

The Regional dimensions of Zimbabwe's multi-layered crisis: an Analysis

By

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Introduction

Zimbabwe has been in the throes of a severe crisis in the past decade or so; one which has seen a once vibrant and dynamic society and economy virtually collapsing as political instability, lawlessness, misgovernment and a relentless economic melt down transformed this erstwhile leading southern African nation into an international pariah and the proverbial basket case. Although popularly referred to as the 'Zimbabwean crisis', what has been occurring in the country since the turn of the new millennium is a complex and inter-related multi-layered and pervasive catastrophe that can, perhaps, best be described as a series of 'Zimbabwean crises', for no aspect of Zimbabwean existence escaped the deleterious effects of this phenomenon. The crisis has been evident in the country's economic and socio-political life and the negative ripple effects that emanated from a progressively dysfunctional state.

While those directly and most severely affected have been Zimbabwean citizens who have endured the worst effects of the country's decline into collapse, the Zimbabwean crisis has had widespread negative regional repercussions. This has gradually led to the realization by Zimbabwe's neighbours, through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) regional organisation, that they had to assist in resolving the crisis for the good of the region as a whole. In the light of the above, this paper seeks to examine the nature and manifestations of the Zimbabwean crisis, its origins, development and impact, regional implications of the crisis and the various initiatives by Zimbabwe's neighbours to resolve the country's crises. It ends with an attempt to locate the Zimbabwean experience in the evolving debates on political transitions in post-colonial Africa.

Genesis of the crisis

The Zimbabwean crisis has been long in the making, although more recent political and economic developments in the country have precipitated its current deleterious manifestations. Long term origins lie in the colonial inequalities that characterised the country in its ninety years of colonial rule, especially pertaining to the land question,¹ that made an armed liberation struggle necessary and led to the development of liberation movements which, because of the very nature of their struggle exhibited anti-democratic tendencies and to be intolerant of dissenting view points, their progressive struggle rhetoric notwithstanding.²

¹ Literature of land abounds. See, for example, H. Moyana, *The Political Economy of Land in Zimbabwe* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984); S. Moyo, *The Land Question in Zimbabwe* (Harare: SAPES, 1995); J. Alexander, *The Unsettled Land: State-Making & the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe 1893-2003* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2006); A. S. Mlambo, "Land Grab or Taking Back Stolen Land: The Fast Track Land Reform Process in Zimbabwe in Historical Perspective", *Compass*, (July 2005); R. Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia* (London: Heinemann, 1977); R. Riddell, "Zimbabwe's land problem: The central issue" in *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe: Behind and Beyond Lancaster House*, ed. W. H. Morris-Jones (New Jersey: Frank Cass, 1980), 1-13; Rukuni, M. *et al.*, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems* (Harare: Government Printer, 1994).

² For more on the post-colonial dispensation in Southern Africa under former liberation movements, see Henning Melber, *The Limits to Liberation in Southern Africa: The Unfinished Business of*

More recently, the formation of the Movement for Democratic change in 1999 and its formidable challenge to the hitherto unchallenged political ZANU-PF dominance created a sense of panic within the ruling party which resulted in ruthless efforts to destroy the opposition, including widespread use of violence. Convinced that the MDC was a front for white, particularly white farmer, interests, ZANU-PF hit back with the fast-track land reform exercise under the banner of the Third Chimurenga economic war. What made the land reform programme a feasible strategy for hitting back at political opponents and mobilising the populace behind ZANU-PF was the fact that, for a variety of reasons, the land question had never been fully and satisfactorily resolved since independence in 1980.³ As David Moore and Brian Raftopoulos correctly point out, therefore, the Zimbabwean crisis was, indeed, “rooted in the long-term structural political–economic legacies of colonial rule combined with the legacies of African nationalist politics” but that its explosion must be understood in the context of a “major threat to the political future of the ruling party ZANU-PF”.⁴

Contributing to the rise of the MDC which increasingly posed this serious threat to the political dominance of the ruling party were the country’s deteriorating economic conditions from the early 1990s. Arguably, the decline set in the era of the harmful World Bank/IMF-inspired Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in the early 1990s which led to rapid de-industrialisation, growing unemployment and the severe erosion of living standards of the majority.⁵ The situation was certainly not helped by President Robert Mugabe’s decision in October 1997 to authorise unbudgeted for pay outs of Z\$50 000 gratuities and monthly pensions of Z\$2 000 to each War Veteran in the face of mounting pressure from this group which was demanding belated recognition for their sacrifices in the liberation of the country during the liberation war. To further compound the situation, in August 1998 Mugabe unilaterally decided to send Zimbabwean soldiers into the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in support of the government of Laurent Kabila, which was under attack by local opposition forces. Both decisions resulted in large expenditures which had not been budgeted for and which negatively impacted on the country’s fiscus and economy. Not surprisingly, economic hardships sparked by these developments increased dissatisfaction among the country’s working population and contributed to mounting worker’s unrest of which the Public Service strike of 1996 is but one example. A conjuncture of interests between the workers and other civil society

