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Understanding inclusive peace agreements in Africa: the problems of sharing power

IAN S SPEARS

ABSTRACT Power sharing has increasingly been seen as a way out of otherwise intransigent conflicts in multi-ethnic African societies. Yet power sharing has obvious problems: power sharing agreements are difficult to arrive at, even more difficult to implement, and even when implemented, such agreements rarely stand the test of time. Indeed, there are relatively few historical examples of successful, formalised power sharing in Africa which would warrant its advocacy. Drawing primarily on the cases of Angola, Somalia, Ethiopia and Rwanda, this paper seeks to explain why a method of conflict resolution so appealing in theory fails so often in practice. The paper will outline general theoretical approaches to power sharing, examine the practical problems associated with its implementation, and suggest ideas for how some of these problems can be overcome.

Power sharing—whereby government posts are distributed across the most powerful political parties or groupings—has increasingly been seen as a way out of otherwise intransigent conflicts in divided, multi-ethnic African societies. Indeed, power sharing is intuitively appealing as a means of conflict resolution and governance. It provides a reasonable alternative to the type of high-stakes, winner-takes-all elections which led to a resumption of war in Angola in 1992. It also offers a promising solution to groups who can neither envision secession nor tolerate the status quo and who, like the SPLA, Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army, in the Sudan, call for a ‘radical restructuring’ of power. Furthermore, because power sharing requires only that participants integrate their respective military wings rather than forego them, participants have more insurance against cheating by their adversaries.¹ Finally, power-sharing does not have to mean that democratic principles and procedures must be abandoned; indeed, power-sharing arrangements can be compatible with democracy while diminishing its most destabilising side effects.

Not surprisingly, practitioners of conflict resolution cite either ‘winner-takes-all’ politics as being at the root of Africa’s current electoral problems or, alternatively, political solutions which emphasise inclusion as offering possibilities for peace. In his April 1998 report to the UN Security Council, for example, Secretary General Kofi Annan argued that Africa’s leaders must give up the ‘winner-takes-all’ political mentality which prevails in so many African coun-

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tries and consider including opposition groups in public debate.² And while US diplomats continue to emphasise free and competitive elections, there have also been more subtle calls for a move ‘from exclusive to inclusive societies’ and, in some instances, for ‘the establishment of an inclusive political transition that would end the cycle of violence and impunity’.³

Support for power-sharing also comes from scholarly sources. William Zartman observes that the ‘eventual key to the effectiveness of mediators and negotiators is an outcome that returns the conflict to normal politics ... Generally this involves creating a new political system in which the parties to the conflict feel they have a stake, thus in a very positive sense co-opting all parties—government and rebels—in a new creations.’⁴ More succinctly, Marian Ottaway writes that a ‘power-sharing pact ... may be the only attainable short-term goal compatible with long-term democratization’.⁵

Yet power sharing has obvious problems: power-sharing agreements are difficult to arrive at, even more difficult to implement, and even when implemented, such agreements rarely stand the test of time. Consider some examples. In Ethiopia, following the overthrow of the Dergue in 1991, the victorious Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) invited a number of opposition groups to join it in the capital, Addis Ababa. Thirty-one parties and organisations participated in the subsequent July conference and, while the largest number of seats in the newly formed transitional council was allocated to the EPRDF, seats were also allocated to the OLF and a number of other ethnically based groups. Within a year, however, the non-EPRDF-affiliated parties, including most notably the OLF, had withdrawn from the government. In all subsequent elections, only the EPRDF and its closest allies participated. In Angola, the UNITA rebel group had long rationalised its ongoing war with the MPLA government in Luanda on the basis that it had been unjustly excluded from power at the time of independence in 1975. But when a peace agreement was finally reached in 1991 at Bicesse, Portugal, neither side considered power sharing, opting instead for winner-takes-all elections. When UNITA lost the elections in 1992 it returned to war until it was finally induced to sign a power-sharing agreement at Lusaka in 1994. While this was an important achievement, the deal became severely strained and, following the resumption of war in December 1998, is now dead.

