

Elite Circulation: The Case of Botswana and Zimbabwe

D Mandiyanike

University of Botswana, Botswana

Abstract: Topical newspaper headlines in Zimbabwe and Botswana respectively in 2017 were "*I am not going anywhere and will stand in for election in 2018 ... there is no vacancy*" and "*Khama bids farewell to SADC*" and "*Khama bids farewell to BDP*". These catchy headlines also show the propensity to which the two countries are adept or lack thereof to circulate their elites. This paper is a reflection of the on-going changes and prospects for successful transition in these two neighbouring countries. The paper makes a comparative analysis of these two countries as they have fairly similar geo-physical and historical ties. Botswana and Zimbabwe present interesting parallels in terms of how they responded to leadership development and succession in their political development. Until 24 November 2017, Mugabe had been at the helm of Zimbabwe since 1980, whilst Botswana has had four Presidents since independence in 1966. Using the cases of Zimbabwe and Botswana, this paper argues that elite circulation is critical in regime change and stability and that failure to circulate the elites breeds crises of sorts.

Keywords: Botswana, Elite circulation, Political crisis, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

Elite circulation is critical in regime change and stability and that failure to circulate the elites breeds crises of sorts. The paper uses cases of Botswana and Zimbabwe to demonstrate the point that elite circulation facilitates democracy and development. Botswana has, since its independence (1966) progressed yet Zimbabwe regressed a few years into independence in 1980. While Botswana has sustained its democracy and has been effective in its management of resources, Zimbabwe has been authoritarian and ineffective. Zimbabwe even won the African prize for repression (Rotberg, 2007). The paper seeks to establish why this has been the case in the two countries using the elite circulation theory.

Botswana and Zimbabwe present a puzzle in terms of the way they responded to democracy and approached the issue of elite circulation in the office of the President, *ipso facto*, the cabinet and general leadership development and succession. Until 24 November 2017, Mugabe had been at the helm of Zimbabwe since 1980 whilst Botswana has had four Presidents since independence in 1966. This paper argues that Botswana has been a responsive democracy while Zimbabwe was a responsive democracy from independence up to the mid-1990s and thereafter regressed to a non-responsive democracy. The paper identifies some elements that support such observations. The author concludes that elite

circulation in Botswana has enabled the massive developmental gains although there are challenges that dent the quality of its democracy. On the other hand, Zimbabwe thus far has exhibited elite circulatory failure (derived from 'circulatory failure' in medical terms) as evidenced by the recidivistic socio-politico economic crises.

This paper is a reflection prompted by the 2017 catchy headline stories that were quite indicative of the different scenarios in Botswana and Zimbabwe. "Mugabe: 'I am going nowhere... My docs have told me my organs are still very strong'". The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic front (Zanu-PF) youth wing insisted that President Robert Mugabe is "switched on" and able to lead the country to 2023, when he would have turned 99 (Robert Mugabe died on 6 September 2019 aged 95). Then Youth secretary Kudzanayi Chipanga, organised country-wide rallies for the then 93-year-old president, and said that the youths will not "stampede" Mugabe into naming a successor. "He is still fit to execute his duties," Chipanga said in comments carried by the state-run Herald. "Mentally and physically ... Our president is still strong" (News24 Correspondent, 2017). On the other hand, Botswana's former President Ian Khama was preparing to step down and pave way for Mogkwetsi Masisi as the next president. Alfred Masokola (2017) wrote "Khama bids BDP farewell". President Lt Gen Ian Khama delivered his valedictory remarks to Botswana

Democratic Party (BDP) faithfuls, marking the beginning of an end of era of his presidency. The change in guard was anticipated and certain as captured by the sentiments "Masisi will be sworn in as president on the 1st of April 2018, becoming the fifth person to assume the office." *Weekend Post* (10 July 2017). It was even known and planned that "Khama to occupy Masire's retirement home in Extension 5 in Gaborone" Mmegi Staff writer (2017). This paper thus also aims to show the extent and the open or closed character of the respective countries' elite circulation. As in the case of Botswana, a ruling elite brings in fresh blood and talent and this tends to revitalise the elite.

The paper is a desktop study based on secondary material such as books, scientific articles and published newspaper articles. It would be a useful tool and starting point for future in-depth studies. The paper uses the elite circulation theory. The elite circulation paradigm was pioneered by Gaetano Mosca and refined by sociologists Mattei Dogan and John Higley (Meyers, 2014). The paradigm argues that when elites have relative autonomy, their decision making is of the highest importance and we should focus on elite activities when describing and explaining political change (Meyers, 2014). In the same breadth, elite circulation helps to placate public discontent.