Democratic Consolidation, (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2003); Henning Melber, “Post-independence authoritarianism“, in *Development & Cooperation*, No. 10 2008, Volume 49, (October 2008); Patrick Bond and Masimba Manyanya, *Zimbabwe’s Plunge – Exhausted Nationalism, Neo-liberalism and the Search for social Justice*, (London: Merlin Press, 2002); Henning Melber, “Liberation and Democracy: Cases from Southern Africa” in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 21, 2, (May 2003).

³A. S. Mlambo, “Land Grab or Taking Back Stolen Land: The Fast Track Land Reform Process in Zimbabwe in Historical Perspective”, *Compass*, (July 2005).

⁴David Moore & Brian Raftopoulos, “Zimbabwe’s Democracy of Diminished Expectations”, Unpublished (2010).

⁵ Much scholarship on the deleterious impact of ESAP exist. See for instance, A. S. Mlambo, *The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme*; A. S. Mlambo and E. Pangeti, “Globalisation, Structural Adjustment and the Social Dimensions Dilemma in Zimbabwe, 1990-1999”, in Taye Assefa et al (eds.), *Globalisation, Democracy and Development in Africa: Challenges and Prospects*, Addis Ababa: OSSREA, 2001, 163-178

groups led, ultimately, to the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in September 1999.

The defeat of the Government by an MDC-led campaign in a 2000 constitutional referendum precipitated the current crisis when the government unleashed a wave of terror against supporters of the MDC and white commercial farmers whom it blamed for having sponsored the new opposition party. The chaotic and highly controversial fast-track agrarian reform exercise and the violent campaigns against perceived opponents of the ruling party that accompanied it from 2000 onwards resulted in widespread human rights abuses that made Zimbabwe a pariah state that was boycotted by the international community and subjected to targeted economic sanctions. Not surprisingly, given the fact that agriculture had always traditionally been the backbone of the country's economy, with most of the manufacturing industries depending on the agricultural sector for inputs and markets, damage to the sector had numerous negative ripple effects throughout the national economy. The result was factory closures, declining outputs and foreign currency earnings and massive unemployment.

By 2008 the Zimbabwean economy had undergone a veritable meltdown, with all indicators signifying a country in severe distress. For instance, inflation rates were estimated in percentages of hundreds of millions, while the country's currency, now denominated in quintillions, becoming virtually worthless. Indeed, by 2007, per capita GDP was estimated at \$200, compared to \$900 in 1990, while over 80% of the Zimbabwean population was reported in 2005 to be living on less than \$2 a day. Exports, which in 1997 had accounted for 33.5% of the country's GDP were worth only 9.9% of the GDP in 2007. Unemployment at 2008 stood at 90%, while once the breadbasket of the entire region, Zimbabwe was now importing basic foodstuffs to feed its population.⁶ According to the World Bank, Zimbabwe had "the world's fastest shrinking economy for a country not at war". Citizens experienced this meltdown directly through crumbling social services and infrastructure, frequent power cuts, factory closures, a worthless national currency, and perhaps the most life threatening, intermittent domestic water supplies and the breakdown of the country's urban water reticulation systems and the infrastructure supplying clean water to urban households; resulting in the horrendous cholera outbreak in 2008.⁷

Meanwhile, the economic crisis resulted in a massive collapse of the country's once-celebrated social services sector, with health and education provision declining precipitously in the face of chronic and severe under funding and a debilitating brain drain as most professionals voted with their feet in search of better prospects abroad.⁸

⁶ Reuters, "Factbox – Zimbabwe's meltdown in figures" 2 December, 2008, at <http://www.reuters.com>

⁷ Muchaparara Musemwa, "From 'Sunshine City' to a Landscape of Disaster: The politics of water, sanitation and disease in Harare, Zimbabwe, 1980-2009", *Journal of Developing Societies*, (Forthcoming, 2010)

⁸Tendai Maphosa, "Exodus of Professionals worsens Health Care in Zimbabwe". 21 October 2003; "Mugabe says we are being stolen. All we want is better pay", *The Observer*, UK, August 10, 2003. In fact, the negative social effects of the crisis had become evident much earlier. See, for instance, A. S. Mlambo, "The Social Costs of the Zimbabwe Crisis since 2000" in Margaret C. Lee and Karen Colvard (eds.), *Unfinished Business: The Land Crisis in Southern Africa*, (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2003), 195-221.

