

Exploring the Nexus between Geopolitics and Intervention for Human Protection Purposes: Lessons from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Responses to the Humanitarian Crisis in Zimbabwe

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KEYWORDS Geopolitics. Responsibility to Protect Zimbabwe. Southern African Development Community. Intervention. Humanitarian Crisis

ABSTRACT This article seeks to discuss the connection between geopolitics and the new United Nations (UN) norm for intervention for human protection purposes, known as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), by examining the Southern African Development Community's (SADC's) responses to the humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe. Factoring a geopolitical dimension to the Zimbabwe crisis is necessary to understand why the country's economic and political turmoil became internationalised and, by implication, a policy responsibility for SADC. Zimbabwe represents a case where the SADC was/is still reluctant and hesitant to lead the international community into fully operationalising the R2P. It is argued that the lack of implementation (or only partial implementation) of R2P by the SADC bloc is a result of geopolitical imperatives such as economic interests, shared liberation war experiences, unresolved colonial inequalities and the fact that the region's governments venerate the principles of state sovereignty and non-interference to the detriment of good governance and human rights observation. It is further argued that SADC's blind solidarity with the government of Zimbabwe has misled the international community into believing that the crisis is a geopolitical matter that can be contained and resolved by regional solutions.

INTRODUCTION

A remarkable contribution to the discourse and praxis of humanitarian intervention in the 21st Century is the promulgation of the R2P norm by the Canadian Sponsored International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in 2001. Learning from the sad experiences of intervention apathy and controversy in Rwanda and Kosovo, the ICISS came up with a more nuanced approach to humanitarian intervention by stipulating the duties and functions of both the state and the international community in respect of human rights violations and any crisis of humanitarian nature (ICISS 2001). The Commission, in its 2001 report, *Responsibility to Protect*, addresses the contestation between matters of state sovereignty and the quest for intervention to protect humanity at risk, especially from crisis of political making. The report explicitly states that claims to state sovereignty entail responsibility, hence the conception of "sovereignty as responsibility" (ICISS 2001).

What started as a mere norm by the ICISS 2001 report attracted global attention, leading to the official adoption at international level by the 2005 World Summit in its Outcome Document

(paragraph 138, 139) and further endorsement by the United Nations-General Assembly in 2009. In Africa, the African Union in its Constitutive Act, article 4(h), resolved to depart from the traditional notions of "non-interference" to "non-indifference" (Mwanasali 2008: 9). This communicated the continent's commitment to R2P. Central to the R2P philosophy is the relationship between the state and its citizens in which the state is charged with the obligation to protect its people from all avoidable humanitarian catastrophes. The R2P commits the international community to deliver on the protection of the people in the event that the concerned state is incapacitated or unwilling to address any humanitarian catastrophe faced by its people (ICISS 2001; Evans 2008; Thakur 2007). The 2001 ICISS report and the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document concur on the wider notions of humanitarian intervention, that is, the responsibility to prevent, react and rebuild. In essence, the R2P contention is that when efforts to prevent a conflict fail, more coercive means should be invoked. This envisages the element of the responsibility to react. These should be followed by rebuilding in order to close the chapter on intervention for human protection. As noted by

Evans (2008: 148), failure to rebuild would be tantamount to preparing for another “violent explosion.” Since 2001, the modern day conception of intervention for human protection purposes thus finds deeper meaning and expression in the new humanitarian intervention norm called the R2P. More importantly, the R2P defines the contours of leadership power by communicating the message that power comes with responsibility, hence, the notion of responsible leadership.

The perplexing case of the social, economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe provides a scenario where the global community anticipated support from the SADC region and the rest of Africa in terms of implementation and operationalisation of the R2P. The mandate to address the dire human security situation in Zimbabwe was assumed by the SADC bloc, which was then guided by the dictates of geopolitics in its handling of the crisis. Zimbabwe’s geopolitical connections with the SADC region thus obstructed implementation of the R2P norm. Moreover, SADC’s most powerful economy and a contiguous neighbour to Zimbabwe, South Africa, seemed to have been influenced by the fact that it witnessed the last liberation-struggle in the SADC region, meaning that it was confronted by challenges similar to those experienced by post-colonial governments.

Focus and Objectives of the Paper

This paper, which is a result of analysis of available written records and literature search aims to illustrate how geographical neighbourhood, common colonial experiences and struggle for independence of the SADC postcolonial states have incapacitated the regional block in resolving the Zimbabwean humanitarian crisis. Through an examination of factors that moulded SADC countries into regional solidarity during their struggle against colonialism, the paper seeks to illustrate that Zimbabwe’s neighbouring states would not apply the relevant international and continental protocols in an attempt to resolve Zimbabwean’s political and humanitarian crises. In particular, the paper demonstrates how factors such as the land contestation, liberation war experiences and neo-colonial rhetoric have been used by ZANU PF to gain sympathy from SADC member states so as to shield their egregious leadership in Zimbabwe.