2. The Early Foundations of Elite Circulation

Whilst elite circulation has its origins in the works of western writers, we also believe that political processes in Africa are driven by the same logic as politics elsewhere. Therefore, general theories which aim to explain the persistence of democratic regimes are equally applicable to Africa (Svanikier, 2007). Rotberg (2003) asks a litany of questions - Why should sub-Saharan Africa show such an extensive disparity between the many nation-states that have been and are poorly led and those few that consistently have been led well? Are the distinctions particularly African? Are they a product of colonial misrule? Do they reflect a common problem of transition from dependency to independence? Do they emanate from deep-rooted poverty and a lack of economic growth? Is sub-Saharan Africa's lamentable leadership record, in other words, attributable to exogenous variables beyond its control, or does Africa respond less favourably to a leadership challenge of the same order as every other region's?

Higley and Pakulski (nd: 950) argue that Pareto conceived of a ruling/governing elite or "governing class" - as a complex aggregation of powerful political, economic, and social groups, the inner leadership of which is located in a government and legislature. They further argue that ruling elites differ according to which of two underlying psychosocial propensities predominates in them: (1) a propensity to combine things in innovative ways, which renders an elite "fox-like" in its actions; (2) a propensity to restore things to traditional forms, which renders an elite "lion-like" in its actions. Under these circumstances, a vulpine elite acts in cunning, inventive and manipulative ways; a leonine elite acts with belligerence, courage and the use of force (Higley & Pakulski, nd).

Put differently, political elites are defined as those: who exercise a disproportionately large amount of influence within the political system; who exercise both authority and power [force]; who ... have actual or potential influence on decision-making and the distribution of spoils and patronage; who exercised and possessed political power to a greater degree than other members of ... society (Zartman, 1974:466). Higley (2011) argues that political elites comprise a somewhat elastic category that includes a society's most senior politicians and most politically influential leaders of state administrative, business, labour, military, professional, media, religious, and other important sectors and movements. Members of political elites are distinguished by their proximity to political decision-making and their ability to influence political outcomes regularly and substantially, whilst political elites may be viewed as a cohort. In this paper we discuss the term in the context of the president as the head of state/government and his/her idiosyncrasies.

There is need to distinguish between "surface" turnovers among newcomers who fail to gain re-election or are booted out by their parties after a single term, and "deep" turnovers among long-serving incumbents (Higley, 2011). Zimbabwe needs a deep turn over in elite circulation. Higley (2011) identifies two types of elites - Parliamentary and Ministerial Elites. He argues that Parliaments are the core components of most democracies. They support or withdraw support for governments headed by prime ministers and constituted by the parties or party coalitions that claim a majority or plurality among members of parliament (MPs). As for the Ministerial Elites, Higley (2011) noted that the formal

and informal features of ministerial elites and the cabinets they comprise vary widely among representative democracies. In the context of the British and other Westminster political systems and some other countries, ministers are always elected MPs selected by the prime minister who heads the party or party coalition commanding a majority or plurality of seats in the lower house of parliament or in a unicameral parliament. It is important to note that ministerial elites have both administrative and representative functions.

3. Elite Circulation in Zimbabwe and Botswana

We subscribe to the notion that political stability is grounded in institutional development: weak institutions produce a political system in constant flux, as leaders use extra-legal means to secure and maintain power. On the other hand, strong institutions characterized by functional differentiation and term limits lead to a system in which political ascent is gradual and the political system is stable. Political stability reinforces regime legitimacy, so by regulating elite change and setting the foundation for inner-Party democracy (Meyer, Ram & Wilke, 2016:149).

Higley and Pakulski (nd:7) posit that failing to circulate elites or even a long cycle is the result of a governing elite's gradual but inexorable degeneration and the dire situation it eventually creates. They noted that degeneration occurs in three principal and interrelated ways. First, routine circulation slows so that a governing elite becomes increasingly closed, with able persons who do not fit the elite's preferred psychosocial and stylistic profile more and more excluded from its ranks (for example Zimbabwe's notable purges of Joyce Mujuru, Didymus Mutasa, Dzikamai Mavhaire and six other ministers in December 2014 and ultimately Emmerson Mnangagwa – now President of Zimbabwe, among others). This does not only unbalance the elite's composition and denudes the elite of talent, it breeds frustration among aspirants, who, on finding their careers blocked, foment mass opposition. Second, a governing elite's intellectual and political qualities deteriorate, with key positions held increasingly by mediocrities who have risen to power through family inheritance, cronyism, and sycophancy, and who lack the vigour and wisdom necessary for decisive and effective actions. This was evidenced by Mugabe's appointment to senior

government positions of his siblings and close relatives Sabina Mugabe, Patrick Zhuwawo and Innocent Matibili among others.