Thus, the country's once-internationally envied health and education services sector⁹ were in tatters by 2008. This deteriorating situation created a human crisis of gigantic proportions, indicated by plummeting life expectancy rates from 63 years in 1990 to 40.9 years in 2005 and related increases in child mortality rates from 76 to 132 deaths per 1000 between 1990 and 2005.¹⁰ The hitherto widely admired primary health care system quickly unravelled as drug and staff shortages meant that no meaningful health care could be provided in most hospitals, let alone in the country's many clinics built in the 1980s which were now neglected and in a progressive state of disrepair. What made the human crisis even more tragic was the fact that health services were declining at the very moment when they were needed the most given the growing threat of rising HIV/AIDS infections. As of 2007, HIV prevalence in Zimbabwe was 15.6% among adults aged 15-49 and 26% (in 2006) among pregnant women, while the average death rate from the pandemic was 3 200 people per week in 2007, making Zimbabwe the fourth highest HIV/AIDS prevalent country in the world.¹¹

This pandemic required greater investment in the health sector, not less. At this point, however, the Zimbabwean state was in no economic condition to rally to this call. The outbreak of the cholera epidemic in 2008 that took thousands of lives was the ultimate incontrovertible indicator of the total collapse of the Zimbabwean health sector and evidence that the system's governance, economic, political and social structures had deteriorated to the extent of not being able to provide even basic clean drinking water to its citizens! Well might the international organisation Physicians for Human Rights could comment on how, the Government of Zimbabwe had "abrogated the most basic state functions in protecting the health of the population – including the maintenance of public hospitals and clinics and the support for the health workers required to maintain the public health system."¹² Summing up the parlous state of Zimbabwe's social sectors, UNICEF commented in December 2008 how:

Schools and hospitals are closing, patients cannot access health care, teachers, nurses and doctors are not able to come to work. Urban water supplies are erratic, or not available at all due to weakened infrastructure, power outages and shortage of chemicals. The net effect on Zimbabwean children has been no schooling, lack of health care, no safe drinking water, reduced number of meals and increased morbidity and mortality.¹³

Meanwhile, UNICEF characterised the country's education services in 2009 as a "national disaster".¹⁴

⁹ A. S. Mlambo, *Economic Structural Adjustment: The Case of Zimbabwe 1990 – 1995*, (Harare: UZP, 1997).

¹⁰ Reuters, "Factbox – Zimbabwe's meltdown".

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Physicians for Human Rights, *Health in Ruins*.

¹³ UNICEF, *Immediate Needs of Children and Women Affected by the Cholera Outbreak and Collapse of the Health and Education Systems*, (UNICEF Zimbabwe, December 2008).

¹⁴ Cited in Physicians for Human Rights, *Health in Ruins: A man-Made Disaster in Zimbabwe*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: PHR, January 2009), 5, at <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org> For a discussion of the decline of post-colonial higher education in Zimbabwe, see A. S. Mlambo "Post-colonial higher education in Zimbabwe: The University of Zimbabwe as a case study 1980-2004", *Kleio*, 37 (2005), 106-130.

As if the above challenges were not enough, Zimbabwean citizens had further to contend with a deepening governance and human rights crisis in which they were subjected to endless intimidation and violence by government agents and supporters of the ruling party for supporting the opposition party.¹⁵ The state's penchant for violence against opposition had already been demonstrated in the *Gukurahundi* massacres of the early 1980s when an estimated 20 000 people were killed by Government forces in the so-called anti-dissident campaign.¹⁶ What had been confined to Matebeleland in those years spread to the rest of the country after 2000 with the widespread and indiscriminate harassment and battering of the political opposition that progressively increased over the years and reached its peak in the run up to the March and June 2008.¹⁷ The erosion of individual rights was accompanied by the systematic militarization of the state,¹⁸ the subversion of the judiciary and undermining of the country's courts,¹⁹ as well as the total disregard of the rule of law and blatant abuse of individual human rights.²⁰ The ultimate evidence of the country's governance crisis and just how far erstwhile liberators had transformed into insensitive oppressors was the callous destruction of urban shelters during the controversial Operation *Murambatsvina* that left hundreds of thousands of people homeless and ruined their sources of livelihood.²¹

Meanwhile, in response to the deteriorating situation at home, many Zimbabweans have left the country and joined the growing Zimbabwean Diaspora abroad.²² Estimates differ on the number of Zimbabweans now living abroad, but it is clear that

¹⁵ See David Moore & Brian Raftopoulos, "Zimbabwe's Democracy of Diminished Expectations".

¹⁶ Catholic commission for Justice and peace in Zimbabwe and Legal Resources Foundation, *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matebeleland and the Midlands, 1980 to 1988* (Harare: CCJPZ/LRF, 1997).