Even in South Africa, where power sharing has been most successfully instituted, the National Party felt compelled to pull out of the ruling coalition before the end of its term. More recently, President Nelson Mandela has shown impatience with white South Africans and even his own long-standing allies, the South African Communist Party, admonishing the latter that ‘if you cannot get your way, then you can go out and shout like opposition parties’.⁶

In sum, while power sharing or inclusion has been cited as a necessary direction which African leaders should follow, it remains relatively unproven as a means of conflict resolution. There are, in fact, relatively few examples of successful, formalised power sharing in Africa which warrant its advocacy. Even those developing world examples cited by power sharing’s main proponent, Arend Lijphart, tend to be relatively few and, with the exception of South Africa, none of them has been initiated in the past 25 years.⁷ On the contrary, there are

several examples of power-sharing failures. Given that it has so frequently failed to bring peace in the long term, it is surprising that power sharing should be seen as a viable means of mitigating conflict. Drawing primarily on the cases of Angola, Somalia, Ethiopia and Rwanda, this paper seeks to explain why a method of conflict resolution so appealing in theory fails so often in practice. By better understanding its weaknesses and limitations, we can arrive at more workable and effective forms of power sharing.

Consociation power sharing and conflict resolution

The most frequently cited form of power sharing is that of consociationalism, as explained by Arendt Lijphart. Lijphart emphasises that, while consociationalism can involve a variety of institutional arrangements, what really counts is a 'deliberate effort by the elites to stabilise the system'. He does, however, suggest several common elements which comprise consociationalism, most notably the idea of a 'grand coalition' made up of political leaders from all of the society's major groups. In addition, Lijphart cites a mutual veto (which can be used by each of the grand coalition's members as a 'guarantee of political protection'), proportional representation, and various forms of autonomy as being the essential elements of consociationalism. His central idea, however, remains elite co-operation and the formation of a grand coalition among ethnic representatives. Just as leaders will form coalition governments in extraordinary circumstances such as wars, when the principle of majority rule is superceded by the need for unity, fragmented political systems require more than a simple majority to deal with their unique challenges. In this way, leaders in fragmented countries are induced to bind together to create viable, stable democracies.⁸

Lijphart uses consociationalism most effectively to explain existing cases of stable democracy among divided societies in Europe. The idea of establishing and maintaining co-operation among elites, however, is arguably not suited to modern Africa. Lijphart notes that elite co-operation is most likely when there is the perception of an external threat to the country. He writes that, in all of the consociational democracies, 'the cartel of elites was either initiated or greatly strengthened during times of international crisis, especially the First and Second World Wars'.⁹ Such circumstances impress upon elites the need for co-operation and to strengthen the bonds between leaders and followers. In Africa, on the other hand, there is less sense of a purely external threat. On the contrary, as Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg have argued, the security of the African state has been guaranteed by the juridical nature of the international system.¹⁰ There are fewer inducements for leaders to demonstrate their collective solidarity and, given their conflictual past, much to drive them apart.

However, as Donald Rothchild and Michael Foley point out, there are many examples where African leaders have sought to include ethnic representatives in their respective governments. Furthermore, this inclusiveness has been central to a regime's longevity in the face of rapid social change.¹¹ Although inclusiveness is not always formally displayed, it has, nonetheless, been a reality of governance. Linkages are personalised and frequently involve bargaining and exchanges between ethnic representatives over government resources. There is also

considerable fluidity in terms of the way ethnic representatives move in and out of the political scene.

In this sense, the kind of consociationalism described by Lijphart is not so foreign to Africa, nor is it new. Indeed, Rothchild and Foley even use Lijphart's terms, the 'grand coalition' and the 'proportional principle', to describe the kind of political systems that were created across Africa. During the post-cold war transitions to democracy, however, agreements were inclined to be formally negotiated at large, inclusive peace and reconciliation conferences; politicians are now expected to attain office through open competitive elections rather than through skillful regional and ethnic balancing and manipulation. Thus the often informal, backroom pattern of inclusiveness, which relied on generous clientelist ties to keep these 'coalitions' together, is incompatible with the open, non-clientelist democratic systems expected in the post-Cold War era.

Obstacles to successful power-sharing

To understand further why successful power sharing is so rare, it helps if we see power sharing and the democratisation process in general not as a policy objective of parties and movements, but as a non-violent *strategy* or *vision* for achieving power. Political realists argue that elites make agreements with their adversaries only when it suits their interests. And parties and movements in Africa consider their options in terms of how each one fits in with their strategy to achieve power.¹² The problem is, as we shall see, that power sharing cannot always be incorporated into these strategies, which have for the most part envisioned exclusive access to power.

