Examining Zimbabwe's Global Political Agreement

Gladys Mokhawa

University of Botswana, Botswana

Abstract

As one of the preferred avenues through which political solutions could be sought, power-sharing arrangements have attracted a broad debate in the literature. Advocates, on the one hand, perceive them as a universal remedy for divided societies, and on the other hand, critics contend that these agreements have a tendency to perpetuate divisions or conflict within societies that are at odds. In the aftermath of the 2008 Zimbabwean political and economic crisis, the country embarked on a power-sharing arrangement to foster political and economic stability under the guidance of SADC. This article, therefore, considers the implementation of the Global Political Agreement in Zimbabwe highlighting both opportunities and threats that characterize this agreement. It suggests that the design of these agreements is intrinsically faulty and as such tends to affect genuine and credible implementation.

Introduction

Dahl's (1973) classical assertion that the nature of the regime itself, and its inclusiveness and public contestation, may predispose a nation to a particular syndrome of domestic politics is relevant to the Zimbabwean case. The political contestation in the country has been characterized by both a diversity of viewpoints and unequal distribution of power. Although power struggles are endemic throughout human societies, the situation in Zimbabwe is distinctive in that exclusionary politics is instituted within a military epistemic authority that led to the shaping of political militarism. In this sense, military power has been used to resolve political problems. As a result, there has been the development of an officer corps that is close and aligned to the ruling party and the military has become the most crucial component of the political centre that releases election results. This sordid state of affairs has created "far greater barriers to genuine power-sharing resulting in the politics of continuity" (Cheeseman and Tendi 2010).

Power-sharing arrangements have emerged to be the preferred avenue upon which conflicts can be solved. Whilst they have been applauded for being forward-looking, peace-strengthening and democratic, they have also been criticized for failing to create peace and development in divided societies (Binningsbø 2013). Waking to its economic and political malaise, Zimbabwe

decided to agree to a power-sharing arrangement in order to resolve its problems. This article aims to explore the dynamics of power-sharing in Zimbabwe's political landscape. The article unfolds by first placing the discussion of power-sharing within a theoretical context to highlight the substantive contributions brought by consociationalism. However, this does not exhaust other conceptual possibilities. The discussion further examines the political context that led to the signing of the Global Political Agreement, arguing that the bifurcated discourses that were reminiscent within Zimbabwean politics led to relational identities. It is these oppositional identities that led to exclusionary and violent politics in the country. Furthermore, an assessment of the 'agreement' is proffered and it sets the tone for analysis by problematizing the implementation of the Agreement. The article develops a claim that the Global Political Agreement in Zimbabwe was fated to fail. This is substantiated with the discovery of key omissions in the agreement. The article concludes by offering policy prescriptions for going forward.

Unpacking Power-Sharing Arrangements

Power-sharing has recently assumed centre stage as a means through which conflicts could be resolved. There has been a noticeable tendency to channel conflict and problematic democratic competition through power-sharing arrangements. Although there is recognition that power-sharing strategies might stabilize the transition to an enduring peace (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003), there are nonetheless questions posed by these arrangements. Evidently, these questions represent both the theoretical and methodological concerns raised by this conversation. Attempts at theorizing about power-sharing have resulted in a plethora of conceptualizations that are temporally and spatially bound. Not only that, power-sharing arrangements have also been used to resolve an array of conflicts ranging from civil wars to political questions. In the same vein, Cheeseman and Tendi (2010) posit that analysis on power-sharing has focused on the end of civil wars without necessary giving attention to challenges of democratic deadlock. To this end, they use veto-player analysis to understand the emergence, disposition and strategic importance of the main veto players who emerged during the power-sharing negotiations. Although this kind of analysis separates partisan and institutional players, they transcend the rather static approach that is often characteristic of this kind of analysis by taking a historical trajectory (ibid). This approach is palatable in sense it is able to tease out historical roots of the key veto players who shape up how the power-sharing was implemented (ibid). This article does not use the veto-player analysis but argues something can be salvaged from this kind of analysis.

