

# SADC'S ZIMBABWE MEDIATION IN 2008 AS PRESERVATION OF ZANU PF POWER

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## Abstract

The historic defeat of the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) in the March 2008 harmonised elections was followed by the unleashing of a violent campaign against the opposition in the 27 June 2008 presidential run-off. This triggered the mediation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The negotiated outcome was a Government of National Unity (GNU) comprising ZANU PF and the two Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations between 2009 and 2013. As this paper argues, SADC was thereby largely complicit in the advancement of authoritarian consolidation of ZANU PF. Its deployment of foreign policy within SADC was mainly designed to secure the region's solidarity whilst advancing domestic interests aimed at cementing political survival. The region became a crucial focus of attention by the government, but how this was used to consolidate ZANU PF's hold on power is yet to be unpacked in full.

**Key Words:** SADC mediation; ZANU PF; MDC; authoritarianism; GNU; regime preservation



## 1. Introduction

This article contends that the primary objective of the ruling elite is devoted to the pursuit of political survival, and in doing so, several tools are used both at the domestic and international levels. In Zimbabwe, the ruling elite systematically perceived the SADC as its survival shield of last resort. Therefore, there are two sides to be expanded upon, namely Zimbabwe's attitude towards the regional organisation and the SADC's approach to Zimbabwe.

Between 2000 and 2013, the SADC found itself increasingly tangled in the internal affairs of the Zimbabwean state, with direct involvement manifesting in March 2007 following the brutal police attack on opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai and a state-sanctioned crackdown on opposition leaders and civil society organisations (Tendi 2010). The SADC responded through an Extraordinary Summit in Dar es Salaam upon which South African President Thabo Mbeki was appointed the mediator of the Zimbabwean crisis (Ankomah 2007). Although the mediation was underpinned on several regional dynamics, the SADC became complicit in the preservation of the beleaguered ZANU PF regime that had electorally been defeated by the opposition.

Three aspects advance the argument of SADC complicity in entrenching ZANU PF authoritarianism and consolidation of its power. First, the SADC's attitude to external intervention did not correspond with the regional bloc's conspicuous silence on the state's human rights abuses and economic mismanagement in Zimbabwe. Second, the SADC demonstrated an unwillingness or inability to reprimand ZANU PF throughout the crises period in a genuine manner and several instances of flouting the GPA agreement by the ruling party. Third, the SADC exhibited unconditional support of ZANU PF on every matter, and this partisanship was to a greater extent amplified by the case of the SADC Tribunal.

## 2. SADC Complicity in advancing ZANU PF preservation

Between 2000 when the ruling ZANU PF rolled out the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) and 2008 when the SADC brokered a GNU following the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) on 15 September 2008, the SADC maintained ZANU PF legitimacy by glossing over the flawed electoral process and brokering a power-sharing pact (Aeby 2018). After the military orchestrated a massive campaign of electoral violence in the post-March 2008 elections where Mugabe suffered defeat in the

first round, the SADC offered ZANU PF and Mugabe a lifeline even when the regional bloc could no longer accept the farcical electoral process and its outcome (Tendi 2010). The SADC gave credence to ZANU PF's anti-imperialist narrative, which was simply a cover for authoritarian tendencies.

The SADC chose to remain silent on the abuse of democratic and human rights, corruption, and mismanagement of the Zimbabwean economy and state in the interest of the Zimbabwean government rather than the population (Aeby 2019). The SADC did not try to balance their concerns about Western attempts to orchestrate regime change in African countries and reprimand ZANU PF for violating SADC principles on human rights and freedom. By glossing over the massive abuses by the Zimbabwean government, rather than upholding its founding principles, the SADC was complicit in sustaining and consolidating ZANU PF authoritarianism. The SADC chose to ignore irregularities in elections and then declare them "free and peaceful" but not free and fair (Aeby 2018). In so doing, the SADC subjugated human rights issues and democratisation in their whole framing of the Zimbabwean question to concerns about stability and external interventions (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015).

The SADC was unable and unwilling to reprimand ZANU PF genuinely and openly throughout the crisis period. There were only a few incidents where the SADC stood its ground in calling ZANU PF to order, as was the case during the Livingstone Summit of 2011 where Mugabe and ZANU PF were reprimanded for flouting the GPA behind closed doors (Muleya 2011). There were several instances of letting ZANU PF float the GPA principles during the whole course of the GNU up until Mugabe frog-marched the country in another election in 2013, even without an electoral roadmap that the SADC had insisted to be put in place. The first round of elections had some semblance of being free and fair leading to the defeat of Mugabe and ZANU PF in 2008. However, the regional bloc could not stop Mugabe from conducting the botched one-person presidential run-off of 27 June, nor persuade him to step down to pave the way for a transitional government (Coltart 2016; Alao 2012; Bourne 2011).