The first challenge to power sharing, for example, is that it interferes with the option of total power offered by competitive elections. In Angola, Jonas Savimbi, for example, argued that an insistence on power sharing for Angolans—while competitive elections were acceptable elsewhere—betrayed a double standard on the part of the world community.¹³ But these objections doubtless had as much to do with Savimbi's reluctance to jeopardise access to total power (particularly since early indications suggested UNITA would win open and fair elections), as with any stigma associated with power sharing. As in many African countries, to be excluded from the state in Angola was to lose control of virtually all the levers of political and (perhaps more importantly) economic power. Moreover, since both sides had been confident of electoral victory (UNITA apparently more so than the MPLA) neither side seriously lobbied for a power-sharing (or even face-saving) arrangement which could have alleviated the consequences of losing. What was offered during the 1992 campaign—vague promises of a government of national reconciliation *after* the election—was too uncertain to satisfy those who did not win. Elections provided UNITA with a strategy which would finally, legitimately, offer them a realistic chance of political power. In this environment the political parties embraced elections out of the expectation that they would win, rather than as an acceptance of democratic ideals *per se*. Indeed, observers in Angola at the time conceded that UNITA would probably not have accepted a peace agreement and elections had they not been convinced that they would be victorious. The lesson for

advocates of power sharing, then, is that there are few incentives to forming inclusive governments when risk-acceptant groups have the option of complete political power and believe the attainment of that option is very likely.

A second obstacle to power sharing is that parties and movements prefer to share power only as part of a strategy to augment military and political power in order to defeat adversaries rather than to make peace with them. Clan leaders in post-Siad Barre Somalia, for example, were willing to share a nominal portion of power for the purposes of achieving a more favourable balance which would then help them overcome their opponents. Indeed, Somalia was as much an exercise in building cross-clan coalitions as it was a military confrontation. Both the principal clan leaders, Ali Mahdi and General Mohamed Farah Aidid, built alliances with other clans by including clan representatives or other friendly ‘warlords’ in their over-sized national ‘governments’. But while they were determined to develop *national* coalitions, they were unable to forego or compromise personal political ambitions. The leaders were only willing to make power-sharing arrangements with other significant but nonetheless lesser clans and militias—ones that would involve the fewest political compromises—rather than make the deals that really would have counted, with their principal adversary.¹⁴

Third, power sharing requires otherwise incompatible individuals and groups to co-operate—something which is almost never envisioned by political leaders or incorporated into their political strategies. By definition, power sharing requires frequently demagogic and mutually hostile leaders to collaborate on an ongoing basis. Aside from potential differences in political culture, power sharing is difficult for two or more individuals who for many years have been at the pinnacle of their respective movement’s political structure and have engaged in vitriolic denunciations of one another. Again, the case of Angola is instructive. The UN Special Envoy to Angola, Margaret Anstee, implies that the kind of partnership which a coalition would have required at the time of the 1992 elections was not on the cards given the ideological differences, the radically dissimilar personalities and the ‘deep personal animosity’ which characterised relations between the two leaders.¹⁵ Suspicion or disdain may in turn be built on fear and past instances of violent behaviour. In view of the post-colonial episodes of violence between Tutsi and Hutus in Rwanda, René Lemarchand cites former Rwandan President Kayibanda’s comment that ‘there is no intercourse and no sympathy [between the nations. They] are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts and feelings as if they were dwellers of different zones, or inhabitants of different planets.’¹⁶ Obviously this is not a situation conducive to co-operative behaviour.

Groups may also be incompatible if they believe they have made the greatest sacrifices in bringing down the previous government and liberating their country, or if they believe other groups are too unorganised to justify the sharing of power. Other groups are seen as free-riders seeking to capitalise on the sacrifices and hard-won achievements of the victors. In Somalia, despite the fact that Siad Barre’s power-base had been whittled away for years, General Mohamed Farah Aidid believed that it was ultimately he who was responsible for the regime’s collapse and, thus, who deserved the presidency. Aidid was unwilling to share

power with those (even from within his own Hawiye clan-family) who made similar claims of having helped bring down the regime. Alternatively, in Ethiopia the EPRDF had waged a guerrilla war against the Dergue for many years but, upon the Dergue's defeat, was confronted with demands from other liberation fronts who represented numerically larger ethnic groups but, from their EPRDF's perspective, had done little or nothing to bring about the Dergue's downfall.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, the coherence of the EPRDF government sharply contrasted with the noisy and often divided opposition, a fact which allowed the government to dismiss the opposition entirely when it refused to accept the EPRDF process. Indeed, when these groups refused to abide by the rules laid out by the victors, the EPRDF's strategy shifted towards their own ethnically based parties made up of more compliant ethnic representatives. Power-sharing, then, did not mean that the new regime consisted of representation from each of the major liberation fronts in the country. Rather it required only the inclusion of individuals from the most prominent ethnic groups or defectors from the liberation fronts who would follow the EPRDF's lead and yet could still claim to represent those ethnic groups.

