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Power-Sharing as a Form of Democratic Development in Zimbabwe and South Sudan

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Introduction

Democratic consolidation has existed as a largely precarious and politically taut issue across the entirety of postcolonial Africa. Applying a multitude of wide-ranging governmental effigies majorly stylized on Western structured modes of national administration, political leaders across Africa have been instrumental in both fostering and hindering formal democratization across the region. This paper will compare and contrast the instigation of power-sharing in two African countries – namely Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) and South Sudan – and argue that it is a natural step in these two countries' fractured progressions towards democracy, but has produced varying outcomes. More than merely a temporary coping mechanism put forward to deal with bouts of internal conflict or political instability, power-sharing (a specific governmental form of which is known as "consociationalism") in Zimbabwe has become an effectively applicable, though by no means perfect, part of its political development, whereas in the defunct government of Sudan it appeared that eventual secession was the only answer for the area's future.

In its most basic of principles, "Successful power-sharing is theorized to prevent the outbreak of violence by bringing all major stakeholders to the table." [1] Robert Mugabe's lionized leadership as President of Zimbabwe via his Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) remains, while South Sudan's newly determined nationhood poses many uncertain questions: "Will Sudan and South Sudan, having failed to build unity amid diversity, live in peace with each other, or will partition itself give rise to further armed strife? Can partition prevent the recurrence of ethnosectarian conflict?" [2] However, even with these hanging issues, power-sharing has, in differing ways, provided a willing path to democratic development in both Zimbabwe and South Sudan. This paper will first outline what power-sharing involves in its implementation and how it evolved into being within these two nations, using Zimbabwe to show how its indefinite use would mean further democratic development in that country. It will then contrast the varying results of its implementation in these countries. It will conclude by studying power-sharing's challenges in the future of Zimbabwe and its effects on South Sudan.

Power-Sharing – the Zimbabwean and Sudanese Cases

To fathom the means by which power-sharing agreements may be brought into fruition, it is important to understand what such complex political structures entail in their democratic efforts. We must also place value of study on the proprietary features of the implementation of power-sharing governmental models with regards to the two aforementioned African states. In overview of the various aims of such modelled arrangements, however, we are able to see that:

In principle, power-sharing enables conflicting groups to remedy longstanding patterns of antagonism and discrimination, and to build a more just and stable society for all ... democratic power-sharing is a much broader concern [that] does not rest simply with elected representatives and other government officials, but ultimately falls to all of us. [3]

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There is a plethora of different, and indeed competing, power-sharing types that exist and that fundamentally attempt to achieve the same, or arguably similar, goals via their use. Political actors – political parties, warring factions, oppositional leaders – institutions, diverging ethnic populations and even religions can all play a major role in the creation and subsequent fulfillment of proposed power-sharing deals. No matter the degree of such crucial actors nor their desires and behaviour, the crux of an implemented power-sharing agreement's aims is to include all players, or as many as possible, in a mutually benefitting environment of minimal participation exclusion. The numerous strategies followed to reach these frameworks can be outlined in three overarching approaches that are designed to ensure an optimal democratic and effective outcome of such deals:

Assimilation is ... understood to involve the merging of the separate identity and culture of ... communities. Integration may be understood as involving the recognition of the identity ... who wish to remain a distinctive community ... and to ensure their effective participation ... [and] autonomy [involves] the creation of separate structures through which members of a ... community may exercise effective control over their own political, economic [and] social affairs ...[4]

Political leadership (Prime Ministers, Presidents as well as other elected officials), elections and legislative makeups, too, are a great issue of design and resolve in power-sharing models. These types of governments and methods of national ruling bring many benefits, but like any required political solution they are not without their shortfalls. Power-sharing and consociational arrangements, due to unfavourable conditions, have met with failure in the past, as has been proven in cases such as Nigeria, Cyprus and before the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 in Northern Ireland. This notwithstanding, power-sharing in the African arena, and with specific regards to Zimbabwe and South Sudan, has become a largely indefinite force in the politics of both the continent and these two countries.