The regional bloc's handling and reaction to the SADC Tribunal case broadly reflected the SADC's unconditional support to ZANU PF. The Tribunal was established in Article 16 of the Declaration and Treaty (1992, 14) and constituted the supreme judicial body of the SADC with the power to deal with all legal issues. The Tribunal was tasked to ensure adherence to policies and proper interpretations of the provisions of the SADC Treaty and its subsidiary instruments and adjudicated its disputes (Zenda 2010). In October 2007, a petition by a group of former white commercial farmers represented

by Michael Campbell contested the government's compulsory acquisition of their farms (Nathan 2011). The Tribunal found the Zimbabwean government guilty of breaching the SADC Treaty obligations.

In September 2009, the then Justice Minister, Patrick Chinamasa, announced Zimbabwe's withdrawal from the Tribunal, alleging the Tribunal was improperly constituted as two-thirds of member states had not ratified its Protocol (Aeby 2018). This led to the shelving of the Tribunal in 2009, only to resurface with weaker powers in 2015 following a revised interpretation of the SADC Treaty and Protocols relating to the disputes between member states (SADC Summit 2012). The SADC's level of partisanship with ZANU PF was extreme, letting the party get away with violations of the regional bloc's protocols (Aeby 2018). Moreover, the Tribunal's demise exposed SADC member states' unwillingness to cede sovereign power to supranational structures, fearing that these supranational bodies might not follow the dictates of national governments (Nathan 2011). The repugnancy of the nationalist conception of sovereignty, regional governance norms, and conflict management allowed ZANU PF to fend off the regional bloc's demands to implement the GPA and SADC Summit resolutions during the mediation and facilitation phase (Nathan 2011).

The SADC's position on Zimbabwe was a deliberate stance to protect the ruling elite. Several leaders in the region strongly felt the need to render Mugabe and ZANU PF support with the firm belief that their removal would set a precedence applicable notably to other former liberation movements as governing parties (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). The SADC's sympathy to Mugabe was further accelerated by the lack of a moral claim to rein in ZANU PF and Mugabe (Tendi 2010). After all, other leaders and ruling parties have had similar undemocratic approaches and tendencies to those of ZANU PF and Mugabe in respect of rigging elections, repression, violence, as well as resource plunder, economic mismanagement, and corruption (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). Some other SADC member states could not accuse Mugabe of human rights abuses, the violation of the rule of law, and persecution of opposition leaders without risking being exposed to the same (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020). Only Botswana under Khama and Zambia under Mwanawasa openly criticised ZANU PF and Mugabe; they knew they would not be accused of the same (Tendi 2010). Former liberation movements are characterised by paradoxical qualities, both emancipatory and authoritarian, such that it was difficult for any of them to call ZANU PF to order (Southall 2013). Their governance shares similar traits in intolerance, corruption, patronage, human rights abuses and forms of discrimination such that they have become postcolonial pathologies to democracy (Southall 2013; Melber 2003; Ranger

2004). Due to this lack of moral claim, several SADC states became convenient enablers of the ZANU PF regime.

ZANU PF's hard-line approach was well known throughout the SADC region. Without some degree of the complacency of a process acceptable to ZANU PF, the SADC mediation and facilitation of the Zimbabwean crises could not have succeeded. SADC states could particularly read the party's stances and several bold speeches proclaimed by Mugabe at international fora, causing them to handle Mugabe and ZANU PF with extreme caution (Southall 2013). Furthermore, Mbeki was quite alert to the military-party complex in Zimbabwe (Melber 2003).

“Any dealings with Mugabe and ZANU PF had to be done gradually, delicately and cautiously, knowing that there were certain forces behind the scenes outside the presence of either Mugabe or his party” (Masunungure 2019).

The complicated role of the securocrats in the political affairs is well known, such that any form of mediation had to have privy information of such, notably the intricate relationship of ZANU PF and the military (Southall 2013). It can be argued that a firmer stance on Mugabe and ZANU PF could have provided a better mediation outcome in terms of the much-needed reforms the state required to address not only an anachronism to Zimbabwe's progress but the rest of the region. There is validity in asserting that the SADC deliberately suppressed all these pertinent issues in preference of a sustained authoritarian consolidation of ZANU PF power and ensured the party remained in control throughout the GNU period.