Power sharing can also run into other logistical problems associated with the peace process itself. In Somalia, General Aidid and Ali Mahdi were ostensibly the most significant military powers and the main contenders for political power, but they were also allied with innumerable other clan militias involved in power struggles in other locations of the country. More significantly, the ability of factions to splinter off along any number of clan lines and then to form their own political movements complicated the peace process. The effort to extend the process outward inevitably stimulated various self-appointed clan leaders to call for their inclusion, regardless of whether they had a genuine connection with the clan community. Consequently, power sharing became a trap: efforts to include and accommodate everybody in itself generated increasing factionalism and—intentionally or unintentionally—left some complaining that they had been excluded.

Yet the costs of *not* including one particular faction can be catastrophic. One diplomat close to the negotiations argues that the 1993 Arusha Accords on Rwanda were 'the perfect example of the failure of power-sharing because of a basic decision to exclude a group of people'—most notably the extreme Hutu-dominated Committee for the Defence of the Republic (CDR).¹⁸ Excluded from the political process and believing that Hutu political power was being sold from underneath it, Hutu extremists took action which ensured that the agreement would not be implemented.

In fact, an ethnic group does not have to be excluded from power for it to feel threatened. It needs only to perceive a loss of power in an environment conceived as being zero-sum in nature. A fourth obstacle to power sharing, then, is the fact that, despite the theoretical promise of mutual benefit, power sharing still involves the perilous requirement that one party relinquish at least some power. As the case of Rwanda shows, the threat of a net loss in power may force extremists to take violent preventative action. The concessions made by the Hutu-dominated government of Juvénal Habyarimana to the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) meant that, although the Hutu would continue to

hold the bulk of political power, their representation in the proposed government was no longer commensurate with their proportion of the Rwandan population. More importantly, the agreement specified that the RPF's control of the army command structure would be equal to that of the majority Hutu population. The decision to go ahead with the Accords' implementation—finalised during President Habyarimana's last trip to Arusha—signalled the death-knell for the regime. As he flew back to Kigali on 6 April 1994, Habyarimana's plane was shot down almost certainly by members of his own regime.

The fear that power can be jeopardised even within the context of a power sharing agreement points to a fifth obstacle. Groups are constantly strategising, and strategic choices depend in large measure on the respective relative power positions of the adversarial groups and, more importantly, on whether their relative military power is on the increase or the decrease. The fluidity of coalitions and the dynamics of power relations, however, means that their political interests and their willingness to accept an agreement are rarely the same for each party. Elites are more likely to agree to share power when they are threatened by the possibility of losing total power. Their adversaries, on the other hand, can risk biding their time until a more advantageous situation emerges, particularly one where they will not have to make any power concessions. In other words, there is a certain incompatibility in terms of the times when each party will accept a power-sharing agreement or, stated differently, there are few points when it is simultaneously in the interest of both parties to accept a power-sharing agreement.

Consequently, there is rarely a point at which a conflict is—in William Zartman's words—ripe for resolution.¹⁹ Instead, leaders look forward to when they might be in a more advantageous position relative to their adversary. When UNITA was on the run in 1994 in Angola it was willing to lock into a power-sharing deal at Lusaka before it was emasculated militarily by government forces. However, as UNITA rearmed, Savimbi distanced himself from the power-sharing deal worked out at Lusaka. In Rwanda, the country's ongoing economic decline and the army's failures on the battlefield put the government under considerable pressure to reach an agreement before it was overthrown entirely by the advancing RPF forces. The RPF, on the other hand, threatened to return to the battlefield if it did not get the deal it wanted and, ultimately, did not stop to share power once the option of total power was opened to it following the death of President Habyarimana.²⁰ In both cases, instances that appeared to be 'ripe' were envisioned, or in fact became, weigh-stations on the road to total power.

A sixth and final obstacle to power sharing is a consequence of the fact that there are varying degrees of commitment to a strategy. In aggregating political interests, political parties and movements incorporate a range of views from moderate to extreme. Signing a power-sharing deal with a long-time enemy is inevitably viewed as either a necessary compromise for peace by factions within the movement or a betrayal of the movement's most basic interests. Fragmentation makes it difficult to capture the entire opposition as a coherent group in a power-sharing agreement. Possible scenarios include instances, such as in Rwanda in 1993–94, where the more mainstream leadership signed but other

more extreme elements were excluded and/or objected to the finished agreement. Alternatively, an agreement will include the most relevant party but fail to capture its leadership. The fact that the 1994 Lusaka Protocol was signed by UNITA, but not by Savimbi himself, allowed Savimbi to disassociate himself from the agreement as it suited him and as he regained military power. In both cases, fragmentation had obvious undesirable consequences insofar as it further radicalised the remaining faction or isolated and weakened the co-operative faction and allowed them to be branded as having sold out.