Conceptualisation of Geopolitics

Fundamental to this paper is the need to discuss the geopolitics of the Zimbabwe crisis, and the entrenchment thereof. Before explaining Zimbabwe’s geopolitical ties with SADC, it is equally important to explain the conceptual dimensions of the subject of geopolitics. The intellectual development of the subject of geopolitics in the academic discourse is linked to the works of the Swedish political philosopher, Rudolf Kjellen (1889-1920), who is revered as the first scholar to seriously come up with theories on how geographical factors affect both national and foreign policy choices by different states. As noted by O’Tuathail et al. (1998) and Kjellen (1889-1922), there is a tight relationship between politics and the physical earth. There is a conviction that medieval practices like mercantile capitalism and imperialism were heavily influenced by the connection between politics and geography. It is then that the subject of human geography expressly focused on the relationship between man and environment. Chapman (2011: 7) therefore defines geopolitics as encompassing “international economic, environment, diplomatic and security relationships” between nation-states, Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). It is further argued that “beliefs that states have boundaries, capitals, communication lines, consciousness and culture” constitute the fundamentals of geopolitics (Chapman 2011: 7). In the same vein, one can argue that through geographical understandings of world politics, regions such as the SADC today identify themselves both ideologically and geographically thus, giving them a regional identity. Dadds (2007: 24) adds that what makes geopolitics a special study area is the quest to determine the fundamental “role of territory and resources” in the conduct of international politics.

One critical aspect of geopolitics is that, both in the traditional and contemporary political spheres, geopolitics emerged as a critical instrument for state craft and conduct, as well as for informing policy choices (Chapman 2011; O’Tuathail et al. 1998). Worth noting is the fact that geopolitical imperatives are not fixed since each era may have its own geopolitical considerations. A typical case is the World War II (1939-1945) and the Cold War (1945-1989) eras:

O'Loughlin (1994) argues that in the former, Hitler's geopolitical ambition was to create more living space for the German people. In the latter, geopolitics was defined in terms of competition for global space and ideological dominance between the US and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), now Russia. Relations between the US and Russia soured over control states (spheres of influence) and the world's strategic resources (O'Tuathail et al. 1998; O'Loughlin 1994). Though Germany under Hitler used geopolitics for war purposes, its importance and use has since been broadened to include any real aspect of political pattern and to explain and predict distributions of patterns of political potential in the society of nations. Such uses include assessing opportunities and constraints in the environments in which interacting states or communities operate. It is thus fair to argue that the changing nature of geopolitical forces complicates exactitude when it comes to giving a proper definition of the concept. Scholars like Chapman (2011) and O'Tuathail et al. (1998) lament that selfish geopolitical considerations reflected in the Russian and US cases for example, are bad in the sense that they can subject innocent people to severe suffering especially due to imperialism and unregulated expansionist tendencies.

In the context of humanitarian issues, geopolitical reasoning is crucial in the sense that it helps one understand "how foreign policy decisions-makers make sense of international crises, how they develop strategies for handling these crises as political challenges and how they conceptualise solutions to these crises" (O'Tuathail 2002: 603). In retrospect, geopolitics is about how the local relate with the region, as well as the global. When looking at the Zimbabwe crisis it is therefore pertinent to examine how the Southern African region comprehended the crisis in the light of the fact that Zimbabwe is a SADC member state. It should be acknowledged that social, economic and political relations between interacting states as well as their borders were determined and created by the colonial system. In that respect, before discussing the SADC position on the Zimbabwe crisis, it is fundamental to use the same geopolitical analytical angle to examine Zimbabwe's position within SADC.

The Geopolitical View of the SADC Region

Southern Africa is one of the sub-geographical regions in which the African continent is divided. The geographical context in which African countries are situated is a colonial construct. What is known as SADC today underwent several transformations and morphological processes since the 1970s. SADC started as a conglomeration of the newly independent Southern African states (Botswana, Zambia, Mozambique, Angola and Tanzania) under the rubric of the Front Line States (FLS). These independent states forged diplomatic alliances in support of the liberation of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), South-West Africa (now Namibia) and South Africa (Adolfo 2009; Hull and Derblom 2009). In 1979, the FLS was transformed into the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) and with the attainment of Zimbabwe's Independence in 1980 the movement was bolstered to confront the apartheid regime in South Africa (Evans 1984). SADCC was created to reduce economic dependence of the region on South Africa's apartheid government, to forge links to create conditions for regional integration and coordinate regional economic policies for purposes of economic liberation (Schoeman 2002; Bowen 1990) Zimbabwe, through Robert Mugabe was instrumental in challenging apartheid South Africa's counter-revolutionary campaigns. This resulted in the creation of an Inter-State Defence and Security Council (ISDSC). The ISDSC was primarily meant to address the security needs of the region (Nyang'oro 2006). Between 1980 and 1990, the Zimbabwean government supported Mozambique's FRELIMO in fighting RENAMO, which was supported by apartheid South Africa in order to destabilise Mozambique. What also made Zimbabwe's position in SADC prominent is when Mugabe boldly opposed South Africa's policy of Constellation of Southern African States (CONSAS). In essence, SADC started as FLS mainly for security reasons, then evolved into SADCC for economic cooperation and, lastly, to SADC for a more pronounced economic and security integration.

What can be depicted from the discussion of the SADC bloc is the connection between regions and geography. Bauer and Taylor (2006: 3) argue that "regions are almost always more

than geographical divisions” and that “[they are] social constructions.” Despite the fact that political boundaries can shift any time, regional identity and establishment is premised on shared values and norms (Bauer and Taylor 2006). What is important to note is the commonality or shared values among the SADC member countries, of which Zimbabwe is a member.

A critical study on the foundation of the SADC region shows that the region shares some uniquely common attributes, including both colonial and post-colonial historical experiences. Bauer (2005) posits that SADC countries, Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa, attained their independences after long and protracted wars of liberation. Unlike other countries in Africa which attained independence in the 1960s, colonialism lasted longer than anticipated in the SADC region. White minority-rule was ended in South Africa in 1994, while Namibia became independent in 1990, Zimbabwe in 1980, and Angola and Mozambique in 1975. It is further argued by Bauer (2005: 4), that “the war of liberation had a profound and lasting effect on social, economic and political developments in the region.” These ‘newly’ independent African states share other common attributes, namely social and economic inequalities. There is a popular belief that most of the economic sectors of society are still controlled by the white minority and that this continues to impoverish the black society (Bauer 2005). The large component of white people in these countries has been used to justify aggressive and populist reforms like the land reform programme in Zimbabwe.

