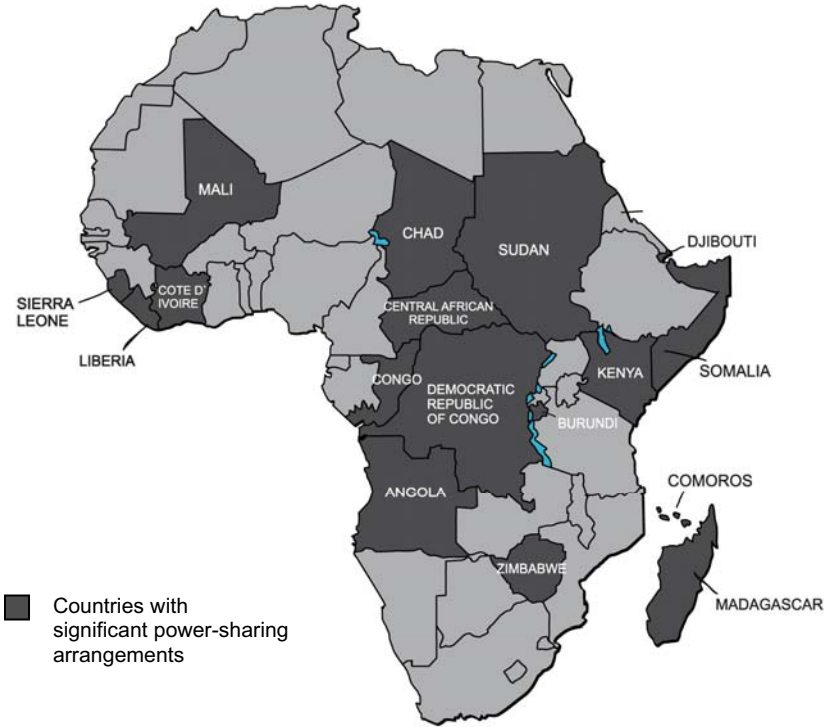




## Power-Sharing Agreements in Africa 1999-2009



Source: Updated on the basis of Mehler 2009.

# Introduction: Power-Sharing in Africa

Andreas Mehler

In 2009 the 25 year old civil war in Sri Lanka was brought to an end, by the military victory of the Sri Lankan army against the Tamil Tiger rebel movement – a remarkable and brutal war with an equally brutal variant of war termination. This event does not mirror the general trend in war termination: negotiated settlements are the dominant way to end wars nowadays on a worldwide level (Hartzell and Hoddie 2007: 10). This was not always the case: in contemporary history wars were often fought till the end. Fortunately, the Sri Lankan way to terminate war has become an exception. But not all negotiated settlements of violent conflicts are sustainable. “Losing the peace” is a dire perspective for many stakeholders and analysis cannot stop with the signature of a peace deal. Another trend has become obvious: power-sharing elements are present most of the time when peace agreements are concluded in the new millennium, not least in Africa (Mehler 2009). In the period 1999-2009 meaningful peace agreements were concluded in all countries highlighted in the map on the left.

Senegal is the only country on this map that witnessed an agreement without power-sharing elements. Included in this map are Kenya, Zimbabwe and Madagascar. In these three cases there was no civil war – according to the usual definitions –, but violent political crises about the country’s leadership occurred in 2008/2009. The distinction is probably important for the academic debate (see below), but mediators immediately sought for similar solutions. Thus, power-sharing is regarded more and more as the best solution for severe crises on the continent. And this was the main motive for launching a special issue of *Africa Spectrum* on this topic.<sup>1</sup>

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1 ... and an international thematic conference in the framework of the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS), held in Hamburg on October 1-2, 2009 (funded by the Fritz-Thyssen foundation). Out of 13 pre-selected papers seven have entered this special issue. All were substantially reworked based on the discussions held in Hamburg and later in several rounds of reviews. I have to thank many prestigious colleagues who accepted to anonymously review the manuscripts and come up with very pertinent comments. Excellent discussants (Matthias Basedau, Mathijs Bogaards, Ulrich Schneckener, Christian von Soest) also helped to improve the quality of the papers. The proof that *Africa Spectrum* found interest in the topic early on is that, in 2003, we published Bogaards’ “Power-Sharing in Südafrika: Ist der ANC eine Konkordanzpartei?” (vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 47-68).