The Zimbabwean case of power-sharing and subsequent political brokerage showcases the overall fragility, but effectiveness towards peace, of putting to test such systems after democratic (or rather, undemocratic) election disputations. This fragility and political unpredictability of trying to reach and hold to peace fostering agreements of this kind will naturally be heightened in a country used to little else but a long-term despotic regime headed by a singular, now vastly aged, figurehead. In overview:

President Robert Mugabe, 86, and his party, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), have ruled Zimbabwe since its independence in 1980. Rising inflation and unemployment rates contributed in the late 1990s to the creation of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).[5]

The nation has suffered for decades at the ruthless and wholly inefficient policies of Mugabe, who has brought widespread economic, social and environmental degradation on Zimbabwe. Within the last decade, the country had gradually started to descend “into an abyss of a political-cum economic crisis.”[6] Unrest began to slowly rear in Zimbabwe, with the state losing significant authority over the country's citizens. After March 2008, in which Zimbabwe held its first nationally harmonized set of parliamentary elections, ZANU-PF was stripped of its majority status to the MDC opposition. Despite an arguably corruptive presidential runoff, Mugabe eventually held onto his presidency, which fostered a great level of civil unrest and violence, with numerous calls for his resignation by the West.

Through the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) reached in September of the same year between the ZANU-PF and MDC parties, “Zimbabwe finally edged closer to finding the long-elusive political settlement and a formula for establishing a new political and economic dispensation.”[7] Included in this crucial agreement was a power-sharing form of inclusive coalition government between the two factions. Morgan Tsvangirai, president of the Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai (MDC-T) party was sworn in as Zimbabwe's Prime Minister, and the MDC-T have taken up other ministerial positions alongside their ZANU-PF counterparts in the formation of shared government responsibility.

This specific power-sharing deal has by no means produced a nation of uninterrupted political harmony, but it has effectively challenged Mugabe's ZANU-PF party in its previously undisputed reign. The Zimbabwean Government of National Unity (GNU) “has undoubtedly helped to revive Zimbabwe's economy ... a multisectoral transformation process has begun, and the establishment of national commissions is a major step [for the security sector].”[8] Other

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constitutional, economic and agrarian reforms have also been of grave importance and action since the GNU's enactment. This has appeared to be a considerably admirable step in better governmental structure for the nation when compared with its tumultuous existence in the 1980s and 1990s. Before the creation of the GNU, Zimbabwe had seen a number of political reforms and institutional changes (as well as an attempted constitutional reform), yet these had been formulated in a single-party environment of unchecked domination that was, in the long run, producing little result. This period of biased constitutional change and corruptive presidential extension highlight well the studies of Danien Posner and Young, who write "incumbents have had three options: 1) abide by the constitutional term limit and stand down; 2) attempt to change the constitution to permit a third term; or 3) scrap the constitution altogether and prolong their tenure through extraconstitutional means." [9] Attempts at tackling Mugabe's authoritarian angles at unfairly retaining his power had been relatively unsuccessful, and the instigation of power-sharing in Zimbabwe, regarding Posner and Young's studies, show how it was one of the only means of reversing single-party, undemocratic supremacy so common across Africa.

A key step in reversing what had once seemed to be an inexorable course toward authoritarianism and one-party dominance in Zimbabwe came several years before the June 2000 election. Through successive legislative acts passed by a parliament dominated by the ruling party, the presidency had grown excessively powerful, while the capacity of other governmental institutions to ensure accountability declined. [10]

In trying to challenge Mugabe's rule, up until 2008 and beyond, opposition groups had witnessed failure in their endeavours. Since the GNU, despite its shown weaknesses in some areas of policy agreement and the embedded mistrust shared between its members, exerts a nature of counterbalancing and cooperation between ZANU-PF and MDC-T, Mugabe is at less means to swathe Zimbabwe in his political will as he previously enjoyed for so many years before. Despite this power-sharing government suffering many deep, almost inevitable, problems, it is an increase in democratic purpose to serve Zimbabweans that has come out of the GNU on behalf of the MDC-T, and improvements in Zimbabwe's situation have been noted.