Inevitably, some countries and conflict situations are more conducive to power sharing than others—as the proponents of power sharing themselves admit. The problem is that, on one level, the more intractable or the more violent a conflict, the more logical and desirable it is that power sharing be adopted. On the other hand, it is these conflicts—characterised by what Donald Rothchild calls ‘essentialist perception’²¹—which offer the least hope for inclusive agreements. Where power sharing is needed most, it appears least likely to work.

Making power sharing work in Africa

Barbara F Walter argues that outside security guarantees are the best means to induce actors in a civil conflict to sign and abide by agreements.²² Local actors in civil conflicts need these guarantees to be assured of their own security. But the post-Cold War experience in Africa has diminished the possibility that foreign actors will offer the outside guarantees that Walter believes are necessary for meaningful conflict resolution. There are even hints that more muscular African nations may themselves in future be reluctant to intervene in neighbouring countries to enforce agreements, or even to support legitimate allies, if there are widespread consequences at home.²³

How then does one design a peace process when power sharing appears so fragile and when agreements of any kind will probably not be enforced by outside guarantees? The answer may be more power sharing rather than less. Aside from military victory or risky and divisive competitive elections, in the most violent conflicts it is difficult to imagine plausible options to governance other than cooperative and inclusive rule and/or decentralisation. Moreover, if groups resort to violent conflict when they believe all peaceful opportunities to achieve their goals are blocked, then power sharing keeps that door to reconciliation open. Indeed, power-sharing settlements may be possible provided they incorporate individuals and factions whose existing strategies are compatible with or can be incorporated into inclusive agreements, or whose strategies are flexible enough that they can be adjusted to consider inclusive agreements.

In other words, peacemakers must exploit the fact that, within any one group, there will always be moderates who are practical deal makers. Theorists writing on transitions from authoritarian rule note the presence of hardliners and softliners and, within them, a variety of different factions.²⁴ Indeed, even in a conflict ostensibly as polarised as Rwanda’s civil war, it was possible to identify three groups within the government: *moderates*, who were willing to negotiate with their adversaries; *opportunists*, who were not necessarily in favour of negotiations but were discerning enough to consider them under the correct

circumstances; and *extremists*, who would never negotiate.²⁵ The key is to recognise that a core of potential deal makers exists and then identify and protect them. More importantly, innovative ways must be found to expand on this co-operative core by drawing in opportunists who might then be moderated and accommodated. This approach to power sharing involves engaging the factions, not the group as a whole, and focusing efforts on the mercurial opportunists rather than on the moderates (who will agree in any event) or the extremists (who will never agree). This project in turn involves three elements: increasing incentives to consider inclusive agreements; decreasing the costs associated with power sharing; and, finally, decreasing the incentive to leave existing power-sharing agreements.

Increasing the incentive to enter a power-sharing agreement

Recognising that practical hardliners will always be under pressure from extremists, these individuals have to be given a large enough stake in the future government that they will prefer to contest issues inside the political process with the moderates than outside with the extremists. By providing them with a larger share of power than if a deal were not in place, the extremists are undermined and the larger pragmatic group is legitimated. Efforts to expand the size of the moderate core should be made in two ways.

First, in situations of three or more distinct power contenders, rules and structures can be developed which both maintain electoral competitiveness and yet make electoral success contingent on alliances and bridges to other groups. Indeed, to the extent that power sharing can be incorporated into a competitive democratic process, additional legitimacy is conferred upon power sharing. The requirement that political parties in Cambodia form a two-thirds majority before becoming the government, for example, forces leaders to in a sense *need* each other. The requirement of a large majority discourages the formation of mere alliances and encourages collaboration between the main centres of power. Riskier strategies might include the use of a ‘mutual assured destruction clause’ such as that discussed in the 1998 negotiations on Northern Ireland. Here negotiators included a provision whereby the creation of each participant’s preferred institution of representation was contingent on the parties following through on their earlier pledges.

Second, conceptions of power sharing must also be expanded so that a wider variety of groups will consider the formal political process. Innovative side deals involving diplomatic postings and other offices were used in both Angola and Ethiopia to bring more marginal parties on board. More importantly, power sharing involves not only the sharing of political power but the sharing of economic wealth. While this might seem particularly important in countries such as Angola or Nigeria, which are blessed (or cursed) with diamonds and/or oil, wealth sharing must also be regarded as a central aspect of conflict resolution in all regions. In virtually all of Africa—resource rich and resource poor—the state remains the single largest source of wealth, and control of its resources is, in many respects, at the heart of what different factions fight about. Finding appropriate means to collectively exploit resources and to distribute them

downward to the citizenry may ease concerns about a group's survival and prosperity.