Despite talks about global interdependence, countries in the SADC region are intricately linked linguistically. One can find Shona, Ndebele (Nguni) and Shangaan-speaking people in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique. Botswana and South Africa house a large component of Tswana-speaking people. Sotho people are found in both Lesotho and South Africa, Ovambo people are found in both Angola and Namibia, while the Chewa people are found in Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. This has cemented relations from the times of the liberation struggle to date. Regional ties within SADC are also a result of migrant labour activities traced as far back as 1800 (Bauer 2005). Guest workers from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Mozambique and Malawi, to cite a few, interacted in every

sector of human activity in the various countries. These were unified by colonial experiences and due the fusion of different experiences and ideas, the spirit of Pan-Africanism emerged. This explains why liberation cadres could form liberation movements in foreign neighbouring countries (Bauer 2005).

Although the SADC bloc has 15 member countries, the focus of this paper is on the interactions of nine countries sharing borders with and/or which are closely linked to Zimbabwe. These are South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Lesotho, Angola, Namibia, Zambia, Malawi and Swaziland. Of these, six were British colonies and are Anglophone. As earlier discussed, their borders were artificially created to suit British economic and political interests. Mozambique and Angola were Portuguese colonies but they became interconnected to the rest on the basis of their shared colonial experiences and contiguous borders. One of the members, Madagascar, is currently on suspension since March 2009 and this decision was adopted by the SADC bloc when Andry Rajoelina led protests to oust Marc Ravalomanana as president of Madagascar. The act received wide condemnation from the SADC and AU leaders especially, the involvement of the military in the unconstitutional change of government (SADC 2009). It is because of these symbiotic relations that economic and political problems in any one of them became contagious to all. In view of this argument, the Zimbabwe crisis can therefore, be viewed as a SADC problem.

Situating the R2P Argument on the Crisis Situation in Zimbabwe

The most striking feature of the early phase of the post-independence political dispensation in Zimbabwe was its ability to develop a vibrant “forward looking policy” and “peaceful race relations” that enhanced growth and development in sectors such as education, health, the economy, agriculture, social development and other spheres of human activities (Henie 2009:147). The post-independence transition also helped Mugabe to wield more power and influence as an iconic African statesman. Such a focused political and economic policy earned Zimbabwe the title of the “bread basket of Southern Africa” (Sachikonye 2005: 35). Former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere once even hailed

Zimbabwe as the “jewel of Africa” (Heine 2009:147).

It was not until the year 2000 that the political tides changed and the country plunged into serious socio-economic and political crisis when it adopted the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. Worsening standards of living and growing dissatisfaction with the government cemented a civil society coalition to challenge Mugabe’s legitimacy as a leader (Gevisser 2009). This culminated in the creation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the strongest opposition political party in Zimbabwe since independence in 1980. ZANU-PF was left with no option, but to resort to populist policies like nationalization and land redistribution. This explains why there many commentators accuse ZANU-PF and its ruling elite of driving the country into a “basket case” (Chan 2003: 117). Scholars view the crisis as a recent, man-made problem by attributing it to the ZANU-PF led Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP) (Bratton and Masunungure 2011; Reeler 2009). Having embarked on violent land invasions, the Mugabe regime had to face the reality of a strong opposition political party which nearly wiped out ZANU-PF’s political dominance. In response, the regime resorted to draconian policies and started promulgating repressive legislation, notably the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Privacy Act (AIPA) (Brett 2010). Through AIPA, the regime silenced all critical media voices, causing serious media blackout. The idea was to suppress the national story from being publicised to the whole world. POSA was a mirror image of the Law and Order Maintenance Act (LOMA) used by the colonial government to give the police and other security agents the right to use all necessary force to suppress the opposition (Coltart 2007). Human rights violations and other electoral related abuses were licensed by POSA. This explains why ZANU-PF supporters could commit crimes against humanity with impunity.

The militarisation of governance structures in Zimbabwe resulted in electoral related human rights violations where MDC party supporters and civil society organizations were the prime targets. Elections in 2000, 2002, 2005 and the notorious 2008 “harmonized” elections were heavily militarised and Masunungure (2009:79) describes the systematic nature of the violence

as “militarised elections.” The strategies that were devised by the military made the whole exercise appear like a military campaign. Bretton and Masunungure (2008: 44) note that the securitization of the state “resembles a party state duality in which the security and military servicemen serve the party and not the state.” This is summed up by Rupiya (2005:117-118) who labels this practice as “governance through military style.”

The army and other state security apparatus took the “command responsibility,” in the form of verbal instruction to torture and beat opposition party supporters and their leadership (Reeler 2009: 24). The 2008 Human Rights Watch report points to serious crimes against humanity in the June 2008 pre-and post-run-off period alone when more than 5000 people were subjected to torture and at least 163 people were killed. This recalls the 1984 UN Convention against torture, which singles out “infliction of pain, whether physical or mental, done with intentionally, done with purpose in mind, to intimidate” (Reeler 2009: 1). From an R2P perspective, following the collapse of the public health care system asked;

What happens when a government presides over the dramatic reversal of its population’s access to food, clean water, basic sanitation and health care? When government policies lead directly to the shutting of hospitals and clinics, the closing of medical schools, and the beating of health workers....” (Physicians for Human Rights 2009: iii).

