

Interregionalism and Multiparty Mediation: The Case of Arab Africa

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Abstract

This paper triangulates the main theoretical approaches of three areas of research (regional conflict resolution, interregionalism and multiparty mediation) and applies them to the study of conflict resolution in Arab Africa. It focuses in particular on 12 conflicts which involved members of the two main regional organizations operating in the region – the Organization of African Unity / African Union and the Arab League – to explore the occurrence of “forum shopping” behavior and its causes. The analysis of these cases sheds light on the factors that can lead to the emergence (or non-emergence) of “forum shopping” in multiparty mediation and therefore contributes to a reformulation of the debates on the role of regional organizations in the resolution of persistent conflicts.

Much has been written on the role of regional organizations in conflict resolution (Nye, 1971; Zacher, 1979; Alagappa, 1995; Peck, 1998; Diehl and Lepgold, 2003; Diehl and Cho, 2006; Tavares, 2008; Tavares, 2010). The claim that regional organizations have to play an important role in conflict resolution, which is embodied in article 52 of the UN Charter, rests on a series of assumptions on the comparative advantage of regional conflict resolution over the intervention of international or external bodies. Regional organizations, it is often argued, are “well positioned to understand the root causes of many conflicts [...] and to influence their prevention or resolution, owing to their knowledge of the region” (Tavares, 2010: 13). Many also believe that the intervention of regional bodies is likely to be more timely and less costly and, on average, to be perceived as more legitimate than the involvement of other international actors (Diehl, 2003; Tavares, 2010).

However, despite the high hopes expressed in the UN Charter and the repeated calls for regional organizations to step up their role in regional conflict resolution, most notably in the 1992 *Agenda for Peace*, the conflict resolution record of a number of regional bodies is often considered as not particularly satisfactory. Many regional organizations – most notably the Organization of African Unity (OAU) / African Union (AU) and the League of Arab States (LAS) – struggled to set in place credible and effective mechanisms for dealing with conflicts in their regions of competence. In contrast to the Organization of American States (OAS), neither the OAU nor the LAS succeeded in developing organs or working legal procedures for assisting the peaceful settlement of disputes. The OAU’s “Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration”, formally established in article XIX of the OAU’s charter, “was never fully constituted, never met, and never operated” (Zartman, 2003: 92); and only in one occasion – a minor dispute between Lebanon and Syria in 1949 – has the Council of

the League of Arab States been called to arbitrate a conflict under article 5 of the Pact (Hassouna, 1975: 368).

As a consequence, the empirical record of both organizations is often considered as the worst among regional organizations. Even if we lack up-to-date comparative analyses of the success rate of regional organizations in resolving conflicts, existing studies comparing the OAU, LAS, OAS – and occasionally other regional organizations such as the UN or the Council of Europe – consistently show that the performance of the OAU and the LAS during the Cold War years was a weak one. Nye's comparison of the performance of these organizations in managing nineteen conflicts between 1948 and 1970 concludes that the OAS "helped ended fighting" in 60% of the conflicts considered, while the OAU did so in 25% and the LAS in none (Nye 1971: 171). Mark Zacher (1979) compared the performance of these three organizations in tackling 116 conflicts and suggested that the LAS succeeded in 12 percent of the cases, compared to the a 19 percent success rate for OAU and 37 percent for the OAS. More recently, Ibrahim Awad (1994: 153) argued that the Arab League "med with success in only six of seventy-seven conflictual situations it attempted to settle between 1945 and 1981", and a similar success rate was recorded by Pinfari (2009) who expanded this analysis to 2008. It therefore comes to no surprise that the (O)AU is often seen as having achieved "minimal results" (Imobighe, 2003, 99), as "largely incapable of meeting the challenges facing the continent" (Okoth, 2008: 30) and as "marked more by failures than achievements" (Tavares, 2010: 21), and the LAS is considered *tout-court* as a "failed" organization (Barnett and Solingen, 2007).

One of the most visible countermeasures that have been taken to compensate for the apparent weakness of regional organizations in conflict resolution, especially in the Mediterranean basin, the Middle East and Africa, has been the creation of a number of sub-regional bodies and inter-organizational forums, which in turn resulted in a substantial increase in the number of actors involved in conflict resolution activities. However, it is unclear if the proliferation of such bodies is to be hailed as a positive development for regional or global peace and security. Indeed, also because of the lack of dialogue between the literature on regional conflict resolution and that on multiparty mediation (Crocker et al., 1999; 2001), remarkably little research currently exists on whether, and under what conditions, the involvement of more than one regional or subregional organization in mediating a conflict helps or hinders the success of multilateral conflict resolution efforts.