Many writers acknowledge that the Zimbabwe that Mugabe inherited in 1980 was highly industrialised, with a highly productive industrial sector that assembled cars and made the finest clothes along with all manner of consumer goods for the rest of the world (Malunga, 2019). Sean O'Grady (2019) contends that "When Robert Mugabe was elected president of the newly liberated, independent Zimbabwe in 1980, his friend and long-term supporter - President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania congratulated him, but added this advice: "You have inherited a jewel. Keep it that way." However, with the passage of time and aggressive policies, Zimbabwe's economy declined rapidly to a point where the country ranks among the poorest economic performers in the region.

Over the years, Zimbabwe slid into a political-economic crisis. The Zimbabwe crisis has come to be an albatross. There has been a cataclysmic socio-political and economic crisis that gripped Zimbabwe. In 2008 the economic crisis reached unprecedented levels to be termed a mega-disaster. Musekiwa and Mandiyanike (2017) argue that Zimbabwe is recovering from a long spell economic crisis that witnessed inflation reaching 230 million per cent. The crisis also caused shortages of goods and services and also resulted in severe food insecurity especially among the urban poor who rely on purchased food. The proportion of people in Zimbabwe living below the Food Poverty Line increased from 29% in 1995 to 58% in 2003 and there is a general increase in malnutrition levels among children under five years (Musekiwa & Mandiyanike, 2017, citing the UNDP 2015 Report). The political situation was equally charged and factional fights within Zanu-PF reached a boiling point forcing the army to intervene 'to restore normalcy to government operations' in November 2017.

During Mugabe's last days as President, Emmerson Mnangagwa then Mugabe's vice was the last victim to be purged. It is instructive to note his parting shot. Mnangagwa (2017) on being dismissed from the party intimated that "this is not the Zanu-PF we established with the late Dr. J.M. Nkomo and other luminaries who have passed on. This is now a party controlled by undisciplined, egotistical and self-serving minnows who derive their power not

from the people and party but from only two individuals in the form of the First Family who have now privatized and commercialized our beloved institution. ... We must reject this insane and idiotic habit of expelling and suspending members of the party merely because we differ in opinion or have brighter and more progressive ideas of improving the lives of our people.

Declaratively, Mnangagwa (2017) concluded "I will go nowhere. I will fight tooth and nail against those making a mockery against Zanu-PF founding principles, ethos and values. You and your cohorts will instead leave Zanu-PF by the will of the people and this we will do in the coming few weeks as Zimbabweans in general now require new and progressive leadership that is not resident in the past and refuses to accept change".

For Rotberg (2007), the single-minded, often narcissistic leaders are many and share common characteristics: they are focused on power itself, not on the uses of power for good; they are indifferent to the well-being of their citizens but anxious to receive their adulation. He also acknowledges that the positive examples of African leadership stand out because of their clear-minded strength of character, their adherence to participatory democratic principles, and their rarity. We argue that elite circulation has a bearing to the turn-over in leadership and how the developmental gains can be maximised. It is customarily assumed that a steady flow of persons from mass to elite positions, and vice versa, is essential for political representation (Higley, 2011).

It is notable that good governments deliver high security for the state and the person; a functioning rule of law; education; health; and a framework conducive to economic growth. They ensure effective arteries of commerce and enshrine personal and human freedoms. They empower civil society and protect the environmental commons (Rotberg, 2003). In the case of Botswana, it has been hailed as having achieved remarkable socio-economic progress since its attainment of independence in 1966 (World Bank, 2014). It moved from the ranks of being one of the poorest countries in the world to upper middle income status (World Bank, 2017). The Millennium Development Goals confirm Botswana as a success story in many ways (UNDP, 2015; Lekalake, 2016). The changes in leadership have cumulatively resulted in positive outcomes

as each incumbent brought a different slant in his administration. In the context of elite circulation, Botswana has routinised the leadership terms and that the incumbent leaves office at the end of their term without unduly attempting to tinker with the processes and extending their term.