The theoretical, methodological and empirical concerns raised by an attempt to understand power-sharing arrangements have necessitated the need for invigorated, innovative conceptual and empirical technologies that will be able to analyze how power-sharing will play out empirically and perhaps, answer the question of "whether or not power-sharing facilitates

reconciliation and reform in the medium to long term" (Cheeseman and Tendi 2010). Consequentially, the inclination of this article is to follow Arendt Lijphart's consociationalism power-sharing strategy, although a disclaimer is made to the effect that there are other complex approaches. It must be noted that it would be difficult to do justice to other philosophical underpinnings at this juncture hence the priviledging of Lijphart's analysis. Lijphart's approach is favored because of its ability to be a "deliberate effort by elites to stabilize the system" (Spears, 2000 citing Lijphart). In his analysis, Lijphart presupposes an arrangement where "all leaders of ethnic groups share power within a governing coalition in which major political decisions about matters of mutual concern are made on the basis of consensus" (quoted in O'Flynn, 2007). In this sense, it can be argued that power-sharing in Zimbabwe fits the consociational arrangement. The beauty of Lijphart's approach is that it offers institutional packs in the form of stability and this stability is arrived at by ensuring inclusion.

After careful consideration of conceptions of power-sharing, it makes sense to define what power-sharing will mean for this article. Power-sharing arrangements at the most "involve the construction of a more or less inclusive government that represents a broad range of concerned parties, but also may include provisions regarding the distribution of bureaucratic posts and new rules for the make-up of the security forces and their subsequent management" (Cheeseman and Tendi 2010, 204). At best power-sharing arrangements can offer advantageous alternative by providing "access to power, allows for broad participation, and as such confers legitimacy on the government and its actions and incentivize political leaders to maintain their proximity to power and ultimately pave way for an effective institutional reform necessary to diffuse the underlying roots of instability" (Mehler 2009). The attainment of these goals might be short-term, although they are compatible with long-term democratization goals (Ottaway 1995). Furthermore, a causal link between power-sharing and democracy has been established (Norris 2008). It is maintained that power-sharing arrangements have the ability to ensure minority representation in decision-making process and create incentives to cooperate especially considered within proportional representation election (ibid). Echoing similar sentiments, Spears (2000) is of the view that power-sharing arrangements are seen as providing alternatives to the high stakes of winner-takes-it-all[1] elections. But, a less than enthusiastic argument, is that power-sharing in itself is undemocratic because it blocks strong opposition, as opposing views are marginalized and excluded (Binningsbø 2013). In fact, they are seen as "condemning opposition parties to accept inferior positions within government, despite their success at the ballot box" (Cheeseman and Tendi 2010).

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[1] Winner-takes-it all, which is endemic in Africa, is seen as a source of electoral problems and as such there has been a call for African leaders to move to a more inclusive electoral system. An inclusive arrangement is seen as being necessary to end cycles of violence and impunity.

The conceptual approaches discussed herein are not really divorced from the empirical world of power-sharing arrangements. But, a conclusion can be drawn that both conceptual and empirical understandings of power-sharing are susceptible to normative analysis. There is nothing wrong with a normative analysis, although this kind of analysis has a tendency to be contingent on one's opinion. Another point to note is that while the utility of power-sharing in theory cannot be disputed, experience has shown the difficulty of implementing such mechanisms, as will be revealed by this article.

The Political Context that Led to the Global Political Agreement

The situation in Zimbabwe changed as 2008 witnessed political and economic crisis as a consequence of violence instigated against the opposition. This was against the backdrop of Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) losing the majority in parliament to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). For the first round of presidential elections in March, Robert Mugabe garnered 43.2 per cent while Morgan Tsvangirai had 47.9 per cent of the total vote, making the latter a victor, but not to the extent that a run-off election could be avoided – this was held on 27 June 2008 (Smith-Höhn 2009). What transpired after this was a staged operation to hold on to power. Intimidation and violence were used against the opposition and it is argued that violence was committed by soldiers, the police and intelligence operatives (ibid).