This paper aims at filling this gap by reviewing the behaviour of regional and subregional organizations in 12 conflicts that took place in Arab Africa between 1963 and 2010. Arab African countries are here defined as those countries located geographically in the African continent and which defined themselves as "Arab" by joining the Arab League. Arab Africa provides a particularly interesting empirical realm for assessing the role of interregional coordination and competition in conflict resolution for at least three reasons. First, it is one of the few subregions worldwide where we can observe substantial overlap between the areas of competence of two major regional organizations. Secondly, such overlap is typically seen as the consequence of a major ethnic fault line – the so-called "Afro-Arab divide" – which is in itself considered as the root cause of the most severe conflicts that took place in the

area, especially in Sudan and Somalia. However, the two regional organizations that are believed to incarnate this divide – the (O)AU and the LAS – have also developed close diplomatic ties at least since the creation of the Afro-Arab forum in 1977. Considering that most intra- and inter-regional cooperation forums involving regional and subregional organizations in Africa have been developed in recent years – typically as part of the conflict resolution efforts in Darfur and Somalia – the cooperation between the (O)AU and the LAS provides an interesting case study for exploring the patterns of cooperation and competition that can emerge, formally and informally, among regional bodies involved in conflict resolution activities, especially across major ethnic divides.

This paper finds that only three out of 12 conflicts analysed reveal clear instances of forum shopping, and of these only one resulted in a direct juxtaposition between the OAU and the Arab League. The case studies also reveal that the occurrence of forum shopping depends on two key variables – the presence of diverging agendas between the mediators, and the willingness of the parties to play the mediators against each other. This suggestion provides the basis for developing a quadripartite framework for understanding the impact and outcomes of multiparty mediation, which is discussed with reference to the episodes included in Table 2. Finally, the paucity of episodes of competition between the (O)AU and the Arab League is ascribed to three key patterns – passive convergence, norm convergence and institutional coordination – which reveal the presence of a thin but rather substantial set of norms of behaviour shared by the two bodies. As a whole, the paper will provide a framework for rethinking the role of multiparty mediation by regional organizations and assessing the impact of both formal and informal forms of interregional cooperation and coordination.

A Tripartite Conceptual Framework

The absence of substantial literature on joint regional mediation reflects the lack of systematic dialogue between three important debates within security and conflict resolution studies: the debates on the role of regional or sub-regional organizations in conflict resolution, the analysis of interregional cooperation and the study of multilateral or multiparty mediation.

Regional conflict resolution

As well known, the UN Charter itself acknowledges in article 52(1) the role of “regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security”. However, the absence of established legal procedures for the “peaceful settlement of local disputes” through regional institutions also implied that the process delineated in article 52(2) of the UN Charter, according to which the conflict resolution efforts of regional and international bodies should be sequenced and coordinated, often remained on paper. In his seminal study, Ernst Haas (1983: 216) noted that at least since 1965 the types of disputes submitted to regional organizations “no longer differed systematically from the United Nations’

caseload” and that such organizations became “competitors” and “rivals” of international organizations; therefore, Haas concluded in 1983, “there is no global division of labor among conflict management agencies now, and there probably never was one”.

At least four obstacles stood in the way to the implementation of the coordinated conflict resolution procedure prefigured by the UN Charter, in particular in Africa and the Middle East. On the one hand, the legal jurisdiction and institutional capacity of regional bodies is limited. Regional organizations are institutionally designed for dealing with inter-state wars but often lack both the jurisdiction and the political will for intervening in civil wars (Jonah, 1994: 9). Moreover, even when the preconditions for effective interventions might exist, the funding of regional organizations is often insufficient for carrying out their duties. The failure of many member states to pay their annual dues to the OAU was considered as “one of the most important impediments” to its proper functioning (Okoth, 2008: 36). The AU fell short of the aim of reversing this trend, succeeding in securing only 57% of the budgeted funding in its first four years of activity and heavily relying on external sources, which amounted to one quarter of the secured funding (Okumu, 2009: 105).

Also, the UN Charter seems not to consider the eventuality of substantial overlap between two regions. Since the creation of the OAU, but especially after the admission to the LAS of countries like Somalia, Djibouti, Mauritania and the Comoros since the 1970s, a significant number of African countries has been member of both the OAU and the LAS; to date, 9 out of the 23 members of the LAS are African countries, and 8 of them – all except Morocco, that withdrew from the OAU in 1984 – are members of both the LAS and the (O)AU. Therefore, ever since the first dispute mediated by the OAU (the 1963 Tindouf war between Algeria and Morocco) local actors have often been in the position of choosing which regional mediator best suited their agenda.

This effect has in turn been amplified by the proliferation since the 1970s and 1980s of sub-regional organizations. These bodies emerged primarily as a response to the unsatisfactory performance of pan-regional institutional projects (Adetula, 2008: 12) and many of them are devoted also – if not primarily – to conflict resolution activities. The African Union currently recognizes eight regional economic commissions (RECs). In the Middle East, two other sub-regional organizations have been founded in the 1980s: the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the weak Arab Cooperation Council (ACC), which also includes one African country (Egypt). At least four of these sub-regional bodies – the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the GCC – have been involved in substantial conflict resolution activities in their sub-regions, and it is not uncommon to witness the creation of new sub-regional body as a part of a multilateral peace process, as in the case of the Arab Maghreb Union.