Up to his retirement on 31 March 2018, (now former President) Ian Khama conducted farewell meetings with communities across the length and breadth of Botswana. These meetings were celebratory and characterised with gifts. This is in total contrast to Mugabe's dishonourable exit from power in November 2017. The Zimbabwean populace celebrated Mugabe's fall from grace. There is no doubt that even Zimbabwe responded fairly well to democracy (at the beginning) but regressed with Mugabe's continued hold on power and failure to handle his succession and indeed the emergence of a strong opposition.

Rotberg (2003:29) contends that despicable leadership is exemplified by Mugabe's Zimbabwe, a rich country reduced to the edge of starvation, penury, and fear. The opening of a long repressed society, with attention to education and a removal of barriers to economic entrepreneurship, as in post-dictatorship Kenya, is another sign of progressive leadership. Most people are trying to make sense of Mugabe's legacy upon his demise. The litany of obituaries has been punctuated with the titles like "Robert Mugabe: Zimbabwe liberator turned ruthless despot"; the President once hailed as beacon of African liberation whose rule bankrupted country". The Zimbabwe African Union (Zanu-PF) spokesperson in South Africa, Kennedy Mandaza said that there were a lot of good things Mugabe did for the Zimbabwean people. He said that his only fault was to hold on to power for a long time (Interview with Dan Moyane, 6 September 2019; www.eNCA.com - Published on 6 Sep 2019). Even, Mugabe's former spin doctor, Jonathan Moyo concedes that his iconic image was blighted by dark spots (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9w815uqTzQI>). This shows a mixed legacy.

On the other hand, Rotberg (ibid) argues that Botswana is the paragon of leadership excellence in Africa. Long before diamonds were discovered, the dirt-poor, long-neglected desert protectorate demonstrated an affinity for participation, integrity, tolerance of difference and dissent, entrepreneurial initiative, and the rule of law. The relative linguistic homogeneity of Botswana may have helped. So

would the tradition of chieftainship and the chiefly search for consensus after discussion among a *kgotla*, or assembly of elders. Rotberg (2011) admires Botswana's century-old, deeply ingrained teachings of the congregational London Missionary Society and how these infected the country's dominant political culture. As Khama finished his second term and handed over the baton to Masisi, Botswana stood out in sub-Saharan Africa as the foremost country to have remained democratic in form and spirit continuously since its independence (in 1966). As Botswana prepares for yet another general election on 23 October 2019, the political landscape has since shifted. Former President Ian Khama broke ranks with his successor (President Eric Masisi) and the ruling Botswana Democratic Party. He is now founder and patron of a new political outfit – Botswana Patriotic Front (BPF). With all the incessant experiences and hardened attitudes, what is the source of Khama/Masisi political bickering? Gabathuse (2019) interviews University of Botswana (UB) senior lecturer in politics, Dr. Kebapetse Lotshwao who argued that although Masisi and his predecessor Khama had not disclosed the source of their differences, "I think the main factor behind their differences is the control of the State. In Africa, as in some other developing countries where the private sector is weak, the State is the source of power". Gabathuse (2019) further alludes that the control of the state allows one to keep political and business opponents at bay, and that "for over 10 years, if not more, Khama controlled the Botswana state and his family and their associates accumulated wealth through the control of the State." Thus in this case, the elite circulation was antithetical as the new president introduced some reforms, for instance, the President wants to open the tourism industry to locals. These reforms are threatening Khama's interests and those of his family and associates (Gabathuse, 2019). It would thus be prudent and indeed natural for Khama to try and fight back, hoping to defeat Masisi, impose a more compliant leader in his place and thus preserve his interests (ibid). This neatly fits with Rotberg's (2007) view that the single-minded, often narcissistic leaders are many and share common characteristics: they are focused on power itself, not on the uses of power for good; they are indifferent to the well-being of their citizens but anxious to receive their adulation.

As the Zimbabwe situation unfolds, we take Higley's (2011) counsel to look for signs of elite degeneration during the several decades preceding crises

and argue that political changes (2017 military intervention, Mugabe's attempted impeachment and subsequent resignation) triggered by crises can plausibly be interpreted as marking the start of new elite cycles.

4. Zenith of Elite Circulation Crisis in Zimbabwe

Higley (2011:838) argues that Pareto theorised that, any ruling elite eventually becomes captive to a psychosocial propensity more and more inappropriate for dealing with changing circumstances and economic-political challenges. As this psychosocial fixation increases, the elite gradually becomes closed to persons with the contrary propensity, elite policies and actions become more doctrinaire and inflexible, intellectual mediocrities ascend to key elite positions, and the elite undergoes moral decline. For example, in the case of Zimbabwe, when Emmerson Mnangagwa was fired from his vice president position, he challenged Mugabe "Your Excellency and First Secretary of Zanu-PF, it is sad and deplorable that you have allowed our Party to be hijacked by novices and external forces as well as individuals who have a proven record of treachery. This Party is NOT PERSONAL PROPERTY for you and your wife to do as you please" (Mnangagwa, 2017). This degenerative process leads eventually to a profound economic-political crisis in which persons possessing the alternative psychosocial propensity take power through violent revolution or a peaceful but sweeping elite circulation.