The conflict was also played out in oppositional discourses both within the country and in the region. In fact, the Zimbabwean political crisis can best be captured by antagonistic discourses that have been ongoing in the country. Ideologically, Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF used liberation to "prioritise the past over the present in the sense that the national liberation experience is deemed to have marked out the now dominant parties as the legitimate inheritors of the past" (Melber 2003, 129). So the liberation narrative invoked rhetorical rituals that involved refutation of the West, and anyone who was thought to associated with it was tagged a 'sell-out' or agent of imperialism. The 'puppets' and 'sell-outs' tags have been used ad nauseam to discredit the opposition and its support base (Kamete 2003, 64). Beyond framing MDC as agents of neo-colonialism, there were multiple 'others' in the form of independent and international press and countries (Botswana and Zambia) that were opposed to the regime, who were also 'othered'. To those who were not taken by President Mugabe and ZANU-PF's selective liberation narrative, the empirical 'other' was Mugabe himself. Framing opposition in this way, appealed to a sense of urgency in which the politics of existentialism were played out. By securitizing the MDC and those that opposed him as the 'other', President Mugabe's ZANU-PF was able to justify the use of violence. This was substantiated by the detailed report of the organised violence contained in the Human Rights Watch (corroborated by senior Western diplomats) describing the situation in

Zimbabwe as a "military coup by stealth". A violent crackdown was stepped up against the opposition and the voters who had the temerity to support it (Amnesty International 2002).

MDC's alternative discourse deconstructed Mugabe's diplomatic offensive of placing the Zimbabwean problem at the heart of a larger anti-imperialist and Pan-African stance. The MDC, as a result of their discontent with the ZANU-PF, framed a counter-discourse that placed democracy and human rights at the top of their agenda. Their discontent was a result of violent land seizures which were signs of the breakdown of the rule of law, infringement of the people's rights, and an attack on democratic principles in Zimbabwe (Chironga and Dewa 2009). Since political mobilizations of identity also point to democratic identity as "relationally constituted against states that are non-democratic" (Hansen 2006, 27), MDC presented Mugabe's ZANU-PF as undemocratic.

Consequently, the antagonism between the two parties descended further into political violence as Tsvangirai announced withdrawal from the 2008 harmonised elections. This was against an unprecedented level of state-orchestrated violence unleashed against the rural areas believed to be MDC strongholds (Smith-Höhn 2009). Against this situation, elections were held resulting in a resounding 86 per cent victory for Robert Mugabe thanks to the involvement of army state employees responsible for administering elections (ibid). However, these elections were dismissed practically by all observer groups as a sham.[2] The political impasse which ensued after a mock of an election thus necessitated a power-sharing experiment that would culminate into a government of unity.

There is often little in the way of inducements for leaders to demonstrate their collective solidarity, and it has been noted that a risk-acceptant group that has the option of complete political power will be less inclined to go into this agreement (Spears 2000). So, one becomes curious as to why Mugabe would agree to this arrangement against the supposed election 'victory' of the 2008 harmonized elections. Mugabe's decision to agree to the political agreement was framed by what he saw as his electoral possibilities. A constellation of assumptions, especially on the political game board, persuaded him to accommodate such an agreement. At home the economy was in tatters, the international community and his neighbors were pouring pressure on him to back down, and additionally, it was apparent that all his political cards were drawn. Or, as desperation discards logic as well as law, it could be argued that Mugabe was desperate.

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[2] The Pan-African Parliament Election Observer Mission noted that "the run-up June elections were characterized by violence, intimidation and political intolerance as well as curtailment of fundamental civil and political rights such as freedom of assembly and freedom of movement" (quoted by Smith-Höhn, 2009) . The African Union Observer Mission was of the view that "the run-off elections fell short of the accepted AU standards" (ibid).

