Ulf Engel (ed.) (2012), *New Mediation Practices in African Conflicts*, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, ISBN 978-3-86583-703-5, 288 pp.

Mediation is nowadays the conflict management tool most often used by international actors aiming to find a peaceful settlement to violent conflicts. Against this backdrop, the volume edited by Ulf Engel focuses on the recent developments in mediation policies on the African continent. The contributions address the history of norms and policies of the African Union (AU) regarding conflict-prone situations in Africa, which have been characterized by various forms of violent and undemocratic behaviour. The volume pays particular attention to the AU policy against unconstitutional changes of government (UCG) and to the challenges the organization has experienced in light of recent normative and institutional developments in various African countries. The empirical relevance of the topic is evident: Since its foundation in 2000, the AU has developed norms and institutions that address challenges such as the securing of democracy and good governance, and the protection of human rights throughout the continent. Thus, the AU policy has developed a framework to deal with UCGs by referring to the principles of good governance and the responsibility to protect. Empirically, the overthrow of the government by soldiers in Mali in 2012, the *coup d'état* in Guinea-Bissau and the revolution-related UCGs in Tunisia (January 2011) and Egypt (February 2011) demonstrate the importance of this new policy instrument. Though the institutional and normative framework of the AU is still emerging, the volume highlights the current difficulties and latest successes of the new policy.

Most of the essays evaluate the AU policy in recent UCGs – in Niger (Asante-Darko), Guinea and Madagascar (Baumert and Ellermann) and Libya (Swart). Further contributions discuss the conflict mediation approaches by the regional organizations ECOWAS (Afolabi) and the SADC (Orbon), and the role of the EU in the developments on the African continent (Witt). Other articles present overviews of the concepts (Engel; Porto), history (Saunders) and challenges of mediation (Sampson). The empirically rich articles contribute to the understanding of recent developments and provide insight into the reactions of the AU and its interactions with the respective (sub)regional organizations. Moreover, the contributions show that AU policy has substantially improved, but that several challenges remain. The AU needs to improve the coordination of multiparty mediations and discuss the differences in reactions to them in specific cases of UCGs. Empirically, the volume speaks to the recent debate on the changing nature of the AU with a focus on the developments in the security architecture of

the African continent. Furthermore, the articles fit very well into the recent debate on multiparty mediation and mediation policies.

While the volume represents a major contribution to the field of studies on AU and regional conflict management in Africa, two major issues linger. First, the focus on the new AU policy toward UCGs is not spelled out clearly. This problem starts with the misleading title of the volume that centres on mediation but does not mention the AU policy and UCGs as the focus of investigation. UCGs are an important and understudied conflict phenomenon in Africa that has been addressed by the AU in recent years. However, other forms of violent conflict – such as civil wars and riots – are also pressing problems in many African countries. It would have been interesting if the book had expanded on the links between mediation efforts in these different types of conflict and the AU policy toward UCGs.

A discussion of these links would have been particularly meaningful since mediation approaches vary depending on conflict type. Of all the contributions, only the article by Peter Sampson deals with the conceptual shifts that have taken place in mediation in the context of different conflict types. Sampson argues convincingly that non-state organizations and specific societal groups (like religious organizations, women, youth) should be better incorporated into mediation efforts to reflect the existing grievances of a society as a whole. However, his arguments are not directly linked to the topic of UCGs, which dominates the rest of the volume. The following questions could have easily linked Sampson's article with the discussion of UCGs: Should and must these societal actors be involved in mediations after UCGs? Are UCGs the product of societal grievances or of the disapproval of the regime by a small group? Moreover, as Sampson rightly states on mediation in contexts of UCGs, "Mediation is not based on a request from the parties" (237). This type of mediation, therefore, differs substantially from the typically voluntary character of mediation in civil wars. Mediation with countries that have undergone UCGs seems to lack voluntary participation by the conflict parties and to shift to "forced" mediation. Against the backdrop of current debates in the literature on the impact of these different kinds of mediation, a further discussion of the peculiarities of mediation in UCGs would have been an extremely fruitful addition.

Second, the volume is rich in empirical details but lacks theoretical explanations for the observed mediation efforts. Many of the case-specific essays offer some hints that could have been employed in an inductive approach to theorizing about mediation in UCGs. Further reflections on the following points could lead to a better understanding of the AU mediation policy: First, UCGs take place in authoritarian regimes as well as in democratic societies. At some points, the articles highlight the different reaction

of the AU to UCGs in these contexts. However, making a clearer link between differences in regime type and type of response (by the AU and/or individual African states) could have helped the reader to better understand mediation policies. The discussion of the uprising in Libya (Swart), for example, should have examined more closely the type of UCG and the characteristics of the overthrown regime. As the Libyan case further demonstrates, a debate on the impact of the normative judgement of these factors (that the people's uprising was a good thing in this specific UCG) is needed and should take the AU norm of "responsibility to protect" into account. Second, the articles highlight the challenges of multiparty mediations; in these cases, mediation efforts carried out by a multiplicity of actors are often hampered by a lack of coherence among the strategies employed by different actors. It would have been worthwhile for the contributions to have elaborated on the opportunities and ways for the various actors to reach a comprehensive mediation strategy. Approaches from the field of International Relations, for example, could represent a theoretical starting point to improve the understanding of the behaviour of single states (foreign policy analysis) or the relationship between the AU, regional organizations and the African states (institutionalism).

Overall, the volume makes a valuable contribution to the debate on AU security policy and the recent handling of UCGs in Africa. The studies are empirically rich and show the complexity of interests that are involved in such mediation processes. They also provide a rather positive outlook for the future because some of the newly established norms seem to have been incorporated into actual policies more and more in recent years.

- Johannes Vüllers