What can be achieved via power-sharing – sustainable peace, a halt in open hostilities, a shared openness for compromise, or none of these – is still open to debate (Jarstad and Sisk 2008; Sriram 2008). Above all, the short-term merits may contrast with long-term problems associated with a solution that is frequently elite-centred, driven by individual material interests and leaving a legacy of strong incentives to turn to arms in order to achieve something. The impression that outside negotiators have some responsibility for a certain short-sightedness has been voiced several times (Tull/Mehler 2005). While negotiators want to settle violent conflicts as soon as possible, citizens might be more interested in finding solutions to the underlying problems that caused violence in the first place. Those who are at the negotiation table usually find comfort in power-sharing arrangements – Mugabe’s Zimbabwe might be an exception –, other stakeholders and ordinary citizens may not. Some legitimate interests may well be harmed by far-reaching agreements, e.g. when civilian opposition parties are sidelined like in Côte d’Ivoire in 2007. In the case of Kenya, the long-awaited constitutional reform advocated by numerous civil society groups was once again postponed in the wake of the 2008 elite deal (see Amadi’s contribution in this issue).

Classical consociational theory provides us with all key ideas and concepts underlying the power-sharing discourse, but it was concerned with other contexts than those of violent conflict. Relatively independent of the older concern about the viability of democracy in plural societies a postconflict power-sharing literature has emerged. Arend Lijphart, the classical author on consociational democracy, has remained influential, though, and rightly so, because he gives us food for thought in terms of the scope of institutional engineering possible to deal with governance problems in plural societies (1977). Lijphart’s work puts forward the following four essential elements of consociational democracy: Grand coalition, minority veto, proportional representation and group autonomy. But, generally speaking, Lijphart had not the African cases in mind. The qualified exception is South Africa, where Lijphart involved himself in the constitutional debate. Apart from this, places like Belgium, Switzerland and Lebanon were his classical cases. And even these four elements show so many variations that it has remained unclear which precise institutional choice can be considered more conducive to peace than another. Research on the value of institutions for peace may get a new push by a recent prominent contribution by Goldstone and others (2010).

The bulk of the post-conflict power-sharing literature (associated with the names of Walter, Rothchild, Hartzell/Hoddie and others) is interested in the big picture. Large-N comparisons, i.e. quantitative approaches, dominate

and lead to apparently statistically solid, but, surprisingly, mutually contradicting results. In sum, it is still unclear what the simple recipes for sustainable peace would be. This inconclusiveness is linked to a number of methodological problems, linked to the rather wide variety of types of agreements or formulas. This always requires tough decisions when coding events in order to fill in categories of a data-base. Jarstad's contribution to this special issue is an example of a thoughtful use of such a data-base. She presents the new Post Accord Election (PAE) data collection and draws conclusions from investigations into the data-base. The qualitative literature includes a wealth of case-based insights but has given little systematic attention to the question of why some power-sharing pacts are more successful than others and which institutional provisions, informal arrangements or salient contexts may help to account for such differences.

“The more power-sharing the better” – this is a meanwhile strongly contested finding of earlier studies on power-sharing. Reflecting more deeply on the issue, it must be rather difficult to “measure” power-sharing content. What is in fact “more” power-sharing?

- More dimensions included (political, military, territorial and economic power-sharing may be distinguished according to Hoddie and Hartzell)?
- More (relevant) actors included?
- Or more substance of power shared between government and its contenders?