Heine (2009) also raised questions about R2P in the context of continued human rights violation by state security agents and other ruling party supporters. In the light of the human rights violations in 2008 alone, it could thus be argued that a threshold had been crossed and that the crisis is of political making, justified invoking the R2P.

Despite politically related human rights violence, the government of Zimbabwe engaged other ill-fated policies like operation *Murambatsvina* (translated as ‘restore order’) which led to the destruction of what it deemed illegal urban structures, allegedly housing criminals (Dzimiri and Runhare 2012). The July 2005 report produced by Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe, and other related impact assessments reveal that over 700 000 people were made homeless by the ‘Clean Up’ operation. The December

2005, Human Rights Watch (HRW) report reinforces that *Murambatsvina* is a man-made humanitarian catastrophe equivalent to a 'peace-time' brutal attack on the people by the government (Human Rights Watch 2005). A sense of collectivity among civic groups like the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), Student Union groups, and the business community culminated in the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in September 1999 (Reeler 2009; Bratton and Masunungure 2011). Official 2005 UN estimates show that nearly 6 per cent of the total population lost their homes, livelihood or both as a result of the evictions, while 2.4 million people were either directly or indirectly affected by Operation *Murambatsvina*. From a humanitarian point of view, indiscriminate destruction of houses had a catastrophic impact, especially on Zimbabwe's poorest people. Most of the victims were taken against their will to 'police-run camps' in Caledonia, and Hopley Farms in the case of Harare victims. Conditions in these camps were dire. There was a lack of water, shelter and basic sanitation (Dzimiri and Runhare 2012; Amnesty International 2007). This resulted in internal displacement of people since many lost their decent shelter and home industries which were means of survival (Dzimiri and Runhare 2012).

An examination of the humanitarian ramifications of Operation *Murambatsvina* reveals that the government of Zimbabwe violated both domestic and international law, especially the prohibition of forced evictions, which amounted to arbitrary displacement (Human Rights Watch 2005). Westgate (2007) argues that *Murambatsvina* constitutes a 'crime against humanity' in the light of the fact that it had no legal backing and that people were forcibly displaced. The Tibaijuka (2005) report - despite not attaching a 'crime against humanity' label - incriminates the ZANU-PF for acting on the basis of improper advice. Some analysts have recently broadened their interpretation of the definition of R2P to include such human security threats like famine, disease, ignorance, deprivation of basic necessities of life, discrimination and lack of freedom (Louis 2008). This strengthens the human security perspective as concerns the spill-over impact of the crisis to the entire "spectrum of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights" (Hammer et al. 2008:2). This extended version of the

R2P definition also implies that if the state default on its R2P mandate and fails to satisfy the human security needs of its people, the definition allows such to be framed in the broader context of crimes against humanity. This also implies that the act of using scorched-earth policies like denying opposition strongholds access to services and amenities, starvation, deliberate breakdown of public health care system and ignoring the scourge of HIV/AIDS, with resultant HIV/AIDS related deaths puts the ruling party at loggerheads with international law. Subjecting millions of people to health related risks as a result of the decline of the health care system, reveals the government's failure to deliver on its R2P obligations.

The 2009 Physicians for Human Rights blamed ZANU-PF for the decline of Zimbabwe's health sector and that this should compel the international community to act (Physicians for Human Rights 2009). Studies and available evidence show that the escalation and deepening of the crisis in Zimbabwe is largely due to the government's failure to deliver on its state duties and obligations with regards to protecting its people from all avoidable humanitarian catastrophes. This is a total departure from the international norm that identifies the protection of people as a defining attribute of sovereignty. The implosion and catastrophic nature of the crisis situation which resulted in collapse of the human security of ordinary Zimbabweans is directly linked to the predatory nature of the Mugabe regime through its systematic use of violence and populist policies (Brett 2010).

The ill-timed FTLRP also led to the implosion of the agriculturally-based economy. Between 2000 and 2006, agricultural output declined by 33 per cent and as a result, manufacturing output also declined by 41 per cent (Parsons 2007). Furthermore, the FTLRP is said to have grossly affected the commercial industry which constitutes 20 per cent of the country's GDP and 40 per cent of the country's exports earnings (Besada and Moyo 2008; Mlambo and Raftopoulos 2010). Coltart (2007: 6) illustrates the cumulative effects of the crisis and shows that during the year 2007 alone, "over 80 percent of the population was unemployed and living below poverty line." By 2004, the country's inflation was pegged at 622, 8 percent (Mlambo 2006). Richardson (2004) blames the Zimbabwean government for entrusting inexperienced and militant

farmers who had little knowledge of modern farming techniques with the responsibility to provide for the country. From an R2P point of view, this would be considered an act of egregious irresponsibility conducted by the government. Heightened political violence prior to and after the 2008 run-off period is said to have disrupted farming activities both in rural areas and the new resettlement areas throughout the country (Ploch 2010). There are also reports that ZANU-PF youth militias, the Grain Marketing Board and war veterans have been implicated in numerous acts of scorched earth tactics of denying food aid, maize seed, fertilizer and farming implements to suspected MDC supports (Human Rights Watch 2009). It is estimated that by 2009, over 7 million Zimbabweans, almost a quarter of the country's population, were in dire need of food aid (Ploch 2010).

The Zimbabwean government is a signatory to several international and regional human rights conventions such as the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and also the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) (Human Rights Watch 2009). In retrospect, the government of Zimbabwe trampled on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which clearly states that every person has a right to food, health, life and freedom of speech, among other facets of both first and second generation rights (UN 1948).