Tsvangirai's motivations to agree to the power-sharing arrangement could be understood from the options that remained to him: "if he walked away, he faced the possibility that Mugabe would cobble together an agreement with Arthur Mutambara" (leader of the MDC's minority faction); this would "complicate the political situation whilst doing nothing to prevent the continuing collapse of the economy" (Southall 2008). If he made a deal, submits Southall, he could at least try to reverse his luck "by attracting support from moderate elements within ZANU-PF away from Mugabe" (ibid). Whether this political maneuverance worked or not remains a moot point.

Before, the agreement (GPA), there was signing on 21 July 2008 of the Memorandum of understanding (MoU) between ZANU-PF and the two MDC factions. The deal was brokered through the then South African President Thabo Mbeki's facilitation. However, this MoU didn't spell out the shape the unity government would take but rather outlined the issues to be addressed in order to reach a negotiated settlement (Smith-Höhn 2009). The issue areas for ZANU-PF were sanctions, the land question and external interference, whilst the MDC was concerned about the security of its members, the prevention of violence, calls for stop to hate speech, as well as the role of SADC and African Union as "underwriters and guarantors" of the global political agreement (3).

Thus, on the 15th of September 2008, a marriage of convenience in the form of a power-sharing agreement was brokered between the major political parties in Zimbabwe, namely, the Tsvangirai-led Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T), the Mutambara-led Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-M) and the then ruling Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). This Global Political Agreement (GPA) was to pave way for the establishment of a Government of National Unity and the reconstruction of the society at large. In fact, the GPA committed the signatories to resolve all the current economic and political situations and chart a new direction for the country (Article 2). The formation of the new inclusive government was expected to provide an opportunity for considering fundamental reforms in the provision of security and justice services to the people of Zimbabwe.

An Assessment of Global Political Agreement

Although semblances of success, though not resounding, can be witnessed both within the political and economic fronts, there is a cautionary note that the country still has a long way to go. Perhaps first and foremost, the agreement has been able to avert greater political violence and repression that could have ensued. The economy has stabilized since the adoption of the US dollar as the medium of exchange. Though, concern has been raised against the heavy involvement of the military (or at least some individuals) in business. There has been a notable improvement in the availability of food. A new constitution to pave the way for fresh elections with a Bill of Rights promised the right to vote to all adult Zimbabwean though excluding

diaspora (International Crisis Group 2013). All the Members of Parliament unanimously endorsed the constitution and a new constitution was one of the reforms that were agreed by Mugabe and Tsvangirai under the 2008 power-sharing agreement. Perhaps what is palatable about the new constitution is that there are provisions for freedom of expression and freedom of the media (Section 61 (4)(b-c)). More importantly, the constitutional referendum enabled the European Union to lift the restrictive measures against most of the individuals and entities it had targeted (International Crisis Group 2013). These developments have prompted Steinberg, quoted in the Africa Report 2010, to argue that it would be a mistake to minimize the achievements of the coalition.

Without denying the modest achievements, there were (and there continue to be) noticeable violations of the agreement. For instance, just a month after the signing of the GPA, there was a deadlock over how to allocate key ministries.[3] Tsvangirai accused Mugabe's ZANU-PF of trying to hold many of the most powerful positions. The MDC saw this political impasse as an attempt by the ZANU-PF to relegate them to the role of a junior partner in a new government. In addition to this snag, President Mugabe has, apparently, been slow in implementing the provisions of the GNU. In Maputo, the SADC organ on Politics, Defence and Security for the first time since its inception stood up to President Robert Mugabe and the ZANU-PF. Despite the dissembling propaganda from the state controlled media and hired ZANU-PF spin doctors, the SADC troika found Mugabe culpable in refusing to deal with the issues vital to the survival of the GNU. It ordered Mugabe to repsect the timelines for the inception of the inclusive government, as outlined in SADC's 27 January 2009 communiqué, and raised other outstanding issues. The troika highlighted that little progress has been made in fulfilling the some of the critical provisions the GPA such as the inception of the National Economic Council to come up with a programme to restore economic stability and growth; and the slow pace in coming up with a solid programme for the promotion of equality, national healing, cohesion and unity.