Finally, apart from regional or sub-regional organizations operating in their own area of pertinence, the roster of potential conflict mediators has expanded further to include regional organizations that regularly operate beyond or across regional boundaries. This category includes both proper regional organizations, such as the European Union, regularly involved in extramural conflict resolution – i.e. conflict

resolution beyond their region of competence – and bodies often considered as regional organizations but which in fact include countries in at least three different regions, such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the African-Caribbean-Pacific Group of States (ACP) (Tavares, 2010).

As a result, it is clear that, while regional organizations continue today to act as mediators in crises taking place in their area of pertinence, the process of regional conflict resolution appears in practice as much more chaotic than the one prefigured by the UN Charter. Regional and sub-regional diplomatic arenas are increasingly crowded, and it is not unusual – indeed, it is increasingly common – to witness intervention from UN bodies in the early phases of a conflict, even before regional bodies have had the time to convene, or to see a number regional or sub-regional organizations simultaneously involved in mediating a specific conflict.

Interregional cooperation

Another counter-measure that has been taken by both regional and extra-regional bodies to compensate the weakness of regional arrangements and create some order in the chaotic arena of multilateral conflict resolution has been the creation of institutionalised or informal interregional forums.

Interregionalism has been defined by Ralf Roloff (2005: 18) as “a process of widening and deepening political, economic, and societal interactions between international regions” and is considered as one of the five levels of global governance – together with the bilateral, sub-regional, regional and global (cf. Rüland, 1999: 1; in Hänggi, 2000: 13). Despite the substantial number of papers published in this subfield over the last decade, the study of inter- and trans-regional cooperation is considered “in its infancy” (Hänggi et al., 2005: 6), and most attention is paid to economic and political cooperation among the three most developed regional blocs – the EU, the Americas and East Asia.

According to Jürgen Rüland (2010: 1272), patterns of interregionalism can be classified in three ways: bi-regionalism; transregionalism and hybrid interregionalism. Bi-regionalism applies to “group-to-group dialogues organized in a hub-and-spokes relationship” (Rüland 2010: 1272) which typically involves the European Union as one of the two partners, but which in principle could develop also between other regional bodies. Transregionalism, on the other hand, “denotes a dialogue process with a more diffuse membership, which does not necessarily only include regional organizations but also member states from more than two regions”; this form of cooperation also normally results in the creation of “a modicum of organizational infrastructure” (Rüland 2010: 1272). Finally, hybrid interregionalism is described as a “residual category” which includes inter-continental forums and strategic partnerships between regional organizations and individual states (Rüland 2010: 1272).

Even if this categorization is highly tentative and there seems to be substantial overlap at least between the concepts of transregionalism and hybrid interregionalism, today’s Arab Africa seems to provide instances of all these patterns, as summarized in Table 1.

With one exception, however, all these cooperation frameworks are relatively new and have been created to cope with the proliferation of mediators in the Horn of

Africa at least since the outbreak of the conflict in Darfur. The LAS-OAU cooperation framework, which was set at the first Afro-Arab summit in March 1977, constitutes the main exception to this pattern – indeed, a particularly relevant one, being one of the first examples worldwide of bi-regionalism. The 1977 Cairo summit resulted in the adoption of a program of action on Afro-Arab Cooperation, of a declaration on Afro-Arab economic and financial cooperation, and it laid a basic organizational structure for this cooperation, (cf. Boutros-Ghali, 1994). The deterioration of Afro-Arab relations since the late 1970s, also as a consequence of the crisis in Western Sahara and of the Camp David treaty, resulted in this organizational framework largely remaining on paper. However, consultations at the highest level between LAS and (O)AU officers continued, even if intermittently, throughout this period and the institutional architecture envisaged at the 1977 Cairo summit demonstrated that “the political will and the institutional framework for Afro-Arab cooperation exist” (Boutros-Ghali, 1994: 166).

<i>Types of interregionalism (Rüland 2010)</i>	<i>Examples from Arab Africa</i>
Bi-regionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (O)AU-LAS cooperation agreements (1977) - EU-(O)AU partnership (2007)
Transregionalism	International Somalia Contact Group (2006)
Hybrid interregionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU-IGAD ministerial troika annual meetings (2007) - LAS-IGAD informal coordination - Africa-Asia Sub-regional Organizations Conference (AASROC)

Table 1: Rüland’s typology of interregional forums applied to Arab Africa

Multiparty mediation

According to Crocker et al. (1999: 9), multiparty mediation in conflict resolution refers to “attempts by many third parties to assist peace negotiations in any given conflict”. These attempts “may occur sequentially – one institution at a time – over the life of the conflict, or may occur simultaneously, involving many different mediators with various institutional bases on the ground at the same time” (Crocker et al. 1999: 9).

Multilateral mediation has a series of advantages over bilateral mediation at least at two different levels. On the one hand, the involvement of a number of actors in mediation can “multiply the impact of the third-party collective effort” – an effect branded by Crocker et al. (2001: 59-60) as “borrowing leverage”. In a multilateral negotiation process, each actor can bring its own contribution either in form of material means that could induce the parties to look for an agreed settlement, or in

more immaterial terms - for instance by providing special mediation skills or exploiting pre-existing preferential relations with some of the parties involved.