Decreasing the costs of coming into an agreement

Having limitations on the length of time parties are required to share power means that political leaders are less likely to see the arrangement as permanently compromising their right to power. In other words, there is less disincentive to making such an agreement. Moreover, incompatibilities between political leaders are more easily overcome if power sharing is seen as a transitional and time-finite step towards more competitive elections. On the other hand, such transitional agreements still allow voters and constituents to familiarise themselves with democratic procedures, or for tensions between groups and individuals to subside and, ideally, for the integration of former disputants into common institutions before a non-power-sharing system is adopted. Even if a particular electoral outcome is expected, as was the case in South Africa's 1994 election, time-limited power-sharing can go some way towards getting more extreme elements to sign on. In Angola, members of UNITA who were part of the government of national unity and reconciliation (GURN) noted their ability to work effectively with their counterparts in the MPLA and of having had common interests and goals while still retaining their party, regional and ethnic identities.²⁶ Having a stake in the continued existence of the current government, if only for the short term, also means that these political leaders develop an appreciation of the benefits of sustaining a shared political role in future.

Even if power sharing is seen as an undesirable final objective, it can still have a role in earlier stages of conflict resolution. Power sharing can be seen as encompassing either governance or negotiation or both. Power sharing involves not only a voice in government, but also, and perhaps more importantly, a voice in the preliminary stages of government formation—anything, that is, which determines the fortunes or affects the interests of a group. Groups which are left out of this stage of the political process may still have the capacity to disrupt the proceedings through violent action and preclude the achievement of a permanent structure. Marginal groups, on the other hand, may be more willing to tolerate their exclusion from government provided they have had a role in a creation which protects their vital interests. Thus, regardless of the form of government which is ultimately established, power sharing is conceivably a necessary step from which groups should not be excluded. Indeed, Timothy Sisk argues that final agreements tend to be a reflection of the negotiation process itself.²⁷

Decreasing the incentive to exit existing agreements

Long-term stability also requires measures which both prevent the early collapse of the entire system in the event that one of the players becomes dissatisfied and yet allow peaceful change when circumstances warrant. Measures include familiar aspects of modern democracy such as separation of powers, movement towards social, political and economic opportunity, and a system of checks and balances. Decentralisation is a key component of this strategy because it lessens

the stakes (and thus the motivation) for violent struggle and because it compartmentalises potential confrontations away from the capital city. Indeed, in Africa decentralisation is frequently more desirable than power sharing. Part of the EPRDF's early success in managing conflict in Ethiopia, for example, was its push for ethnically based states where people have the right to education and communication with their local government in their own language and the right (at least in theory) to secede from the federation. In the Somali region of Ethiopia, where the central government's presence was often minimal, this had the effect of shifting the focus of competition from Addis Ababa to the region itself. In other cases, radical decentralisation and regional autonomy short of outright independence may be a desirable option and, as the contemporary situation in Somalia demonstrates, may be more feasible and better reflect the situation on the ground than forced power sharing in the capital city. Not only does regional autonomy usually present a solution that most groups can live with (provided sufficient power is allocated to the region), but it is frequently one which they already advocate in their political platforms. Moreover, genuine decentralisation and regional autonomy means that there is less opportunity for resentment towards what is often thought to be an unaccountable, foreign (insofar as it is comprised of another ethnic group) government in a distant city. Notably, such a solution is also compatible with power sharing insofar as it does not preclude a government with limited powers and made up of regional and ethnic representatives at the federal level.

Decentralisation also helps deal with another seemingly intractable problem with power sharing: whether or not an agreement should be exhaustive in its inclusiveness. The lesson of Rwanda is that one cannot afford to leave anyone out of the political process. The experience of Somalia and Ethiopia, however, is that attempts to include everybody are fruitless. Indeed, exhaustive inclusiveness in a single comprehensive agreement should not be the goal. An incomplete or partial agreement is better than no agreement at all provided it is part of a larger and ongoing peace process and not a final endpoint.²⁸ The objective of power sharing should involve a simultaneous and yet incremental effort to find agreements on two levels, both of which are necessary, but neither of which, on its own, is comprehensive. At the national level, efforts need to be directed towards transcending the largest and potentially most explosive power centres. At the subnational level, a more piecemeal collection of territorially limited agreements involving local actors should also be struck. The result, then, is a core agreement but with power decentralised down to a series of satellite agreements. Not only is such an organic, two-track framework more achievable while still remaining inclusive, it is also less likely to lead to the collapse of the whole process should any one of the agreements break down. In the end, all parties are included in the peace process at some level, but no one agreement has to include all parties and groups.