Smith-Höhn (2009) highlights contentious issues that were not addressed by the GPA. The land reform, as provided for by Article 5, does not address the need for the land reform policy to be rationalized. A second concern is the issue of sanctions, where the decision to lift sanctions rests with parties external to the agreement (see Smith-Höhn 2009 for a much fuller discussion on this). Thirdly and perhaps "most worrisome is the failure of the agreement to address the need for security sector reforms" (4). This reform deficit confirms Cheeseman and Tendi's (2010, 207) assertion that power-sharing arrangements "do not create space for reform and can be

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[3] Robert Mugabe remained the executive president, while Morgan Tsvangirai as prime minister; ZANU-PF would hold fifteen ministries, the MDC thirteen and Mutambura's MDC faction three; ZANU-PF would retain the ministry of defence, but the MDC would fill the home-affairs ministry (responsible for the police) as well as finance.

manipulated by incumbents desperate to retain their positions in the face of electoral defeat". Over the past years, the Zimbabwean security sector has increasingly come into the spotlight as unduly politicized and as infringing on the human rights of the citizens.[4] Yet, the agreement is not explicit on security sector reform except to note "the easy resort to violence by political parties, State actors and others in order to resolve political differences and achieve political ends" (Article 18.1). Against the call by both MDC and the SADC facilitator to have security reforms instituted, the high ranking officials of President Mugabe's government remain resolute that there will be no security sector reforms – Defence Minister Mnangagwa, for example, told senior military personnel that there would be no reforms as long as he remained in government (International Crisis Group 2013). A Zimbabwean think tank argued that the "failure to implement security sector reforms have the potential to block a possible democratic transition as the country prepares for the first election after the formation of the unity government" (Shoko 2013). Lastly, Smith-Höhn (2009) identifies dual executive[5] between Mugabe and Tsvangirai as problematic. The uneasiness with this kind of arrangement has the potentiality for a deadlock since membership overlaps; there might be questions of who has the final say.

Fated to Fail?

Even though power-sharing arrangements are implicitly promoted as perfectible and at times considered as precious ends in themselves, the ever 'patched-up' peace that is expected more often than not result in less-than desirable outcomes. In this instance, the agreement between the two MDCs and ZANU-PF, the GPA, became an odyssey that did little to resolve the deeply entrenched issues that were at the core of the crisis in Zimbabwe. At first glance one cannot help notice that the talks that subsequently led to this agreement were held under immense pressure. And conventional wisdom teaches us that pressure does not necessarily produce positive results.

There were key omissions right from the start that served to weaken the agreement. Firstly, there was no ownership of the agreement by President Mugabe who had referred to the agreement as a "creature". This was demonstrated by his excitement about the end of the agreement where he stated that "…this two or three-headed creature called the GPA is coming to an end, the clock is ticking" (Anonymous 2013). Referring to the agreement as "this creature" validates the assumption that Mugabe saw this cooperation as merely a 'wiggle room' allowing him space for minor compromise so as to appear to have engaged, thus diffusing the opposition claims.

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[4] Recall the statements that were made by the Army General Chiwenga that they would not support an opposition government in the event that Mugabe lost the elections.

[5] Mugabe as the President chairs the Cabinet with 31 ministers while Tsvangirai chairs a Council of Minister.