¹⁷ Zimbabwe Solidarity "Punishing Dissent, Silencing Citizens: The Zimbabwe Elections 2008 (21 May 2008), at <http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org> ; A. Moyo, "Polls neither free nor fair: ZESN", Zimonline.co.za , June 4, 2009; Catholic commission for Justice and peace in Zimbabwe and Legal Resources Foundation, *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matebeleland and the Midlands, 1980 to 1988* (Harare: CCJPZ/LRF, 1997).

¹⁸ J. Muzondidya, "The Politico-military Business Complex and the Transition in Zimbabwe", Paper presented to the Roundtable on "The Death of Quiet diplomacy and A New Chance for Zimbabwe" organised by the Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, 17 July 2007.

¹⁹ Brian Raftopoulos and Alois Mlambo (Eds.), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History of Zimbabwe from the pre-colonial period to 2008*, (Harare: Weaver Press, & South Africa: Jacana Media, 2009); Robert Martin, "The rule of law in Zimbabwe," *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 95, 384, (April 2006); "Zimbabwe judge quits, goes into exile," *The New Zimbabwe*, (January 29, 2004), <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/majuru.1373.html> ; *The State of Justice in Zimbabwe*, A Report to the International Council of Advocates and Barristers by Five Common Law Bars into the state of Justice in Zimbabwe, (December 2004).

²⁰ International Federation for Human Rights, *FIDH and Zimrights condemn serious human rights violations against leaders of opposition parties and civil society representatives*, 15 March 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/482c5bd919.html>

²¹ M. Vambe (ed.), *The Hidden Dimensions of Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe*, (Harare: Weaver Press, 2008); Tibaijuka, A. K. *Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to Assess the Scope and impact of Operation Murambatsvina by the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe*, (New York: UNHCS-Habitat, 2005).

²² Tendai Maphosa, "Exodus of Professionals worsens Health Care in Zimbabwe". 21 October 2003; "Mugabe says we are being stolen. All we want is better pay", *The Observer*, UK, August 10, 2003. In fact, the negative social effects of the crisis had become evident much earlier. See, for instance, A. S. Mlambo, "The Social Costs of the Zimbabwe Crisis since 2000" in Margaret C. Lee and Karen Colvard (eds.), *Unfinished Business: The Land Crisis in Southern Africa*, (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2003), 195-221.

the numbers are substantial. Unlike earlier migrations which were dominated by men,²³ the current migration includes both women and unaccompanied minors. A recent report has made the following observation about this migration:

The largest mass movement of people into South Africa in its history is continuing into its seventh year, yet the (SA) Government appears to have a policy that consists of window dressing and broken promises. The Zimbabwean migration is around three times greater than that of Mozambicans during the civil war, yet astonishingly there is no coherent indication from Government on how it intends to deal with this, either now or in the future. This crisis of immigration into South Africa is a direct product of the crisis in Zimbabwe; as economic recovery in Zimbabwe is not likely to occur soon, its biggest export will remain its people.²⁴

This has created serious problems of human trafficking and other abuses. Meanwhile, the influx of Zimbabweans into Botswana and South Africa, particularly, has sparked off serious xenophobic reactions; the most well-known example being the attacks on ‘foreigners’ in South Africa in 2008 which resulted in widespread death and destruction²⁵ and which provided clear evidence that Zimbabwe’s crisis was, in fact, a regional problem that required resolution for the good of the region as a whole. These attacks were repeated on a more local scale in De Doorns in the Western Cape in November 2009, when xenophobic violence resulted in the forceful displacement of some 3000 Zimbabweans and the ‘destruction and looting of their dwellings by their South African neighbours.’²⁶

Regional Political Challenges.²⁷

The Zimbabwean crisis has presented the region with a series of formidable challenges. These include: Dealing with the political fallout of the first liberation movement to lose an election in the region, and its unwillingness to cede power to the victorious opposition; and walking a line between the international condemnation of human rights abuses by the Mugabe regime, and the latter’s effective deployment of a redistributive anti-colonial and Pan Africanist discourse to confront the universalist

²³ A. S. Mlambo, “Zimbabwe Migration up to 1990: A Historical Overview”, in J. Crush and D. Tevera (eds.), *Zimbabwean Migration* (forthcoming 2010); L. M. Zinyama, “International Migration to and from Zimbabwe and the Influence of political Changes on Population Movements, 1965-1987”, in *International Migration Review*, vol. 24, No. 4 (Winter, 1990); Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933*, (Johannesburg: Ravan press, 1976); F. E. Sanderson, “The Development of Labour Migration from Nyasaland, 1891-1914”, *Journal of African History*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1961), 259-271; W. C. Chirwa, “‘TEBA is Power’: Rural Labour, Migrancy and Fishing in Malawi, 1890s -1985”, PhD Thesis, Queens University, Kingston, Ontario, (1992); D. S. Tevera and J. Crush, “The New Brain Drain from Zimbabwe”, SAMP, (Cape Town: IDASA, 2003).