The Mugabe regime was also found at fault when it neglected the economic situation and the health sector of the country in favour of military spending. By allowing the health sector to decline, the government of Zimbabwe violated the convention on the right to health which obligates states to treat and control epidemics and other diseases. The ICESCR requires states parties to take steps individually and through cooperation to progressively realise this right via the prevention, treatment and control of epidemic diseases (UN-GA 1966). The 2001 UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS is no exception in this regard. The declaration commits UN member states to "the highest attainable standards of treatment of HIV/AIDS, including the prevention and treatment of opportunistic infections and effective use of quality

controlled antiretroviral therapy" (UN-GA 2001). With regards to food shortage, there is evidence that Article (11) of CESCR has been violated by the Zimbabwe government. The convention obligates the nation state to provide for its people and make sure that it seeks international support in the event of failure to do so (Human Rights Watch 2008). Further to that, the state is obliged to ensure that the right to adequate food is met for vulnerable population groups and individuals even when experiencing resource constraints (UN-ESC 1999). Considering that the cholera outbreak in 2008 affected children most seriously, it could be argued that the Zimbabwe government violated the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 14 of the ACRWC spells that "every child shall have the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical, mental and spiritual health" (ACRWC 1999). The same is echoed by the UNCRC, which states that;

State Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. State Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services... (UNCRC 1989).

Such acts rhymes well with the Rome Statute of the ICC's description of crimes against humanity 'with criminal intent' and 'other inhumane acts with similar character' (to murder, torture and rape among others) as including "reckless indifference to the consequence of one's actions, as well as the deliberate infliction of injury..." (Amnesty International 2008:9).

By way of reasoning within the R2P mindset, it is fair to argue that several human rights violations by the Zimbabwean government are evidence enough that the Zimbabwe crisis deserved some form of R2P-guided response by the international community. Initially, the West took the lead by adopting a tough stance against the Mugabe regime with the hope that the SADC regional members would support those initiatives. Human rights violations since the 2000 farm invasions such as attacks on media freedom, flawed judiciary processes and political violence, allegedly contributed to drastic measures by the Western countries against President Robert Mugabe and members of his inner

circle (Jacobs and Stultz 2009). The US and the UK imposed targeted “smart” sanctions, including trade and travelling bans against selected members of the Mugabe regime. In 2001, the US government imposed the Zimbabwe Economic Recovery Bill which became “the cornerstone of the US policy towards Zimbabwe” (NewAfrica 2007: 101). The stringent measures imposed by the US government included stopping any business undertakings between US citizens and the government of Zimbabwe, as well as lobbying international financial institutions to stop any credit or loan facility to the government of Zimbabwe (NewAfrica 2007). This compelled the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) to deny Zimbabwe voting rights and access to credit facilities (Taylor and Williams 2002). Britain responded by imposing an arms embargo against Zimbabwe on 3 May 2003. Successive governments in Britain imposed sanctions against the Mugabe regime (Jacobs and Stultz 2009). Other western countries like Australia and New Zealand supported the British initiatives to resolve the crisis through public diplomacy, which included blaming and shaming the Mugabe regime over the alleged human rights violations. The US and UK on several occasions attempted to bring the Zimbabwe question before the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), but this was greeted with contempt and rejection by most of the African member states and the SADC bloc in particular.

In the light of the above discussion, the SADC region’s handling and understanding of the Zimbabwe crisis deserves special attention.

SADC’s R2P Mandate in the Zimbabwe Crisis

Since 2000, political developments in Zimbabwe have been a fixture on the SADC agenda. However, there has been no coherence in the manner in which member states responded to the crisis. As noted by Carver (2008), since 2000, regional responses to the humanitarian tragedy in Zimbabwe have been characterized by an admixture of material self interests, ideology and personality challenges. In the light of the spill over implications of the crisis throughout the region, there was an expectation from the world community that the impact of the crisis would give impetus to tough regional solutions. Botswana and South Africa, due to their strong

economic status in the region were on the receiving end of an influx of economic refugees. During 2006, an estimated 3.5 million Zimbabweans were believed to be living in South Africa, either legally or illegally. This was followed by Botswana, which was estimated to be harbouring about 250 000 Zimbabweans, while other Zimbabwean refugees were believed to be scattered throughout the rest of the SADC region (Pendleton 2006). The influx of Zimbabweans into various SADC states has had serious socio-economic implications on the receiving countries. Raftopoulos and Mlambo (2010) argue that the economic and political implosion in Zimbabwe caused a massive exodus of both qualified and unqualified labour force throughout the region. In the case of South Africa, sporadic incidents of xenophobia witnessed professionals from Zimbabwe being accused of flooding the job market, thus seizing already scarce job opportunities available for South Africans (Sibanda 2008).

The region has been divided on the Zimbabwe question with Botswana and Zambia being lone voices calling for the isolation of Mugabe, while the rest opted to engage Mugabe ‘constructively.’ Hawkins (2008: 8) notes that the crisis threatened the very foundations for ensuring security and stability, as well as adhering to “democratic principles and good governance.” Mlambo and Raftopoulos (2010:7) echo the same sentiments arguing that the region is confronted with the “challenge of living up to democratic principles, while at the same time, preserving the values of the liberation struggle.” Hawkins (2003) makes reference to the contagion effects of the economic crisis in Zimbabwe and warns about the serious risk of a lasting damage to the regional economy and its people. The crisis has rendered the SADC region’s mechanisms for ensuring stability and adherence to democratic principles and good governance largely ineffective. The contagion effects of the crisis were also shown by the outbreak of cholera in Zimbabwe between 2008 and 2009, which spilled over into South African towns such as *Msina* and other areas around the Beitbridge Border Post (Physicians for Human Rights 2009).