Secondly, there were no substantial changes in policy direction or related reforms that were instituted. Of particular interest is the failure to address security sector reforms, despite the fact that it was the securitization of Zimbabwean politics that was responsible for much of the trouble. Furthermore, it has often been argued that power-sharing in peace agreements include at least one of four dimensions – security, territory, politics and economics – with many processes involving more than one (Sriram and Zahar, quoting Hartzell and Hoddie 2007). The danger in not addressing security is that groups are not assured that a resort to violence and repression is unlikely. The mode of power-sharing in Zimbabwe did not create favorable conditions for effective reforms leading to the conclusion that unity government serves to postpone conflict rather than solve it (Cheeseman and Tendi 2010). Related to this, elections reforms that are still lagging behind. Chief among these are reforms that include those "intended to address political violence, intimidation and repression; security and law and order deficits; broadcast media restrictions and hostilities and tension among and between political parties" (International Crisis Group 2013, 3). In addition to election related problems is the highly questionable composition of the Zimbabwean electoral commission (ZEC) which boasts among its members former security sector and intelligence operatives allegedly loyal to ZANU-PF (ibid).

Thirdly, there have been contradictions in the expectations from the signatories: MDC expected a resolution to outstanding election roadmap issues even after the adoption of a new constitution whereas ZANU-PF was of the view that the new constitution should supersede the roadmap (International Crisis Group 2013). This election roadmap deadlock was seen as demonstrating that Zimbabwe was not yet ready for elections – sentiments that were echoed by a number of spectators in the same ICG report. The risk anticipated was that having elections under such a climate (without instituting key reforms) would result in a mockery of the process. The ICG (2013, 32) warned that "under current conditions election disputes are unlikely to be resolved conclusively, but could rather lead to negotiations for further power-sharing or provoke a 'power vacuum' ". However, the likelihood of a conclusive election was seen as marginal because a conclusive election is the sum of a credible process and acceptance of results by key stakeholders. However, President Mugabe in 2012, against exasperated calls, went ahead and announced that elections were going to be held in March 2013. This was an unrealistic timeline, as most reforms, especially elections related ones, had not been instituted. Electoral reforms that were identified as key included, *inter alia*, "the need to speedily implement the election roadmap; clean voter's rolls and timely deployment of observers with the mandate to monitor elections" (International Crisis Group 2013).

Conclusion

Africa has seen most power-sharing arrangements fail or being inapplicable except for the unique few. For that reason, it is not surprising to be less-than thrilled by another power-sharing

experiment. The problem is that the analysis of "the conditions necessary for power-sharing to be effective, and the likely consequences if these conditions do not hold, has been largely superficial" (Cheeseman and Tendi 2010). Additionally, there has been a problem with the literature of power-sharing which have been preoccupied with power-sharing to end civil wars. Less attention has been paid to power-sharing arrangements that promise to solve political gridlock problems. Needless to say, empirical evidence has shown that the pathway to power-sharing arrangements, and more importantly its impact, has fallen short of the desired outcome. The Global Partnership Agreement, for instance, was broad and sweeping in terms of the promised reforms. It was a measure apparently inspired by the low motive for cooperating: for the sake of saving face (in Mugabe's case) and in so far as it was so, it would become inoperative and useless when the cooperation should cease. It may be fairly questioned whether the agreement has diminished rather than increased the sum of MDC's power. If it diminishes, it will be a loss for democracy.

Significantly, power-sharing arrangements, if they are well thought, "can only work where there is a genuine desire for commitment among the respective leaders towards peace, and sufficient imagination and innovation to create appropriate structures and institutions" (Spears 2000, 117). To this end, then, it becomes crucial for the guarantors of this agreement, SADC and the African Union, to increase their monitoring capacity, set-up an in-country liaison office, define their 'red lines', and demand compliance to their democratic principles and guidelines (International Crisis Group 2013).

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Biographical note:

Gladys Mokhawa holds a Ph.D. in international relations from the University of St. Andrews, UK, and is currently a lecturer in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies at the University of Botswana.

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