²⁴ Solidarity Peace Trust, *Desperate Lives, twilight worlds: How a million Zimbabweans live without official sanction or sanctuary in South Africa*, Johannesburg, 31st March 2010.

²⁵ A.S. Mlambo, “*Makwerekwere* go back to where you came from: Thoughts about the recent xenophobic riots in SA.” Paper presented to the History Seminar, University of Sheffield, UK, 2nd March 2009.

²⁶ Forced Migration Studies Programme, *Violence, Labour and the Displacement of Zimbabweans in De Doorns, Western Cape*, University of Witwatersrand, Dcember 2009, p2.

²⁷ This section draws from B.Raftopoulos, “The Politics of the SADC Mediation and the GPA in Zimbabwe.” Forthcoming 2010.

claims of this human rights politics.²⁸ Together these problems have brought to the fore the challenge for the region in attempting to live up to the demands for greater democratisation, while challenging the inequalities of the global economic order, through the jealously guarded demands for national sovereignty, and the right of states to find ‘African solutions to African problems.’ The Zimbabwean situation has also showed the limits of regional pressure in attempting to deal with states that openly flout the democratic pretensions of the regional body SADC, and the constraints of Western pressure in the face of its duplicity around democratic questions. A brief survey of the South Africa led, SADC mediation in the Zimbabwe crisis will expose some of these broad issues.

On becoming President of South Africa in 1999 President Mbeki, faced with the politics of solidarity in SADC and the AU, was determined to avoid the pitfalls of unilateralism that the South African state encountered in its dealings with Nigeria, Lesotho and the DRC. The post 9/11 world order and the ‘regime change’ strategy that became a hallmark of US foreign policy under George Bush Jnr, also heightened sensitivities of many African states to opposition movements viewed as agents of such a strategy. The Mbeki government was further concerned about being viewed as a regional bully, pushing its own agenda in conflict situations, and continuing the hegemonic ambitions of the Apartheid state.

Thus on the Zimbabwe question, facing a highly respected liberation leader with substantial support in the region and on the continent, the South African government, even if it had an inclination to, could not afford to get isolated in a political position that was seen to push the agenda of Western states. South Africa’s broader ambition of leading the African continent and becoming a global player, has meant that it has had to “walk the tightrope of keeping South Africa’s continental ambitions alive (by not coming out in opposition to Mugabe’s regime) without totally sacrificing Western support.”²⁹ Thus it has combined a desire to stabilise the continent economically and politically, with the struggle to reform the global order while maintaining the ideals of anti-imperialism and Pan Africanism.³⁰ In specific terms this policy orientation translated into Mbeki’s “quiet diplomacy” on Zimbabwe, which betrayed its limits in applying its once idealistic ambitions in applying its foreign policy objectives in support of human rights. Instead it sought more multilateralist approaches and consensual positions in dealing with conflict situations like Zimbabwe.³¹

The 2007 SADC mandate to South Africa to broker an agreement between Zanu PF and the two MDC formations must thus be seen as an extension of Mbeki’s emphasis on multilateralism and the broader policy objectives described above. This intervention took on an added urgency after the public beating, arrest and torture of opposition and civic leaders on the 11th March 2007 and the brutal attacks on the MDC structures that followed thereafter. A combination of international pressure and

²⁸ M.Neocosmos, “Thinking the Impossible? Elements of a Critique of Political Liberalism in Southern Africa.” *Identity, Culture and Politics*, Vol 5, Nos 1&2, 2004, pp.207-234.

²⁹ L.Freeman, “South Africa’s Zimbabwe policy: Unravelling the Contradictions.” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 23/2, May 2005, p 156.

³⁰ A.Habib, “South Africa’s Foreign Policy: Hegemonic Aspirations, Neoliberal Orientations, and Global Transformation.” *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 16/2, August 2009, pp.143-59.

³¹ P.Kagwanja, “Power and Peace: South Africa and the Refurbishment of Africa’s Multilateral Capacity for Peacemaking.” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 24/2, May 2006.

concerned voices in SADC led to an Extra-Ordinary SADC Heads of State summit in Tanzania at the end of March 2007, at which South African was given the mandate to mediate between the contending political parties in Zimbabwe. From the onset of the mediation process it was clear that Mbeki's efforts were concentrated on reaching an agreement that would result in a generally acceptable election process in 2008, as a means of settling the issue of international legitimacy, and

...begin the process leading to the normalisation of the situation in Zimbabwe and the resumption of its development and reconstruction process intended to achieve a better life for all Zimbabweans on a sustained and sustainable basis.³²