The SADC mandate stems from Zimbabwe’s geopolitical ties with the rest of the region. Despite the spill-over ramifications of the crisis, the region is believed to be interested in investing in peace and prosperity, by addressing cri-

sis situations. As noted by Louis (2008:454), “geopolitical proximity strengthens the practical pressure to respond” to the crisis. This underlines the previous observation that the crisis in Zimbabwe is a SADC problem.

The police’s brutal attack on, and detention of, the MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai and his party officials in March 2007, attracted wide condemnation of ZANU-PF by the international community (Solidarity Peace Trust 2008). Former Ghanaian President John Kufuor, at that stage the AU Chairman, described the incident as “very embarrassing” while the former UN S-G Kofi Annan lamented that “it is a pernicious self-destruction form of reason to rise up and expel tyrannical leaders who are white, but to excuse leaders who are black” (Solidarity Peace Trust 2008:8). Since then, the AU entrusted the SADC member states with the duty of resolving the crisis in Zimbabwe. This has fallen largely to South Africa as the regional hegemon. The South African-led SADC mediation in the Zimbabwe crisis engaged the Mugabe regime through a non-confrontational strategy popularly known as ‘Quiet Diplomacy’ (QD) (Adolfo 2005; Landsberg 2010). The strategy of QD as explained by Adebajo and Landsberg (2000: 21) is premised on the philosophy of “dialogue and negotiation”. As noted by Solomon and Coady (2009), SA’s resort to QD was informed by the need to depart from the apartheid policy of destructive engagement, which relied on the logic of force instead of the force of logic. Through QD, the hope was that “moral persuasion” and not force would result in negotiated peace settlement (Van Wyk 2002: 22). There is also a view that South African president Thabo Mbeki’s actions were informed by his euphoric vision of African Renaissance where “effective structures for dialogue and cooperation” are believed to be the path to African solutions to African problems (Mills 2005: 2). Critics castigate QD for avoiding the R2P framework in resolving the crisis in Zimbabwe, but Landsberg (2010:444) is of the view that the SADC region followed the R2P norm by adopting a preventive political path and negotiation instead of “bellicose tactics” like sanctions and military intervention as recommended by the western countries. The formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) after the contested 2008 elections in Zimbabwe is believed to have been also informed by the QD approach. Both the 2008 and June 2008 run-

off elections in Zimbabwe were marred with political violence and the level of violence had reached a point where the international community expected some form of intervention. SA acting on behalf the SADC however opted for preventive diplomacy wherein it brought both ZANU-PF and MDC to the negotiation table.

Ian Khama, President of Botswana and the late Zambian president Levy Mwanawasa with their record of democratic and credible elections at one point proposed military intervention to depose Mugabe and save innocent lives in Zimbabwe (Heine 2009). Khama, however, made a sudden about-turn in 2011 and condemned the West for subjecting the government of Zimbabwe to severe economic sanctions (Carver 2008).

There are several indications that SADC’s failure to adopt robust R2P initiatives like military intervention were out of choice. A different scenario presented when, during 1998, Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia intervened to rescue the Kabila government after the invasion of Rwandan and Ugandan backed forces (Caromba 2008). Also in 1998, SA and Botswana intervened in Lesotho when the military revolted against the government. Irrespective of the controversy surrounding these interventions, it is evident that where there is a will, there is a way. The Zimbabwe crisis merits more attention given the fact that the incumbent leader supported by the military, threatened the very fabric of human security by refusing to concede electoral defeat. Mugabe abused his presidential prerogatives and held on to power by delaying the release of the election results for almost a month in 2008. Legally speaking, this was tantamount to a *coup* by ballot. Adequate justification for military intervention may also be derived from the severity of the crisis, wherein most scholars and humanitarianists hold the government of Zimbabwe responsible for not only being unable to protect its people, but also for being the culprit perpetrating several human rights violations.

The ICISS 2001 report recommends exploring prospects for success in the event of military intervention for human protection purposes. If prospects for military intervention for human protection were explored, there would arguably have been reasonable chances for success. Zimbabwe is landlocked and the interna-

tional community could have capitalized on this by ‘suffocating’ the Mugabe regime. It was recorded by various media and in scholarly writings that during 2008, the country faced huge desertion by the army, policy and other security personnel because of poor salaries and working conditions. In addition, many military and security force members were arrested and subjected to court marshals, amidst accusations of trying to topple the government (Caromba 2008). State security forces were and evidently not immune to the economic hardships facing the country. These considerations presented enough opportunity for SADC, should it have chosen to do so, to react to the Zimbabwe crisis using military means.

Since the imposition of smart sanctions by the West, Zimbabwe depends on South Africa for almost everything, from fuel, electricity to food staffs. If South Africa wanted to complement the western efforts to squeeze the Mugabe regime by cutting fuel and electricity supplies, the Mugabe era could possibly have been history. Surprisingly, South Africa and the rest of the SADC bloc had a different interpretation of the crisis situation in Zimbabwe because such measures could have more negative impact on the livelihoods of ordinary people.

Analysis of the SADC Response to the Zimbabwe Crisis

From 2000, the Zimbabwean crisis was compounded by issues involving, the militarisation of the state, farm invasion, *Murambatsvina* demolition of houses, decline in the public health care sector and electoral violence as a result of the militarisation of the state. All these could be defined as human rights violation according to International Law which therefore could have called for invoking R2P norm. The response given by the SADC regional countries are discussed in the next section of this paper watered down opportunities for the UN to invoke the R2P on Zimbabwe.