Multilateral mediation, however, also presents various liabilities. The most apparent is the possibility for the parties to go “forum shopping” – i.e. to pick and choose among a range of different forums within which to negotiate (Crocker et al., 2001: 57). Forum shopping has various negative implications on conflict resolution. For instance, the availability of alternative mediation initiatives tends to reduce the leverage – and, thus, the ultimate chance of success – of each of them, creating a race to the bottom among would-be mediators. It could allow parties that are not committed to peace talks to buy time “not for peace but for a continuation / escalation of the conflict” (Crocker et al., 2001: 57). Logically, all these effects are also more likely to be relevant if the number of mediators is high, when the chance of significant disagreements among mediators increases.

The study of multiparty mediation adds two important insights to the analysis of both interregional cooperation and regional conflict resolution. On the one hand, by detailing the negative consequences of uncoordinated mediation efforts on conflict resolution, it provides a stronger theoretical and comparative ground for arguing for the reinforcement of intra- or interregional cooperation frameworks of any form – an intuition that can be found in part of the literature on conflict resolution in Africa (cf. Govender and Ngandu, 2010: 21) but which often rests primarily on short-term or anecdotic evidence. On the other hand, and most importantly, it helps re-frame the debate over the impact of regional organizations in conflict resolution by suggesting that, even if they may have a dismal record as peace-makers, they can still have a substantial *negative* impact on conflict resolution by acting as spoilers by sponsoring mediation initiatives explicitly (or potentially) competitive to existing ones. This suggestion should lead researchers to re-think how the “success” of multilateral cooperation in conflict resolution is assessed and calls for a more accurate evaluation of the reasons why multilateral bodies do not to intervene in specific conflicts – whether this is due to operational weakness, or if action is considered or expected to happen, but it ultimately does not take place because of broader political and diplomatic considerations.

An Interpretative Model

With specific reference to Arab Africa, two important sets of research questions emerge from the intersection between these areas of research:

- 1) In Arab Africa, how many conflict resolution attempts have been disrupted by “forum shopping” behaviour? What determines such behaviour?
- 2) How often (if ever) have the (O)AU and LAS successfully coordinated their mediation activity? If they did coordinate in at least some conflicts, why and how did they do so?

I will answer these questions by comparing 12 armed conflicts which crossed the Afro-Arab divide between 1963 – the year of creation of the OAU – and 2010, and which involved at least one state that is member of both OAU and LAS; if inter-state conflicts, the second state must have also been a member of at least one of them.

These conflicts constitute a “most likely” scenario for finding evidence of forum shopping behaviour, since they took place across a major ethnic divide and presented the potential for competing involvement of at least two major regional organizations. These cases were chosen by considering existing lists of conflicts mediated by the (O)AU and the LAS (including Zacher, 1979; El-Ayouty and Zartman, 1984; Imobighe, 2003) integrated and triangulated with primary sources. The cases are introduced in Table 2.

Among the cases considered in Table 2, on the basis of available primary and secondary sources, I suggest that forum shopping has been an important factor in the conflict resolution process of three out of twelve conflicts – the conflicts in Western Sahara, South Sudan and Somalia (post-1995).

Explaining why exactly these conflicts experienced forum shopping, however, is no easy task. Table 2 also introduces a number of potential explanatory variables, one distinguishing between different types of conflict and three focused on some key dynamics in multiparty mediation – the membership of these state(s) in regional organizations at the time in which the conflict developed, the sequencing of intervention by international bodies and the involvement of sub-regional organizations in conflict resolution. None of these variables seems to be sufficient on its own for explaining the presence of forum shopping; however, all the cases in which forum shopping behavior has been observed are intense and persistent intra-state conflicts, while no relevant inter-state war seems to have witnessed major instances of forum shopping – that is, the presence of a domestic conflict seems to be a necessary condition for forum shopping to be observed. These results are in line with the expectation that regional organizations, because of their original mandate, would normally find it more difficult to be perceived as legitimate mediators in civil wars as opposed to inter-state conflicts.

The search for explanations for the presence of forum shopping should therefore be extended to factors at a lower level of analysis. A closer look of these cases suggests that at least two key lower-level variables interact in determining such outcome: the presence or absence of a shared agenda among the mediators and the willingness or unwillingness of the local actors to play mediators against one another. In this sense, “forum shopping” and “borrowing leverage” appear to be only two extreme outcomes that could be compounded by at least two other intermediate situations, which will be named “risk assessment” and “regional blackmail”.