Is there a role for the international community? Barbara Walter presents a normative argument in favour of international guarantees. Indeed, the provision of incentives directed towards keeping actors in the political process and—if the international community has the political will—costly repercussions for those who return to war are possible contributions which external actors can make.

Given the need for ongoing economic aid and the fact of a unipolar international environment, local actors must be careful not to alienate potential external actors and allies.

However, the role of foreign actors must be carefully circumscribed. Despite the international community's apparent willingness to provide assistance to Somalia in 1992–93, some Somali leaders—most notably Mohamed Farah Aidid—resented foreign meddling in Somali affairs. The international community's subsequent obsession with capturing Aidid diverted it from the more important task of reconciliation between adversaries. Moreover, external intervention should not come at the expense of ongoing bargaining and concessions by the local actors themselves, since compliance with an agreement's terms will only be achieved if they have the unqualified blessing of those who have to live with them in future. External actors can instead focus their attention on *facilitation*; bringing key groups and leaders together—not an inconsiderable task given the lack of transportation and infrastructure in many post-conflict societies. Facilitation also includes a communications role. What is most remarkable about the violence in Angola in 1992 and Rwanda in 1994 is that the aggressors so grossly underestimated the military capacity of their foes. The decisions by both UNITA and the CDR to initiate violence might have been different if they had somehow been persuaded that their military actions would ultimately be unsuccessful.

Finally, there is a need to recognise that the structure and composition of government alone cannot be expected to overcome all the animosities within a county. Good governance must be supplemented by other measures which, in a sense, diminish the importance of the state or at least the necessity of controlling government. Not only does a generalised effort towards economic development increase the standard of living for all citizens, it also means that control of government is not the sole objective of all groups and individuals. Larry Diamond has argued that peaceful democratic systems require moderation and restraint; citizens must care enough about politics that they will want to participate in the political process but not so much that they cannot contemplate defeat.³⁹ By encouraging generalised development and financial investment individuals are able to ensure personal security even if they do not specifically win elections. Power sharing, decentralisation *and* genuine development reduce the stakes in the political game and leave individuals with several favourable options to consider both within and without the government.

Conclusions

As it stands, there are few reasons to be optimistic about the prospects for formalised power-sharing agreements in Africa. Despite being frequently advocated, intuitively agreeable and containing possibilities for ending violent conflict, power-sharing will not always be applicable to African conflicts. The central weakness of power-sharing is not that it fails as an idea but that it runs into so many obstacles when put into practice. Perhaps, however, there is a need to reinterpret those instances of power-sharing—which until now have been seen as failing to bring peace—in terms of what can reasonably be expected to have

been achieved. Despite persistent warnings that Angola's situation of 'neither war nor peace' was about to descend once again into violence, until December 1998 this did not happen. Indeed, there are signs that senior members of UNITA have decided to abandon the military route in favour of the political. In South Africa, despite the withdrawal of the National Party from the power-sharing agreement, and tensions between the ANC and its allies—events which cannot be seen as unexpected in any political arrangement—the political system has persisted. While South Africa continues to confront difficulties, these are not related to power-sharing *per se*. In non-African settings such as Cambodia, the apparent failure of power sharing has more recently given rise to its tentative success, as Prime Minister Hun Sen made steps towards forming an inclusive government with his former foe, Prince Ranariddh. If power sharing remains the only option between the status quo and total disintegration, then these thin strands of progress must be built upon until peaceful government is achieved.

Indeed, this paper does highlight ways in which ostensibly intransigent groups might be induced to consider power sharing, means by which the obstacles to implementation of agreements might be overcome, and ways in which agreements or their legacies might be made more lasting. Above all, power sharing can only work where there is a genuine desire and commitment among the respective leaderships towards peace, and sufficient imagination and innovation to create appropriate structures and institutions which simultaneously accommodate all groups.

Notes

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¹ On this issue see BF Walter, 'The critical barrier to civil war settlement', *International Organization*, 51 (3), 1997, pp 335–364.

² K Annan, 'Annan: this may be a turning point for Africa', *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 18 May 1998, p A11.

³ SE Rice, US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Statement before the Subcommittee on Africa, House International Relations Committee, Washington DC, 15 September 1998. See also 'Central African conflict and its implications for Africa and for the future of US policy goals and strategies', Testimony, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on African Affairs, 8, June 1999.

⁴ IW Zartman, 'Dynamics and constraints in negotiations in internal conflicts', in IW Zartman (ed), *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*, Washington, DC: Brookings, 1995, pp 22–23.