Higleys and Pakulski (nd) Pareto theorised that over time a distinct psychosocial propensity - manifested by personality traits, mentalities, beliefs and actions - becomes predominant in governing elites. This renders them, especially their leaders, prone to bias, closure, rigidity and cumulating blunders. A gradual process of decline - degeneration is a more pointed term - takes hold and leads eventually to a profound crisis during which groups and persons disposed toward the opposite propensity ascend, only to have a lengthy process of decline or degeneration begin anew.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The author concludes that elite circulation in Botswana has enabled the massive developmental gains although there are challenges that dent the quality of its democracy. The recrudescence of

former President Ian Khama confirms the strength of circulating elites, with the attendant risk of re-appearance of those prematurely recycled. On the other hand, Zimbabwe thus far has exhibited elite circulatory failure (derived from 'circulatory failure' in medical terms) as evidenced by the recidivistic socio-political economic crises. Mugabe's failure to handle the succession debate inevitably degenerated to the elite circulation crisis that led to his unceremonious and embarrassing exit from office and the party. This even became more pronounced as he died in a foreign country (Singapore).

References

- Acemoglu, D. & Robinson, J. 2013. *Why Nations Fail - The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*. London: Profile Books.
- Alexander, J. 2009. Comments Off on Vilfredo Pareto: The Karl Marx of Fascism Part II: Foxes and Lions.
- Botlhomilwe, M.Z., Sebudubudu, D. & Maripe, B. 2011. Limited freedom and intolerance in Botswana. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 29(3):331-348.
- Higley, J. 2011. Introduction – Circulations and Qualities of Political Elites. *Comparative Sociology*, 10:829-839.
- Lekalake, R. 2016. *Evaluating Botswana's performance on National Vision 2016 Public opinion on development pillars*. Johannesburg: Afrobarometer.
- Masokola, A. 2017. *Khama bids BDP farewell*; *The Weekend Post*. Available at: <http://www.weekendpost.co.bw/wp-news-details.php?nid=4006>. Accessed 20 August 2017.
- Meyers, D. 2014. Elite Circulation in Bolivarian Venezuela. *Latin American Research Review*, 231-245.
- Meyers, D., Ram, M. & Wilke, L. 2016. Circulation of the elite in the Chinese Communist Party. *Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol 16:147-184.
- Mnangagwa, E.D. 2017. Full statement: 'I'm not going anywhere... Zanu-PF is not your personal property,' Mnangagwa tells Mugabe; News24; Available at: <https://www.news24.com/Africa/Zimbabwe/full-statement-im-not-going-anywhere-zanu-pf-is-not-your-personal-property-mnangagwa-tells-mugabe-20171108>. Accessed 11 November 2017.
- Musekiwa, N. & Mandiyanike, D. 2017. Urban Local governments and Food security: The case of Zimbabwe. Paper published in the *International Conference on Public Administration and Development Alternatives*, 80-94.
- Rotberg, R. 2007. *Worst of the worst - Dealing with repressive and rogue nations*. Cambridge: World Peace Foundation.
- Rotberg, R.I. 2003. The Roots of Africa's leadership deficit. *Compass: A Journal of Leadership*, 28-32.
- Sebudubudu, D. & Botlhomilwe, M.Z. 2011. The critical role of leadership in Botswana's development: What lessons? *Leadership*, 8(1):29-45.
- Society, E. nd. *Politics and the circulation of elites*. London: Routledge.
- Svanikier, J.O. 2007. Political Elite Circulation: Implications for Leadership. *Political Sociology*, 114-135.
- UNDP Botswana. 2015. MDG Overview. Gaborone: Botswana Country Office. Available at: <http://www.bw.undp.org/content/botswana/en/home/mdgoverview/overview/mdg1>. Accessed 12 June 2015.
- Writer, S. 2017. *Khama to occupy Masire's retirement home*. Available at: <http://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?aid=71002&dir=2017/august/16>.
- Zartmann, W. 1974. The Study of Elite Circulation. *Comparative Politics*.