Western Sahara constitutes a typical, although somehow extreme, example of forum shopping because of the presence of competing agendas by the (O)AU and the LAS and because of the willingness of the parties to exploit such divisions to their own advantage. In dealing with the Western Saharan conflict, the Arab League consistently and unequivocally recognized the right of Morocco to have its “territorial integrity” protected (Arabic News, 1999), while the subservience of the OAU to the principle of *uti possidetis* and its support for anti-colonial movements both qualified it as a well-placed mediator in the dispute and encouraged allegations from Morocco of not being a “credible, impartial and honest broker” (Layachi, 1994: 34). After the admission of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) to OAU membership in 1982, Morocco withdrew from the organization in 1984 (Zunes and Mundy, 2010: 178) – a unique event in the history of Arab Africa that resulted in the division of

mediators into two essentially opposing camps, with SADR being member of the OAU but not of the LAS, and Morocco enjoying membership of the LAS, OIC and, since 1989, of the Arab Maghreb Union. While, with this arrangement, “no party was left out in the cold” (Layachi, 1994: 54), the absence of a shared regional or sub-regional forum for negotiations seems not to have benefited the conflict, which remains to date one of the last unsolved post-colonial disputes.

Forum shopping

		Mediators played against each other	
		Yes	No
Diverging agenda	Yes	“Forum shopping” Examples: Morocco in Western Sahara	“Risk assessment” Examples: Sudan in Darfur crisis
	No	“Regional blackmail” Examples: Libya in Toyota war; Morocco in Tindouf war	“Borrowing leverage” Examples: Comoros crisis; Somalia Civil War phase II

Table 3: Conditions for “forum shopping” and examples from the cases considered

On the other extreme, the coordination between Arab League and (O)AU in the Comoros civil war in 1997 and in the war between Somalia-Ethiopia in 2006 are typical instances of “borrowing leverage” between regional mediators; in both cases, the two organizations had a shared agenda and the local actors did not decide to play them against each other.

In the early phases of the crisis in the Comoros, in September 1997, the Arab League took the lead in mediating between the government and the Anjouan separatists; the envoy, Mohammed al-Khazinder, before reaching the Comoros capital Moroni, stopped in Addis Ababa on 16 September 1997 to meet the OAU Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim in order to “coordinate the positions and efforts” of the two organizations (ARB, 1997a: 12828). The Arab League and the OAU then organized a joint mission that met the President Mohammed Taki Abdulkarim on 23 September, welcomed both by the government and by the separatists (ARB, 1997a: 12828). The mission was not followed by an immediate success, and a major conference organized by the OAU in mid-December failed to bring about an agreed settlement (ARB, 1997b: 12937). However, the Arab League (together with France) backed OAU-led efforts until the signing of the Fomboni agreements in 2001, which set the stage for the final de-escalation of the conflict (MENA, 1997).

<i>Episode</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Type of conflict</i>	<i>Membership</i>	<i>Sequencing of involvement</i>	<i>Involvement of SROs?</i>	<i>Forum shopping?</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Morocco-Algeria (Tindouf)	Oct-Nov 1963	Inter-state	OAU, LAS (both)	OAU = LAS	No	No	Success (OAU takes lead) ¹
Western Sahara	1973-ongoing	Decolonization / inter-state	OAU/AU (Morocco until 1983; SARN after 1983); LAS, UMA, CENSAD (Morocco)	1) UN; 2) OAU; 3) LAS	Yes	Yes (Morocco playing LAS vs. OAU)	Failure ²
Egypt-Libya war	1977	Inter-state	OAU, LAS (both)	N/A	No	No	Irrelevant; no intervention by either organization ³
Ethiopia-Somalia (Ogaden)	1977-1978	Inter-state	OAU (both); LAS (Somalia)	1) OAU; 2) LAS	No	No	Limited success (OAU takes lead) ⁴
Sudan (Southern Sudan)	1983-2005	Intra-state	OAU/AU; LAS; IGAD	1) OAU, UN; LAS; 4) IGAD	Yes	Yes (LAS/IGAD divide) ⁵	Weakening of multilateral conflict resolution
Libya-Chad (Toyota war)	1987	Inter-state	OAU (both), LAS (Libya)	1) OAU; 2) LAS	No	No	Success (OAU takes lead) ⁶
Mauritania-Senegal ⁷	1989	Inter-state	OAS (both), LAS (Mauritania)	1) OAU	No	No	Irrelevant; OAU-led (failed) mediation attempt; LAS explicitly declares neutral ⁷
Somalia Civil War (phase 1)	1991-1995	Intra-state	OAU/AU, LAS, IGAD	1) OAU (6/1991); 2) UN; LAS (1/1992)	No	No	Limited success (UN-led intervention) ⁸
Somalia Civil War (phase 2)	1995-ongoing	Intra-state	OAU/AU, LAS, IGAD	1) OAU = LAS; 3) IGAD	Yes	Yes (LAS/IGAD divide) ⁹	Failure; opportunity for forum shopping (e.g. Khartoum conference)
Comoros ¹⁰	Sept 1997	Intra-state	OAU, LAS	1) OAU; 2) LAS	No	No	Limited success (shared mediation, later OAU takes lead, but outcome delayed) ¹⁰
Sudan (Darfur)	2003-2010	Intra-state	AU, LAS, IGAD, CENSAD	1) AU (4/2004); 2) UN (6-7/2004); 3) LAS	No	No ¹¹	Limited success (AU takes lead)
Ethiopia-Somalia	2006	Inter-state	AU, IGAD, CENSAD (Somalia and Ethiopia); LAS (Somalia)	1) AU, LAS, IGAD; 4) UN	Yes	No	Limited success (shared mediation; IGAD/AU peacekeeping force) ¹²