All three aspects could plausibly be important. The *dimensional approach* leads to the quick establishment of some notable trends on the continent. Political power-sharing is unsurprisingly the most prominent dimension of power-sharing. In the “special” cases of Kenya, Zimbabwe and Madagascar it is obvious that power-sharing must focus on the political side as there were, properly speaking, no military confrontations. But in the same way no single recent African post-war power-sharing agreement has avoided the political dimension. Military power-sharing is equally prominent in most agreements. Rather rare, by contrast, are territorial elements in power-sharing agreements. This is notable as one frequent assumption about African civil wars is that they would be ethno-regional in essence, and one would therefore expect territorial devices to deal with the main underlying problem. So either the assumption is wrong or the institutional ingenuity has not been there. And finally, economic power-sharing or wealth-sharing is equally rare. The latter is obviously a very important element in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan where North and South or more precisely the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement

(SPLM/A) agreed to share the oil wealth between them (see Einas Ahmed in this issue). It was also prominent in Liberia 2003 and Sierra Leone 2000 where the sharing of spoils was a strong incentive for behaving peacefully in the first place (see Helga Binningsbø and Khendra Dupuy in this issue). Tiny Burundi can be credited with all four dimensions. Specialists in power-sharing can less and less spare themselves the study of this relatively unknown case as it is the one where most experiments in power-sharing have been done so far (as Stef Vandeginste can impressively show in his contribution). An appraisal of the interplay between those different dimensions of power-sharing may still need more in-depth and comparative analysis.

The *inclusiveness* of power-sharing deals is another important aspect. Variation in the formal process of peace negotiations is important here. Not always does the “more inclusive” mean the “more effective” – if we think about the case of Côte d’Ivoire where the less inclusive Ouagadougou agreement (2007) was much more successful in terms of fostering peace than the far more inclusive Linas-Marcoussis agreement (2003). But to exclude main players will, of course, always be problematic. Quite frequently, part of the leadership of a rebel movement agrees to the terms of a peace agreement, while others still do not feel accommodated and initiate a split within the organisation, sparking new violence and subsequently becoming candidates for a new round of negotiations. This is why peace remained so elusive in countries like Chad and Central African Republic even after the signature of many peace agreements.

The *extent or degree of power-sharing* is probably the most intriguing aspect of the three aforementioned puzzles. Zimbabwe’s Deputy-Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara of one wing of the once oppositional Movement for Democratic Change is quoted as saying: “You can see that we are not in full control. We are not exactly in charge. There are other forces in control”.<sup>2</sup> This is a clear sign of frustration with what was achieved by signing a power-sharing agreement. But the next question must be: not controlling what? We may have to go back to some classical authors on the nature of power in Africa to come to more meaningful conclusions with regard to the degree of power-sharing in individual cases (Bayart 1989, Chabal 1992, Herbst 2000). Is the core of power relations touched at all by power-sharing deals? Doubts are permitted in many cases. As long as the President of the Republic is still making the most important decisions with regard to the appointment to

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2 As reported by Nic Cheeseman’s and Blessing-Miles Tendi’s paper for the aforementioned conference. This quote has unfortunately disappeared from the final version (Cheeseman/Tendi 2010) to be published with *Journal of Modern African Studies*.

“juicy” positions and hands out the sinecures, there will not be a fundamental change in the rules of the neo-patrimonial game.

Two additional aspects, only superficially dealt with in the academic debate, merit deeper reflection and adapted research designs: the local level of power-sharing and the relative importance of international negotiators.

The *local level of power-sharing*: The apparent assumption of most of the existing literature is that the sharing of national power leads to a territorially uniform and locally meaningful peace process. But this assumption is not grounded empirically. Only looking at sub-national arenas that were particularly affected by violence would permit far-reaching conclusions with regard to the contribution of power-sharing agreements to peace. National elites cannot simply act upon the local level and its actors. A more realistic alternative assumption could therefore be that national peace and power-sharing accords are unlikely to trigger a country-wide peace if they ignore local constellations of actors and their interests. Studies on the local level of power-sharing are nearly non-existent. The exception to the rule is the contribution by Kathrin Heitz to this special issue. She investigates the change of power relations in the long-time rebel-held city of Man in West Côte d’Ivoire and comes up with some preliminary findings which should invite further research.