From the inception of this mediation it was clear that civil society as a whole would be excluded from the negotiations. Despite the fact that the civic groups presented their views to the SA facilitators, and the MDC (Tsvangirai), the largest part of the MDC which had split in 2006, had carried out some consultations on the mediation with the leadership of the civics, the latter increasingly felt isolated from the process, and protested that they were being used to 'popularise' the process without being substantially involved. However there was general agreement between both the SA facilitators and the two MDCs, that the involvement of civil society groups would cause enormous delays in the negotiations, and none of the players in the negotiations wished to entertain such delays.³³

An even greater issue for the SA facilitators to deal with was managing relations with the international community over the mediation. In 2001 and 2002 the US and the EU respectively had imposed "targeted measures" against key individuals in Zanu PF accused of human rights abuses. These measures, combined with the cessation of Zimbabwe's relations with the International Financial Institutions since the late 1990's, effectively cut the Zimbabwe government off from any development assistance, though humanitarian aid continued to flow into the country.³⁴ This overall position led to a good deal of scepticism from the West on the capacity of the SADC mediation to produce satisfactory results, and this position caused growing tension with the SA facilitator. In December 2007 during the dispute over whether Mugabe should attend the EU-AU Summit in Portugal in that month, the ANC Secretary General Kgalema Montlante attacked the role of the British government in particular in delaying a settlement to the Zimbabwe crisis. In a statement Montlante observed:

The simple truth, therefore, is that SADC, with full support of the AU, is not only concerned about the situation in Zimbabwe. It is acting on this concern, with the full support and cooperation of the government, the ruling party and the opposition political formations in Zimbabwe. Clearly the British Government believes all this means nothing. It is suggesting that it is morally

³² Letter from President Mbeki to Morgan Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara, copied to Robert Mugabe, 4th April 2007.

³³ The politics of this issue is more fully discussed in Raftopoulos (forthcoming) op cite.

³⁴ For a useful discussion of the sanctions issue see B.Kagoro, "Sanctions and the Global Political Agreement in Zimbabwe: A Case of Grown-ups playing hide and seek?" Unpublished paper 2009.

superior to everybody else in the EU and the AU. The question to ask is whence this extraordinary sense of superiority?³⁵

Montlante proceeded to answer the question by referring to Senior British diplomat and Blair advisor, Robert Cooper's call for a "new kind of imperialism" which "aims to bring order and organisation but which rests on the voluntary principle". Motalante then denounced this position as "unapologetically backward and reactionary."³⁶ In the end Mugabe attended the summit, with full support from the AU and the British stayed away.

By the end of 2007 the SA mediation had resulted in some minimum agreement on creating conditions for a free and fair election, and despite the concerns of the MDCs that more reforms were required before an election could take place, Mugabe unilaterally announced an election date for the 29th March 2008. The election took place in relatively peaceful conditions, and to the surprise of many, in particular Zanu PF itself, the two MDC formations won most of the parliamentary seats with the MDC (T) winning the most seats. Moreover Morgan Tsvangirai won the first round of the presidential vote but without the 51% majority needed for an outright victory. There was much contestation over the results, particularly since Zanu PF took nearly a month to announce them. However it was clear that Zanu PF was on the ropes and a rerun of the presidential election under free and fair conditions would most likely see the demise of Mugabe. In the event the Mugabe regime inflicted the worst electoral violence on the population since the Matabeleland massacres of the mid 1980's resulting in Tsvangirai pulling out of the presidential rerun, and the outcome not being accepted by any major bodies, including the usually compliant SADC and AU.

In the aftermath of this election debacle and the continued lack of a legitimate government in Zimbabwe, Mbeki's mediation came under increasing criticism from a several quarters including the MDC (T) which expressed its doubts about Mbeki's neutrality, the civics, sections of the Alliance in South Africa, certain countries like Tanzania and Botswana in SADC, and the West. Mbeki responded in particular against the attacks by the West:

There are some further afield from us who choose to describe us as a so-called Rogue Democracy....because we refuse to serve as their *klipgooiers* against especially President Mugabe.³⁷

After several months of further negotiations between the Zimbabwean parties, Mbeki managed to secure a Global Political Agreement in September 2008 that committed the parties to the following:

The parties hereby declare and agree to work together to create a genuine, viable, permanent, sustainable and nationally acceptable solution to the Zimbabwe situation, and in particular to implement the...agreement with the

³⁵ K.Montalante, "The EU-Africa Summit must go ahead, with Mugabe". www.newzimbabwe.com Accessed on 18/12/07

³⁶ Ibid. See also I.Phimister and B.Raftopoulos, "Mugabe, Mbeki and the Politics of Anti-Imperialism", *Review of African Political Economy*, 101, 2004, pp.385-400.