Table 2: “Conflicts in Arab Africa included in the analysis (1963-2010)

Notes: ¹ Wild (1966) – ² Layachi (1994) – ³ “Libya protested Egyptian ‘aggression’ to the UN, OAU and Arab League” (Zacher 1979, 281); effective mediation by Algeria and PLO but not as OAU or LAS members (Zacher, 1979: 281). – ⁴ Kuwait first calls for “collective Arab action” to support Somalia, but later “urged the Arab Nations to support the OAU in its attempt to settle the Ethiopian-Somali dispute” (Tomkins, 1978). – ⁵ LAS more critical than AU on Machakos framework agreement, but the strongest divide is between LAS and IGAD – e.g. government of Sudan calls for both LAS and OAU to intervene to counter-balance the IGAD in the Machakos peace process (AFP, 2003). – ⁶ Guardian (1987) – ⁷ BBC (1989) – ⁸ Andemicael (1994); UNSCR 733 – ⁹ LAS organizes competitive initiatives to IGAD (e.g. Khartoum conference - Tomlinson, 2006); Islamic courts reject IGAD and Somali government rejects Arab League. AU lets Ethiopia (IGAD) lead but does not take central role between 1995 and 2006. – ¹⁰ ARB (1997a; 1997b) – ¹¹ Main dynamic in Darfur negotiations is West (US; UN) vs. African/Arab actors (Slim, 2004; Weber, 2010). Existence of an early “understanding” between LAS and AU (MENA, 2004); LAS “acknowledged the active role of the AU” but did not strongly commit to “achieve better coordination with AU initiatives” (Weber, 2010: 10; cf. also Slim, 2004: 823-824). – ¹² Joint AU-LAS-IGAD communiqué on 27/12/2006; joint role in IGASOM / AMISOM.

The Arab League and the AU also converged around a unitary position by issuing a joint LAS-AU-IGAD communiqué in the aftermath of the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia on 27 December 2006 (Healy, 2011: 118). The joint document called unequivocally for the withdrawal of Ethiopia from Somalia and, among other things, for the establishment of a “protection and training mission” in Somalia. Ethiopia did begin the withdrawal of its troops in January 2007, as it probably had already planned, and the communiqué was followed by the institution of the OAU-led AMISOM mission in the same month. While the continuation of the civil war in Somalia makes it difficult to claim that such joint effort was a diplomatic success, the direct impact of this initiative at least on creating the diplomatic conditions needed for the deployment of AMISOM is clear.

The analysis of the conflict included in Table 2, however, also reveals a series of occurrences which add substantial complexity to the analysis of the concepts of “forum shopping” and “borrowing leverage”. On the one hand, in some occasions the main mediators involved in the resolution of a conflict converged on a shared position, yet local leaders tried (unsuccessfully) to pull them apart. A clear instance of such behaviour – what I have dubbed as “regional blackmail” – can be found in the so-called “Toyota war” between Libya and Chad. During the conflict, both the OAU and the LAS maintained an essentially neutral position and the OAU ultimately succeeded to secure a ceasefire on 11 September 1987 after substantial “pressing and repeated appeals” (Guardian, 1987). This solution was explicitly praised by the Arab League Council during a meeting in Tunis on 23 September, even if it also contextually recognized (*ex post*) Libya’s right to secure its territorial integrity (BBC, 1987b). However, the Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi repeatedly tried to get explicit support by the Arab League *against* Chad in the key phases of the war, for instance by threatening to withdraw from the League, and the Arab League refused to do so (The Economist, 1987). He also tried (less blatantly) to ingratiate himself with the OAU, for instance by offering in March 1987 to fund a 50,000 dollar Qaddafi prize for science and arts to be awarded to leading African scientists – an offer which was turned down by the OAU Ministerial Council (BBC, 1987a).

On the other hand, the development and impact of multiparty mediation in Darfur is extremely difficult to summarise in a clear-cut assessment. No commentator has so far spoken explicitly of forum shopping behaviour involving the Arab League and the African Union; if anything, it has been recognized that the LAS “acknowledged the active role of the African Union in Darfur”, but did not make “much effort to achieve better coordination with AU initiatives” (Weber, 2010: 10; cf. also Slim, 2004: 822). However, there seems to be general agreement on the fact that the main framework for “forum shopping” in the Darfur conflict involved not so much direct competition between the Arab League and the African Union, but rather regional actors on the one side (thus including *both* the Arab League *and* the African Union) and international actors – especially the United States and, to some extent, the United Nations – on the other. In this sense, the Darfur case could be considered as a rather peculiar situation in which local actors had to conduct a “risk assessment” of the diplomatic milieu and, preferring the “less worse” option of regional mediation over extra-regional mediation, tried not to exacerbate the differences between regional mediators but instead welcomed the elaboration of shared regional mediation

initiatives and, most importantly, peacekeeping operations that enjoyed widespread support among regional actors (IHT, 2004). Indeed, regional actors such as Nigeria used the prospect of Sudan “facing less friendly pressure from outside the continent” as a means for securing Sudan’s approval for a AU peacekeeping mission (AFP, 2004).

