. Stepan, A. C. (1999). Federalism and democracy: Beyond the US model. *Journal of Democracy*, *10*(4), 19–34.

54. Takougang, J. (2003). Nationalism, democratization, and political opportunism in Cameroon. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, *21*(3), 427–445. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/0258 900032000142455.

55. Takougang, J. (2019). *African state and society in the 1990s: Cameroon's political crossroads*. Routledge.

56. Tillin, L. (2017). Asymmetric federalism. In S. Choudhry, M. Khosla, and P. B. Mehta (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Indian Constitution* (pp. 540–559). Oxford University Press.

57. Toft, M. D. (2006). Issue indivisibility and time horizons as rationalist explanations for war. *Security Studies*, *15*(1), 34–69. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410600666246.

58. Walter, B. F. (2002). *Committing to peace: The successful settlement of civil wars.* Princeton University Press.

59. Walter, B. F. (2009). *Reputation and civil war: Why separatist conflicts are so violent.* Cambridge University Press.

60. Wanie, C. M. & Tanyi F.O. (2013). The impact of globalization on agro-based corporations in Cameroon: The case of the Cameroon Development Corporation in the South West region. *International Journal of Business and Globalisation, 11*(2), 136–148.

61. Wolff, S., & Weller, M. (2005). Self-determination and autonomy. In M. Weller and S. Wolff (Eds.), *Autonomy, self-governance and conflict resolution: Innovative approaches to institutional design in divided societies* (pp. 1–22). Routledge.

62. Wolff, S. (2011). A resolvable frozen conflict? Designing a settlement for Transnistria. *Nationalities Papers, 39*(6), 863–870. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2011.617363.

63. Wolff, S. (2013). Conflict management in divided societies: The many uses of territorial self-governance. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, *20*(1), 27–50. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/15718115-02001003.

64. Wucherpfennig, J., Metternich, N. W., Cederman, L.-E., & Gleditsch, K. S. (2012). Ethnicity, the state, and the duration of civil war. *World Politics*, *64*(1), 79–115. DOI: https://doi.org/1 0.1017/S004388711100030X.

65. Zartman, I. W. (2000). Ripeness: The hurting stalemate and beyond. In D. Druckmand and P. C. Stern (Eds.), *International Conflict Resolution After the Cold War* (pp. 225–250). National Academy Press.