The *relative prominence of negotiators* may also merit better scrutiny. In some cases mediators are more active than in the average: they sign the document themselves and represent a “guarantee power” in the agreement, in others they are discreet to the point that they are not mentioned at all in relevant texts. One potential explanation may lie in the variation of the post-agreement role they are assigned to play; but who assigns them to a specific role? The earliest arrangements between the conflict parties when negotiating a ceasefire agreement and settle with a trustful negotiator and/or the first, often improvised, involvement of international bodies could play an underrated role. If this were the case, a certain path-dependency could be assumed and should invite researchers to adapt their research designs accordingly. One element is obvious: There is in academia and practice a relatively strong emphasis on third-party guarantees of peace agreements and usually those third-parties already demand an active role in the negotiation process. However, more informal aspects have to be considered as well. The universe of African negotiators in peace processes is growing. Some of them are – or were – extraordinarily frequently invited (e.g. Gabon’s Omar Bongo Ondimba until his death in 2009), some had their country’s experience with power-sharing in their baggage (South Africa’s Mandela and Mbeki) and some had a rather peculiar position in the just-ended war (Burkina’s Compaoré in Côte d’Ivoire). Unfortunately, there is no text in this collection that

deals particularly with the negotiators of peace deals, although Chandra Lekha Sriram and Marie-Joëlle Zahar remind us of the partly problematic attitudes of international actors to post-conflict peacebuilding. Sriram and Zahar in fact identify three factors of particular salience for the appropriate implementation and durability of power-sharing arrangements: the nature of the state, the nature of the armed group, and the degree of third-party engagement. Generally, weak states, badly organised armed groups and third parties interested in quick-fix solutions make working power-sharing arrangements a rare outcome in Africa.

Finally, and this was an important finding of the Hamburg conference, it may be useful to see power-sharing as a process and not as a one-off event. Historical institutionalism, the search for “critical junctures” in peace processes may merit more attention. This perspective would permit one to value past, apparently “failed” peace agreements as part of a learning exercise by key actors. The “success story” in Burundi was for a long time just the opposite: a story of repeated failures. Vandeginste’s historically informed analysis in this issue allows us to review the entire process from first attempts to share power in 1988 until the 2006 agreement (and beyond).

Jarstad’s contribution deals with another puzzle, the tension between power-sharing and elections. While democracy is all about uncertainty (associated with free political competition and uncertain electoral outcomes), power-sharing is, on the contrary, all about the reduction of uncertainty (guaranteeing continuous political power to those who are part of the power-sharing deal). She finds that power-sharing agreements do not provide particularly good chances of their being followed by peaceful elections, based on her data-based analysis. However, she identifies cases, not least in Africa, where power-sharing and peaceful elections could be accommodated – cases to be watched more closely.

Binningsbø/Dupuy analyse the intended or unintended effect of attracting rebels to the capital via a power-sharing agreement, isolating them from their combatants and their military resources, as a key to the military success and relative peace in Sierra Leone – this may be one of the alternative ways to peace, but one that could not easily be recommended because of all the potential costs associated. They show how a government may not stop “cheating” their armed opponents after the signature of a peace agreement, and that the implementation phase of an agreement is of utmost importance.

Heitz, in her contribution, invites us to be more interested in what is happening on the ground (in former combat zones) when deciding on the real value of an agreement. The relationship between local rebel commanders not only to the leadership in the capital, but to local stakeholders, in-



cluding the slowly returning representatives of the state administration is an important although underrated aspect of the sustainability of both formal and informal peace arrangements.

The selection of papers presented here clearly invites researchers interested in the consequences of specific forms of peace agreements to continue their reflections in a more circumspect way. A balance-sheet of power-sharing in Africa cannot be drawn yet, not only because new, more meaningful agreements will probably be signed in years to come, maybe in Darfur, maybe in Eastern Congo, maybe in Chad; but primarily because there are few viable alternative paths to peace in sight. This explains the rather supportive view on power-sharing held by one of the key authors in the field (Lemarchand 2007). Not a single contribution in this issue is naïve with regard to the (side-)effects of power-sharing, but some are rather sceptical (Sriram/Zahar, Amadi, Jarstad), others moderately optimistic (Vandeginste, Ahmed). All this is food for thought and hopefully just the start for new meaningful research designs to fill the wide gaps in our knowledge and – why not – to come up with more suitable proposals for making Africa a more peaceful continent.

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