³⁷ Chara Carter, "Mbeki stands his ground on Zimbabwe". *Cape Times*, 13/06/08. "Klipgooiers" is the Afrikaans word for stonethrowers.

aims of resolving once and for all the current political and economic situations and charting a new political direction for the country.³⁸

The agreement, an unhappy compromise between the major political parties, came about as a result of a combination of the weakening of both Zanu PF and the opposition, together with the social forces and civic groups that supported the MDC, the disastrous economic and humanitarian conditions in the country, and pressure from both SADC and the rest of the international community.³⁹ The major parts of the agreement included, a commitment to economic stabilisation and growth, a call for the removal of sanctions, constitutional reform, a land audit, the promotion of national healing and the introduction of various commissions on elections, media and human rights that would work to open up democratic spaces in the country. The GPA was also the result of a ruling party that refused to give up state power after an electoral loss, and it therefore became a central site of struggle for positioning in the state, as all parties kept their focus on the next election. However it also needs to be said that it has been a very uneven agreement as Zanu PF has kept control of the central levers of the military and security sectors.

Since the inception of the GPA it has been bogged down with disagreements over implementation around the assignment of particular posts, and Zanu PF's consistent reminders that they still have control of the central coercive powers of the state, over which they have thus far declared an unwillingness to consider any reform. As Mugabe stated at the December congress of Zanu PF:

Zanu PF as a party of the revolution and the people's vanguard shall not allow the security forces of Zimbabwe to be the subject of any negotiations for the so-called security-sector reforms....That is the most dependable force we could ever have, it shall not be tampered with.⁴⁰

Because of the difficulties that have hitherto hindered the full implementation of the GPA, both the EU and the West have thus far refused to lift the targeted sanctions, apart from some minor concessions that were made in 2009. This development has since become the central focus of debate around the many outstanding issues in the GPA, as a result of a combination of Zanu PF's fear of state reform, Mugabe's continued use of the discourse of anti-colonialism and SADC solidarity around this trope, the ambiguous positions of the MDC and the lack of agreement between the two MDCs on this question, and the 'clumsy positioning of the West'.⁴¹ Mugabe has succeeded in moving the centre of the debate to the West's unwillingness to accept an African agreement, and additionally, with the help of some inept British diplomacy has linked the continuation of the sanctions to collusion between the MDC (T) and the British government. In January 2010, the British Foreign Secretary was reported to have made the following statement in the House of Commons:

³⁸ Global Political Agreement, 15th September, 2008, Harare, p1.

³⁹ Solidarity Peace Trust, *Walking a thin line: The Political and humanitarian challenges facing Zimbabwe's GPA leadership-and its ordinary citizens*, Johannesburg, 30th June 2009.

⁴⁰ Quoted in International Crisis Group, *Zimbabwe: Political and Security Challenges to the Transition*, Africa Briefing No 70, Harare/Pretoria/Brussels, 3rd March 2010, p.9.

⁴¹ Solidarity Peace Trust, **Whither Zimbabwe?** Johannesburg, 31st March 2010, p.5

In respect of sanctions, we have made it clear that they can be lifted only in a calibrated way, as progress is made. I do not think it is right to say it is a choice between lifting all sanctions and lifting none at all. We have to calibrate our response to progress on the ground, and, above all, to be guided by what the MDC says to us about the conditions under which it is working and leading the country.⁴²

Zanu PF predictably latched on to this link and used it as a further excuse to ‘desist from making concessions in the negotiations until the sanctions are removed and pirate stations cease to pollute the airways.’⁴³ Moreover the call for the removal of sanctions has been backed by the guarantors of the GPA, SADC and the AU, with President Zuma making this the primary message during his state visit to the UK in March 2010. The Zimbabwe question has once again been cast as a battle between the West and Zanu PF, the terrain that Mugabe has occupied so successfully over the last decade. The lack of any substantive budgetary support to the Inclusive Government, with assistance being largely directed to the humanitarian sphere, and to those delivery ministries occupied by the MDC, further divided the transitional government with Zanu PF claiming that the MDC was receiving favourable treatment from the donors. This situation has thus left the future of the GPA largely hanging on the decision over targeted sanctions. Mugabe’s position has been bolstered by his knowledge that the Zimbabwe problem is likely to remain in the hands of SADC and the AU, because the support of the Chinese government in the United Nations Security Council is unlikely to bring the matter under the latter body in the near future.