(O)AU-LAS coordination

In relation to the second research question, an important piece of information that emerges from Table 2 is that, out of the three instances of forum shopping, at least two appear to be linked not so much with competition between the two regional organizations operating in the region – the (O)AU and the LAS – but rather between the LAS and a sub-regional actor, the IGAD.

In the Southern Sudan conflict, the Arab League was predictably more critical to the Machakos protocol than the AU. The latter effectively delegated to IGAD the responsibility to negotiate the protocol, and later “welcomed” its signing and “congratulated” all the mediators (African Union, 2002: 6). On the other hand, the head of the African affairs department of the Arab League, Samir Hosni, pointed out that “the division of any member state is something that runs counter to the charter of the Arab League” and that his organization was working to “avoid a separation scenario” (Al Ahram, 2002). However, the Secretary-General of the Arab League Amr Moussa used much softer tones, stating that he would not be drawn into “a futile exercise of debating the pros and cons” of the protocol (Al Ahram, 2002). Indeed, in the aftermath of the agreement the Sudanese government appealed to both the LAS and the AU to play a more active role in the process to counter-balance the IGAD. President Bashir did not make any effort to hide his mistrust for the Ethiopia-led IGAD, stating that, if the mediators insisted on the Machakos process, “IGAD and those behind it [can] go to hell” (AFP, 2003). Instead, his government appreciated the (ambiguously) critical position of the Arab League towards the protocol and called the AU “to get more involved in supporting peace” and not to back unconditionally the IGAD-led process (Africa News, 2003). In sum, even if it is possible to suggest that the AU was broadly behind the IGAD mediation efforts, the fact that it was the IGAD to act as front-line mediator allowed the AU not to be involved directly in the process, and avoid exposing itself politically and diplomatically in a possible confrontation with the LAS.

The clash between LAS and IGAD was even more explicit and unambiguous in the peace process in Somalia, where once again IGAD took the lead but, this time, the Arab League organized explicitly competitive peace initiatives. An early episode of LAS-IGAD competition took place in 1998, when Egypt and the Arab League jointly hosted a separate set of Somali reconciliation talks which “effectively undermined the Sodere peace process”, sponsored by IGAD, and which prompted the latter to call explicitly for an end to “the proliferation of peace initiatives” (Healy, 2011: 112). In the more recent phases of the conflict, there has been no doubt about the predilection of the transitional government for the Ethiopia-led IGAD and of the Islamic Courts for the Arab League, and the LAS-IGAD competition reached another climax in November 2006, when the Arab League organized a largely unsuccessful peace

conference in Khartoum (Tomlinson, 2006). Interestingly enough, the Khartoum conference preceded by few weeks not just the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in December 2006, but also the abovementioned joint IGAD-LAS-AU communiqué that marked the beginning of a more obtrusive role of the AU in the management of the civil war. The fact itself that the inclusion of the AU in the process as a more proactive actor was perceived as part of the *solutions* to the crisis, and not among its causes, highlights how much of the “forum shopping” taking place in Somalia involved the polarization between the Arab League and IGAD and, behind it, between the two hegemonic states in each organization – respectively, Egypt and Ethiopia. These episodes, however, do not provide evidence of any substantial forum shopping involving directly, and juxtaposing, the LAS and the OAU.

But what explains the paucity of episodes of forum shopping involving the (O)AU and the LAS in the period analysed? For sure, the weak institutional framework created with the Cairo summit did not contribute to this outcome, since there is no evidence of any of the institutions created in 1977 playing a relevant role in joint conflict resolution activities. Yet, a number of other far more “thinner” and less structured factors or dynamics, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, seem to be at play. Table 4 summarises three of these that can be detected in the conflicts described in Table 2.

	<i>Explanation</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Passive convergence	At least one organization does not have the political will or operational ability to intervene, but does not undermine other conflict resolution efforts	Egypt-Libya war (1977)
Norm convergence	Acting according to ethnic allegiances is considered, but superseded by desire to contribute to the resolution of a conflict (typically in inter-state conflicts)	Ethiopia-Somalia (Ogaden, 1977-78) Mauritania-Senegal (1989)
Institutional coordination	Formal coordination takes place in an inter- or intra-regional forum or meeting and results in a shared and unified position	Comoros (1997) Ethiopia-Somalia (2006)

Table 4: Three explanations for the paucity of episodes of forum shopping involving the Arab League and the (O)AU

A first indication that emerges from this table is that, intuitively, the absence of competition does not naturally reflect the presence of cooperation or even formal or informal coordination. In various conflicts, including the 1977 Egypt-Libya war (Zacher, 1979: 281), what we seem to observe in the relations between the LAS and

the (O)AU could be defined as “passive convergence” – i.e. a situation where at least one organization does not have the political will or operational ability to intervene, but does not undermine other conflict resolution efforts. On the other hand, in other occasions, the two organizations engaged in what we could call “formalised coordination” – that is, they explicitly and formally coordinated their conflict resolution efforts in inter- or extra-regional forums or meetings that resulted in a shared and unified position. Instances of such coordination are the 2006 joint AU-LAS-IGAD communiqué on Somalia and, to a lesser extent, an early AU-LAS “understanding” on Darfur on August 2003 (MENA, 2004) and the informal coordination meeting that preceded the AU-LAS mission to the Comoros in September 1997.