Considering the level of political violence and the man-made humanitarian catastrophe in Zimbabwe, one would expect the SADC region to refer the matter to the UNSC in order to lead the international community towards proper R2P action such as preventive deployment of peacekeepers. It is worth noting, however, that the SADC handling of the crisis in Zimbabwe has

more to do with geopolitical factors than with the lack of political will or a “state of denial and paralysis” as alluded to by Colter (2007: 6). Firstly, robust R2P operationalisation failed because of the challenge of politics of solidarity (Alden 2010, Mills 2005). Unlike other parts of Africa where independence was achieved in the 1960s, colonialism lasted longer in the SADC bloc. As explained before, SADC members share what Adolf (2005:7) describes as “painful experiences of colonialism” to such an extent that regional solidarity is the defining pillar of their relations. SADC members have always supported each other as brothers in arms during the liberation struggle and the fact that most of these cadres are still alive, means that history for SADC remains a unifying force (Adolfo 2009). The fact that memories of liberation wars are still fresh in the psychic systems of most of the regional leadership implies that regime security will always matter more than human security. This solidarity was revealed during the 2007 Extraordinary SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government, in Dar es Salaam, when Heads of State pledged support for the Zimbabwean government and called for UK to honour its compensation obligations for the land reform as well as lifting what they deemed illegal sanctions that was imposed on Zimbabwe (SADC 2007).

Coupled with the challenge of regional solidarity, is the democratic deficit that plagues liberation regimes in SADC. Despite constitutional democracy in most of the states within SADC, the region is marked by prolonged tenure of dominant political parties (Adolfo 2009). Notable dominant parties are the Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa, Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) and the South West African People’s Organisation (SWAPO) of Namibia. Carver (2008:15) adds that because of the “club of liberations” leadership on the region, Mbeki wanted to avoid what is happening in Zimbabwe from being replicated in SA. The fear was that MDC emerged from being a labour union to a political party, and if supported, this would encourage the South African Congress of Trade Unions (COSATU) to transform into a political party. The MDC on several accounts complained about the partiali-

ty of the Mbeki mediation and Gevisser (2009:299) explains this as being informed by the “anachronistic perception” of the MDC as a colonial outpost. Mugabe violated the SADC principles on governance and the conduct of free and democratic elections when he held on to election results and refused to accept defeat by the MDC. One would have expected the SADC bloc to have suspended Zimbabwe’s membership, but to the contrary, there was regional solidarity with Mugabe. It seems as if Mugabe’s defeat by Tsvangirai was interpreted as a SADC defeat; in line with the motto of ‘an injury to one is an injury to all.’ Such a misguided solidarity has actually worked to strengthen Mugabe’s grip on power, thereby intensifying the suppression and suffering of ordinary people of Zimbabwe.

The issue of resource distribution within the region is also contentious. It is alleged that the large component of white people in most of the SADC countries has complicated addressing inequalities inherited from the colonial era (Adolfo 2009). In the light of the above, most SADC member states are faced with structurally embedded inequalities. The land reform which is core to the Zimbabwe crisis has thus been touted as a redressing of externally-induced economic and political problems. At the time of writing, the African National Congress Youth League in South Africa (ANCYL) is lobbying for emulation of the Zimbabwe land reform policy, and is calling for nationalization of the economy as well as land redistribution. It can thus be argued that Mugabe is celebrated in most of the SADC political circles as a hero championing the ending of white monopoly on the means of production. The revival of Pan-Africanism by Mugabe has also presented him as an astute political strategist who manipulates the race card to his own advantage. As noted by Hammer and Raftopolous (2002), knowing that Namibia and South Africa have just embarked on liberation movement-led government, Mugabe managed to convince the leadership in these countries that the West are attempting to reverse the gains of the liberation struggle. Hammer and Raftopolous (2002:8) further argue that “mobilization of race as a legitimate force has been used to justify the battle against historical inequalities, while trying to conceal such structures that increases such inequalities.”

Reaction to the SADC tribunal’s handling of the land case in Zimbabwe has shown the re-

gion’s leadership’s unwavering support for reclaiming land from White farmers. Mike Campbell Private Limited and other white commercial farmers referred the land grabbing issue to the SADC tribunal, which subsequently ruled that the government of Zimbabwe had acted contrary to the AU Charter on Human and People’s rights. It concluded, notably, that the Fast Track Land Reform Programme was adopted for political ends instead of settling the landless and the poor (SADC Tribunal 2007). In a thinly-masked political move, SADC dissolved the Tribunal during 2011. This prompted Mugabe to denigrate the Tribunal’s ruling as an “exercise in futility” (Nathan 2011:1). It can be argued that the SADC leadership adopted a cautious approach on the land issue fearing that whatever modality was adopted would have set precedence for other members facing similar challenges. The political impetus for resource distribution in the region seems to have overshadowed the course of justice on the matter. The above-mentioned events make it seem as though the SADC region is running a parallel governance structure to that of the AU. In its Constitutive Act, Article 4(h), the AU talks about zero tolerance to human rights violations emphasising the “right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.” The Constitutive Act of the African Union is the Supreme Law of the continent where all rights and obligations of member states are derived. SADC however, still adheres to the spirit of its Protocol on the Organ on Politics, Defense and Security (OPDS) which insists on non-interference in the matters of member states. The OPDS protocol was established by the SADC Ministers of Foreign Affairs Defence and Security on January 18, 1996, for the promotion of peace and security, and defence cooperation through conflict prevention management and resolution, including a mechanism of dispute resolution. Article 11(2) of the protocol restrains the region from adopting any military intervention towards member states. It can thus be argued that for the SADC region the norm of non-interference impeded them from taking a decisive position on the Zimbabwe crisis. There seems to be a general belief that poverty in most of the SADC member countries has been authored by the colonial system. What remains unaccounted for in most of these

SADC member countries is the role of predatory types of regimes which promote a petty bourgeoisie class in the name of Black empowerment. Corruption should be factored among the challenges in African governance systems today.