Notwithstanding these problems, the GPA has also seen some progress in the politics of the country, characterised by: a certain stabilisation in the economy and drastic disappearance of hyper-inflation; the appointment of the Electoral, Human Rights and Media Commissions; and the introduction of a Reserve Bank reform Bill that will effectively remove the capacity of the Reserve Bank Governor to carry out the kind of quasi fiscal activities that helped to sustain Zanu PF. Moreover the Mugabe regime has been forced to become more accountable in parliament and in cabinet decision-making, while the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC), set up to monitor the implementation of the GPA, has provided an important forum for continued negotiations between the parties. The overall effects of these efforts has been a reduction, though not complete removal, of political violence in the country. These small steps of progress could, however, very quickly evaporate if there is a hasty move towards new elections before a fuller implementation of the GPA. For it is the assumption that a quick election will resolve the Zimbabwe crisis that is one of the most dangerous propositions currently informing some of the players in the Zimbabwe debate. This is the case because the problem in the country has not been the capacity of the opposition to win elections; the MDC showed in 2008 and in previous elections that is capable of doing this under very difficult conditions. The central problem has been to translate electoral victory into state power, and this remains the major obstacle in any strategy for transition that has its sole focus on elections. Zanu PF remains unwilling to release the levers of state power, and at this

⁴² Reason Wafawavora, “Sanctions: MTC-T: Aristocracy or democracy? The Herald, 28/01/10.

⁴³ Sydney Kawadza, “No more GPA concessions, says Zanu PF”, The Herald 28/01/10.

stage in Zimbabwe's history, it may be more advisable to extend the period of power sharing in order to prevent a disastrous return to the situation in 2008.

As the situation in Kenya has shown there are certainly risks to an extended period of power sharing which include:

- The entrenchment of the more repressive forces in the state.
- Conflicts between the partners in government as a result of dual structures in the state.
- The loss of confidence in state institutions and a growing cynicism over the experience of an inclusive government.
- The convergence of interests between parties over the accumulation of resources.
- Long delays in the implementation of a constitutional review process.
- Divisions in civil society over the GPA.
- The opposition's inability to provide an alternative political strategy for state power.⁴⁴

Additionally Lionel Cliffe has pointed out a central characteristic of such arrangements, namely that they are arenas of continued political competition between parties. Moreover because of the reduction in the availability of state assets after two decades of neo-liberalism on the continent, this intra and inter-elite competition is likely to witness more exclusions.⁴⁵ In the Zimbabwe context we are witnessing an intense struggle between an authoritarian nationalist party attempting to extend its class-economic agenda and patronage network through a renewed 'indigenisation' programme. This has been cast in the form of new ownership regulations introduced in 2010, that is an extension of the land occupations that characterised the last decade. Against this the two MDC's have pushed for a renewed international re-engagement and broader accountability in the form of a call for Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) status. These are the unenviable choices now confronting Zimbabweans, as the struggle continues for a democratic future.

Conclusion.

The Zimbabwean crisis has shown the complexity of attempting to defeat a party of liberation through elections, in a region in which the legacies of anti-colonial struggle still have a great deal of resonance, and in a global political framework where the struggle for human rights and political democratisations can be constructed, within a liberation discourse, as an extension of a Western regime change agenda. The crisis has also revealed the limitations of the regional body, SADC, to deal with ruling parties that refuse to adhere to its formal democratic principles, and draw their legitimacy instead from the liberation struggle and the modality of coercive power. The limitations of this power were aptly expressed in 2009 by one of the SA mediators in Zimbabwe negotiations:

⁴⁴ For a comparative discussion of the Kenya context see: Kwamchetsi Makokha, "Riven with divisions: Kenya's singular tragedy", *Pambazuka*, Issue 431, 07/05/09; N.Cheeseman and M-B Tendi, "Power-sharing in Comparative perspective: The dynamics of 'Unity Government' in Kenya and Zimbabwe", *Journal of Comparative African Studies*, forthcoming 2010;

⁴⁵ L.Cliffe, "Power-Sharing: A Comparison of Kenya and Zimbabwe". Paper for the LUCAS Conference, 'Africa and Democratisation', Leeds, 4-5th December 2009.

It is very important that we have an appropriate understanding of the continent and the region we are situated in, so that our expectations of what SADC can do, and even the AU, should be properly tempered.....although SADC has got 14 member countries.....the contribution of these different member countries of SADC was differential in the search for a solution to the problem of Zimbabwe-not because they have different levels of commitment but because not all of them could contribute to the same extent.

We have to position ourselves in such a that we can have the possibility to persuade all parties to the conflict. And if one party decides to place itself beyond persuasion there is very little you can do. I do think that working within this reality there is some progress that we can show for the SADC mediation effort. It is not exactly what we wanted, but it is more than we could have achieved if we went the route of megaphone diplomacy or coercive diplomacy.⁴⁶

Caught between a limited regional intervention and a Western position on sanctions that plays into the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the Mugabe regime, the Zimbabwean opposition is forced to fight for space within the GPA, in the hope of creating the conditions for an election that would allow for the possibility for the transfer of power.

⁴⁶ Transcript of Sydney Mafumadi's input at the "Zimbabwe Consultative Conference on Regional Solidarity", organised by the Zimbabwe Institute, FiPep, Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, and the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum, Harare, 21st July 2009.