However, a common (and, indeed, particularly interesting) cause for the absence of substantial divergence between the (O)AU and the LAS is what could be seen as an incipient or partial form of security regime characterised by a regular convergence of both organizations around a set of norms of behaviour. These norms do not completely override the role of state interests but rather create patterns of behaviour and discursive frameworks which make action against these norms costly and eventually undesirable in most circumstances. The core of such set of norms seems to lie in the acknowledgement that competition between the two organizations should be avoided, even at the cost – especially for the Arab League – of prioritising the broader conflict resolution discourse and value-set over the discourses and value-sets related to the defence of the Arab ethnic background in Arab Africa.

The interactions between the (O)AU and the LAS provide various interesting examples of how Arab countries were torn between these two discourses and value-sets, but ultimately converged with the (O)AU and allow the defence of Arab identity to slip into the background. For instance, during the Ogaden war between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977-8, Kuwait first called for “collective Arab action” to support Somalia, but later “urged the Arab Nations to support the OAU in its attempt to settle the Ethiopian-Somali dispute” (Tomkins, 1978). Similarly, the Moroccan king Hassan II ruled out Arab League’s intervention in the Mauritania-Senegal war in 1989 by suggesting that:

If we had decided to study we, the Arab League the Mauritanian-Senegalese dossier we would have found ourselves in an awkward position because Mauritania is a member of the Arab League and all of us would then have had to respect Arab solidarity. [...] We must reconcile the two sides and tell them to make peace, not just with words but with deeds (BBC, 1989).

Amr Moussa’s refusal to explicitly challenge the AU over its support for the Machakos protocol, discussed above, could be considered as another example of the will of both organizations not to challenge each other on a number of core values, which include a basic commitment to the pacification of the region.

Even if these statements do not provide evidence for suggesting that there exists an Afro-Arab “security community”, or even a full-fledged “security regime”, they certainly reveal an interesting and substantial degree of both discursive and factual convergence around a shared conflict resolution agenda. This situation, which

could be branded as “norm convergence”, constitutes an example of what remains to-date a broadly neglected area in the study of interregionalism – a process of identity building developing *between* regions or sub-regions, and not just *within* regional blocs (cf. Rüländ, 2005: 308-10). If it remains highly improbable that interregional cooperation could generate thick form of security cooperation or even result in the creation of interregional “security communities”, such thinner processes could nevertheless provide a basic framework for at least reducing the probability of interregional competition when regions overlap or regional organizations are involved in extra mural activities.

Conclusion

The results of this analysis provide various interesting additions to the current literature both on multiparty mediation and on interregionalism. On the one hand, they provide evidence to suggest that forum shopping is a possible (and, in some circumstances, likely) but not inevitable outcome in multiparty mediation, even across ethnic fault lines. The analysis of the role of the Arab League and of the (O)AU in these conflicts also showed that the instances in which these two regional organizations provided the opportunity for forum shopping were actually very few, with possibly only one single clear case among those included in Table 2 (the Western Sahara conflict). Such result does not imply, however, that these organizations effectively coordinated their conflict resolution efforts in all other instances; in some occasions they did, but the most common dynamic observed was a form of either “passive” or “norm” convergence, which reflected respectively the inability or unwillingness of an organization to challenge the other, or the choice to prioritise the desire to cooperate with other regional actors to solve a conflict over the temptation to support a specific side. Such “norm convergence” seems to confirm the intuition that what are often presented as clear-cut ethnic frontiers, such as the “Afro-Arab divide”, are better conceived as part of a complex system of social constructions that can be counter-balanced by norm-based convergence or institutional cooperation frameworks.

As far as the idea of “norm convergence” holds true, a practical implication that emerges from this analysis for structuring multiparty mediation initiatives is that interregional cooperation between regional organizations is more likely to generate such convergence than cooperation involving sub-regional organizations or state actors. That is, the smaller an organization is and the more closely it reflects the interests of a specific state, the less likely it is that it will be able to rely on a broader set of norms which prioritise the pursuit of negotiated settlements over other potential objectives of conflict resolution, such as the pursuit of regional or sub-regional stability and security. This suggestion highlights the fact that the creation of new subregional bodies should not be seen as a panacea for regional conflicts, and calls for organizations (such as the European Union) that are engaged in extra mural conflict resolution not to bypass organizations such as the Arab League or the African Union, but rather increase the commitment to help strengthen the capabilities and reach of existing regional bodies.

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