According to Lipton (2009: 332) Mbeki's insistence on QD was informed by the post-apartheid foreign policy of SA who sought to "distance herself from the western power imperatives" and show solidarity with Africa's post colonial struggles. Another area that needs to be examined is the economic dimension of the region. O'Tuathail (2002:616) argues that nation states, as critical international relations players, when confronted with humanitarian crisis like that of Zimbabwe, first engage on what is called "strategic calculation" where they establish the significance of the affected state. It is further argued that the calculation that comes to the mind of every policy maker is "What is at stake for us?" (O'Tuathail 2002:616).

One could therefore ask whether South Africa's policy on Zimbabwe was informed by the same mindset. Since South Africa is renowned as 'regional hegemony,' one would expect a more tough approach on Zimbabwe. It is true that South Africa was burdened by Zimbabwe's plight, but reality on the ground shows that to some extent, South Africa's benefitted from her neighbour's plight. There is a view that since the crisis started in Zimbabwe South Africa's policy towards her neighbour was informed by economic interests (Jacobs and Stultz 2009). It can be argued that a 'zero-sum' approach was maintained where Zimbabwe's economic woes had to equal South Africa's gains (Turocy and Von Stengel 2001). Some analysts point out that Zimbabwe is South Africa's biggest trading partner and since the crisis took its toll, it became the provider for Zimbabwe (New Africa 2007). As noted by Graham (2006:115), South Africa's insistence on QD was meant to prolong the crisis thereby pursuing some kind of "economic imperialism." McKinley (2004) adds that South Africa's policy on Zimbabwe was informed by the interests of its emergent black elite who operate in both the public and private sector. These had vested business interests in Zimbabwe and this led South Africa to "commodify" the Zimbabwe crisis. It can be argued that the polarisation of the discourse on resource distribution among the newly independent SADC countries eclipsed the economic dimension of South Africa's

non-confrontation position on the Zimbabwe crisis. This is well captured by Buthelezi (2003) who contends that South Africa's 'constructive' approach on Zimbabwe is premised on the need to prevent the Zimbabwean economy from collapsing. It is further argued that Zimbabwe's economy is vital for South Africa's "export-oriented economic drive" throughout the region and the continent at large (McKinley 2004: 87). The Mbeki administration's naivety in handling of the Zimbabwe crisis is also illustrated by its pledge for economic rescue packages to the Zimbabwe government and this contrasted all the western efforts to suffocate the Mugabe regime economically. As noted by McKinley (2004), the economic packages were only meant to protect the South African state owned companies (for example the Industrial Development Corporation and the Development Bank of Southern Africa) from the contagion effects of the economic crisis. This means that the human security conditions of the people of Zimbabwe were not of prime concern to the South African government. In the light of the above, O'Tuathali's (2002) model of geostrategic calculation in humanitarian situations finds contextual relevance. The South African government took advantage of its role in leading the SADC mediation in the Zimbabwe crisis for furthering its economic expedencies.

CONCLUSION

This paper revealed that the early phases of the post-colonial transition in Zimbabwe witnessed economic growth and development. This had been attributed *inter alia* to peaceful race relations between the government of Zimbabwe and the white minority groups, as well good deliverance in governance. Coupled with corruption and populist policies towards the end of the 1990s, the country started experiencing a serious decline in both economic growth and development. High unemployment and high cost of living resulted in the formation of the MDC and this challenged the ruling ZANU-PF's one party dominance culture. It has been argued that the overall crisis situation in Zimbabwe intensified as the government tried to suppress popular support for the MDC and also when it implemented the FTLRP. Since then the country has been subjected to a vicious cycle of political tensions and economic meltdown. The human-

itarian crisis in Zimbabwe has thus attracted different R2P approaches from the western countries and the SADC countries. While the West blame ZANU-PF for Zimbabwe's plunge into crisis, many African countries especially as articulated by SADC, interpreted the crisis as a political ploy by the West to undermine the FTL-RP.

The paper also demonstrated how regional political dynamics or geopolitics played to undermine robust operationalisation of the R2P in the crisis situation in Zimbabwe. The geopolitical dimension of the SADC region shows that regime security, rather than human security, seems to influence the regional grouping to the Zimbabwe crisis. The region's leadership was well aware of the horrific human rights conditions but chose not to act, in the name of solidarity. This study demonstrated blind solidarity for the government of Zimbabwe has not only impeded the international community from invoking the R2P in full, but also led them to believe that the crisis in Zimbabwe was a geopolitical matter requiring a regional solution. It has been demonstrated that the Mbeki administration in South Africa, in its role as chief mediator in the crisis, seized the opportunity to advance her economic ambitions. This had worked negatively against the efforts by some members of the international community to invoke the R2P and hold the Mugabe regime accountable for its actions.

It is the position of this paper that unless there is regime change, from revolutionary to progressive and democratic, operationalisation of the R2P may not be easy to implement in the SADC region. The application of a geopolitical dimension to the humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe helped in understanding how geopolitical imperatives impact foreign policy choices and the praxis of intervention for human protection purposes.

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