⁵ M Ottaway, 'Democratization in collapsed states', in I W Zartman (ed), *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995, p 248.

⁶ Cited in H Marais, 'ANC tells allies to stay in line', *Globe and Mail*, 3, July 1988, p A10.

⁷ Lijphart cites Lebanon (1943–75), Malaysia (1955–69), Columbia (1958–74), Cyprus (1960–63, but considered by Lijphart to have been a failure) and South Africa (1994). See A Lijphart, 'Prospects for power-sharing in the new South Africa', in Andrew Reynolds (ed), *Elections '94: South Africa*, London: James Currey, 1994, pp 224–225; and A Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*, New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1977, ch 5.

⁸ A Lijphart, 'Consociational democracy', *World Politics*, 21 (2), 1969, pp 212–213. For alternatives to Lijphart's consociationalism, see also D L Horowitz, *A Democratic South Africa? Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society*, Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1991.

⁹ Lijphart, 'Consociational democracy', p 217.

¹⁰ RH Jackson & CG Rosberg, 'Why Africa's weak states persist: the empirical and juridical in statehood', *World Politics*, 35 (1), 1982, pp 1–24.

¹¹ D Rothchild & MW Foley, 'African states and the politics of inclusive coalitions', in D Rothchild & N

- Chazan (eds), *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1988, pp 238–243.
- ¹² See, for example, J Prendergast & M Duffield, *Liberation Politics and External Engagement in Ethiopia and Eritrea*, Discussion Paper #8, Horn of Africa Discussion Paper Series, Washington, DC: Center of Concern, April 1995.
- ¹³ J Savimbi, 'I have no secret agenda', *New York Times*, 30 October 1989, p 19. See also comments on power sharing in Namibia by the UN Special Representative to Angola, Margaret Anstee in *Orphan of the Cold War: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Angolan Peace Process, 1992–93*, New York: St Martin's, 1996, p 519.
- ¹⁴ In an oft-quoted remark, W H Riker argues that political parties 'seek to maximise only up to the point of subjective certainty of winning. After that point they seek to minimise, that is, to maintain themselves at the size (as subjectively estimated) of a minimum winning coalition.' Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions*, New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1962, p 33.
- ¹⁵ Anstee, *Orphan of the Cold War*, p 147.
- ¹⁶ Cited in R Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*, New York: Praeger, 1970, p 169.
- ¹⁷ In this respect, see Prendergast & Duffield, *Liberation Politics*, p 10.
- ¹⁸ This comment was made to the author in a confidential interview with a foreign diplomat close to the Rwandan peace process, 13 November 1998.
- ¹⁹ IW Zartman, 'Dynamics and constraints in negotiations in internal conflicts', in Zartman, *Elusive Peace*, pp 17–18.
- ²⁰ BD Jones, 'Civil war, the peace process, and genocide in Rwanda', in Taisier M Ali & Robert O Matthews (eds), *Civil Wars in Africa: Roots and Resolution*, Montreal: McGill–Queen's, 1999, pp 69–70.
- ²¹ Rothchild discusses the essentialist perception 'whereby ethnic leaders and groups view others as fundamentally threatening to their physical, cultural, or social survival, they tend to regard any compromises on their part as weakening their position', See, D Rothchild, 'Hegemonial exchange: an alternative model for managing conflict in middle Africa', in D L Thompson & D Ronen (eds), *Ethnicity, Politics and Development*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1986, pp 87–89.
- ²² Walter, 'The critical barrier to civil war settlement', p 361.
- ²³ Consider, for example, the difficulties the government of Robert Mugabe has had in Zimbabwe following the recent introduction of Zimbabwean troops into the war in Congo–Kinshasa. Similarly, even Nigeria has shown an interest in reducing its involvement in Sierra Leone.
- ²⁴ See, for example, G O'Donnell & PC Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1986, pp 15–17.
- ²⁵ My thanks to BD Jones for illustrating this point to me—though using slightly different terms.
- ²⁶ Interviews were conducted in Angola with UNITA and MPLA members of the GURN in November and December 1997.
- ²⁷ TD Sisk, *Democratization in South Africa: The Elusive Social Contract*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1995, pp 16–20.
- ²⁸ SJ Stedman, 'Conflict and conflict resolution in Africa: a conceptual framework' in FM Deng & IW Zartman (eds), *Conflict Resolution in Africa* Washington, DC: Brookings, 1991, pp 371–372.
- ²⁹ L Diamond, 'Nigeria: pluralism, statism and the struggle for democracy', in L Diamond, JJ Linz & SM Lipset (eds), *Democracy in Developing Countries: Vol 2, Africa*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1988, p 69.