The MDC's success is clearest on the economic front. Hyperinflation ... is under control thanks to the government's acceptance of the American dollar. For ordinary Zimbabweans, life has begun to get a bit better ... Thanks to the government's decision to give an allowance of \$100 a month to all civil servants (including government ministers), schools and hospitals have started to reopen. [11]

Talking of neoliberal implications for regional politics in Africa, Catherine Boone states that "If there is no neutral, superordinate, or third party to enforce political deals, power-sharing among political leaders becomes hard to achieve." [12] This is true in Zimbabwe, as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) oversaw the bargaining and agreements that were reached in the nation three years ago and played a major part in its development and finalization. On a national – and, indeed, international – scale, Zimbabwe's power-sharing construction has not only bolstered its democratic possibilities for the future but provided a type of more effective government once seen as virtually impossible.

South Sudan achieved its independence on July 9th, 2011. Before this, the unified Sudanese state had been the scene of two bloody civil wars both fought over the issue of regional autonomy. In 2005, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was formulated between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudanese National Congress aimed at putting an end to the country's Second Civil War. Various peace negotiations and party agreements on military and governmental matters between the Sudanese Government and the SPLA became a fundamental part of the CPA's makeup. However:

The CPA did not include other political parties, solve conflicts elsewhere in Sudan, or provide a blueprint for democratisation and economic development. But, expansion of the peace process to address any of these presumed shortcomings would have derailed the peace talks and most likely resulted in a renewal of the war. [13]

When compared with Zimbabwe, Sudan's form of power-sharing was similar in its compromises and makeup with regards to its parties' stake in the nation's political environment. As is the case in Zimbabwe, a Government of National Unity (GNU) was brought into fruition to make the sharing deals between the vying parties a reality, which

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constituted ministers of different parties (Government of Sudan (GoS) and SPLA) and varying degrees of control and accepted autonomy in what was then the North and South of the country, the latter of which was unique to Sudan's. [14]

While Sudan's approach to power-sharing was remarkable in its overall mitigation of the national conflict which had engulfed it for years, through the entirety of the CPA internal and external onlookers forecast its problems ahead when regarding deemed Southern autonomy. "The near future of CPA is very hazardous with the next tough challenge being the elections scheduled for April, 2010, followed by the referendum in 2011 ..." [15] With the success of the South Sudan independence referendum, power-sharing is seen here as a majorly transitional device used to resolve the nation's overwhelming conflict while providing a path to peaceful democratic governmental reform. This, indeed, goes against the stipulated idea of utilizing power-sharing agreements and consociationalist pacts as an indefinite means of achieving democratic development, rather than a temporary means for peaceful ends. In this manner, "by neutralizing violent conflict and opening the political process" [16], Sudan's CPA was cited as an example of success in the area of temporary bridges to peace and political stability. With an independent state of South Sudan now a reality, power-sharing was used for truly divergent means in Zimbabwe and Sudan, bringing about vastly different effects. In Zimbabwe, Mugabe's despotic rule has been flung various limitations on its abilities, while the aforementioned socioeconomic achievements in the country portray power-sharing's beneficial opportunities for reform and progress. The case of Sudan, however, provides another answer for African democratic development. "The emergence of South Sudan as a new sovereign independent state marks a significant event in the political development of the African continent, which may be viewed either as a unique event or as a precedent for the future." [17] Power-sharing in the Sudanese example fostered regional autonomy and spurred desires for national separation as well as giving conflicting groups a stake in governance. Thus, power-sharing may create results of divergent possibilities, but, especially in the case of Zimbabwe, has proven its worth in democratic entrenchment and progress. In managing conflict and producing concurrent results for political stakeholders to have a say in national policy, power-sharing has become a common feature throughout the African continent. Despite the notion that "Political power-sharing, by far the most frequent version in Africa, does not have the same value [in fostering post-war peace], according to Hoddie and Hartzell ..." [18] this is disproven in Zimbabwe by bringing a stoppage to its civil uprisings against the government's actions. At the time of writing the previously quoted article, the author stipulates:

Power-sharing agreements offer nomiraculous solutions to complex crisis situations. Further evidence is provided by the Zimbabwean case, where an uneasy process continued at the time of writing. The agreement was meant to end a severe crisis after the contested first round of presidential elections in March 2008. [19]

The reservations towards power-sharing are valid in African cases just as in already stated examples of its use worldwide. This being said, power-sharing deals offer opportunities for democratic revival – as well as peace – which can be difficult to imagine without consulting some form of cooperation and compromise.

Future Challenges

As previously argued, power-sharing and consociational type agreements are not without their downfalls, and the issues of upholding their survival can be just as wide-ranging and problematic to resolve as issues relating to their implementation. They are also used for virtually limitless reasons, and as such their outcomes are many. The GNUs of Zimbabwe and Sudan were similar in their principles, but their adherence to specific power-sharing agreements has, in the one case, produced a nation with noticeable improvement in some areas previously in degradation, and in the other produced another nation entirely.

For Zimbabwe, the chief issue, as has refused to go away for over three decades, is Mugabe himself. Mugabe seems to regard himself as a kind of monarch who must reign until his death. Not so long ago, he could have counted on the support of SADC leaders, many of them fellow veterans of anti-colonial struggles. But they are being replaced by a less respectful younger generation with more awareness of the link between good governance and their countries' prosperity. [20]

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Power-sharing demands negotiation and concession. Mugabe, quite predictably, has not taken to this idea well. Should future elections produce an MDC majority (even though, technically, the MDC beat ZANU-PF in the March 2008 elections) the power-sharing deal could be seen as wholly defunct. Mugabe's leadership has been the fundamental question when researching Zimbabwe's future, and will remain so. Stifling democracy and opposition appears to be Mugabe's only real desires. "Authoritarianism in Zimbabwe survives because a coalition of political and military elites stands ready and willing to employ violence to execute the Machiavellian vision of ... Robert Mugabe and perpetuate his control"[21] Despite this, power-sharing appears to be bringing improvement to democracy in Zimbabwe.

South Sudan, still remaining as the world's youngest nation, and the power-sharing formulas injected into Sudan's precious CPA helped pave the way for its lower half's formal statehood last summer. The continuation of political stability and democratic focus hinges on the South's relationship with the Northern nation. "[T]hey [the Sudanese] must establish a stable and durable peace between their two states, and they must work to promote stability and development within their borders." [22] South Sudan will have a precarious and, perhaps, conflicting relation with those above it, but the successful referendum vote proves that peaceful means to democratic approaches are achievable by the Sudanese.

What has been proven in the cases of both Zimbabwe and South Sudan is that power-sharing, far from a method aimed solely at conflict resolution, provides ample chance for political development. It has not created full democracies in either example, but the democratic brokerage and national coalition governments of deeply disagreeing members is a mark of hopefully irreversible progress that, without it, may still not exist.

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[14] Daniel P. Sullivan, "Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement at One Year of Age: Cause for Celebration?" working paper 2006/02 (German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2006), http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/wp_2_06_ks.pdf (accessed March 14, 2012).

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[16] Jeremy I. Levitt, *Illegal Peace in Africa: An Inquiry into the Legality of Power-Sharing with Warlords, Rebels and Junta* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 44.

[17] Anthony J. Christopher, "Secession and South Sudan: an African Precedent for the future?" *South African Geographical Journal* 93 (2011): 129-130.

[18] Andreas Mehler, "Peace and Power-Sharing in Africa: A Not so Obvious Relationship," *African Affairs* 108 (2009): 454-455.

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