### **3. SADC mediation priorities and negotiating the crisis**

Various approaches of the SADC in handling the Zimbabwean situation were pursuing similar underlying priorities of the regional bloc, namely: peace and stability, quiet diplomacy, and support for former liberation movements. The SADC saw Zimbabwe as playing a pivotal role in preserving the peace and stability of the region. Mbeki's idea of the African Renaissance was a firm conviction that Africa could do things for itself, hence the mantra of “African solutions to African problems” and therefore saw the Western interventions as inimical to African self-determination (Chan 2019). With the increased pressures for regime change in Zimbabwe, including the UK's contemplation of a military invasion as well as the imposition of sanctions, Mbeki and the SADC saw

the Western international community's move as a threat to the stability of the region as a whole, beginning with Zimbabwe (Tendi 2020). The view that the instability in Zimbabwe would translate to instability throughout the SADC region was prevalent during the crises period.

### ***3.1 Peace and Stability Priorities***

From its inception, the SADC developed a common developmental and political policy agenda: the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) and Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ (SIPO). The SIPO was designed to create a peaceful environment to achieve its development agenda (Zondi 2017). The SIPO was to be achieved by protecting the region's people from threats arising from a breakdown of law and order, conflict, and aggression, as its first objective declares (Zondi 2017).

Four factors were influencing the choice of peace and stability priorities: avoiding a winner takes all scenario; preference of a strong statesman presiding over the Zimbabwean state; Mbeki's firm belief in the African Renaissance, which was opposed to Western pressure; and the SADC bloc's ideological desires to retain within its fold a leader with liberation credentials. These motives always took precedence over the pursuit of effective democracy and protection of human rights. From the onset, the main preoccupation was directed at stabilising the security situation in Zimbabwe and creating conditions for better future elections (Mutambudzi 2015). In his autobiography, Tsvangirai (2011) states that the SADC's preoccupation was in formulating a strategy to bring stability to Zimbabwe and the whole of the region, given the early signs of a potential spill-over of the crises to neighbouring states. It was peace and stability built on SADC principles of respect for national sovereignty and consensus approaches to problem-solving.

Mbeki's mediation before the signing of the GPA was motivated by the need to avoid a winner-takes-all scenario even if it meant that ZANU PF had lost the elections (Masunungure 2019). Mbeki believed that the feasibility of the MDC taking the reins of power was less likely. This idea was shared by most SADC states, who were convinced that it was not sustainable to do so, given the intricate relationship of the military and ZANU PF (Tendi 2010). The least-worst scenario was an arrangement where despite the MDC securing victory through an election, it would still have to concede to power-sharing demands with ZANU PF (Tendi 2010). This explains why ZANU PF became a dominant partner in the GNU, with Mugabe retaining executive powers as the head of state and government. A new post of prime minister was created

to accommodate Tsvangirai with limited executive power (Makumbe 2009). The GNU became a mechanism for accommodating the opposition within a political system that the ZANU PF dominated.

The peace and stability envisaged by SADC states required a strong person to ensure that Zimbabwe's internal problems did not spill over to the rest of the region. Mbeki and the SADC believed Mugabe could do that (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020). This perception did not extend to the MDC and Tsvangirai. However, there is widespread literature attesting that Mbeki firmly believed in a post-Mugabe transition, of which ZANU PF would remain the most significant player in that political arrangement (Makumbe 2009). The Kariba House Boat Meeting convened between ZANU PF and Tsvangirai during the initial stages of the crisis reportedly agreed on Tsvangirai to become vice president, a move blocked by senior members of his party who felt the arrangement was only accommodating him (Chan 2010).

### ***3.2 Liberation Movements Camaraderie***

ZANU PF's liberation struggle credentials have had an indispensable role in shaping the mediation considerations of SADC in negotiating the Zimbabwean crisis. Despite the uneasy or non-existent relationships with ZANU PF during the liberation struggle, camaraderie among veteran nationalists and common liberation parties' ethos as vanguards of social justice and transformation translated into strong solidarity with ZANU PF (Boyd 1976; Bond 1998). This emanated mainly from the regional bloc preference and comfortability of a sister liberation movement remaining in power and the sharing of similar traits of mistrust and distrust prevalent during the liberation struggle making them cooperate at the party level more than they do at the government level (Adagombe 2003). SADC leaders genuinely believed removing a liberation movement from power would set an automatic precedent for the complete removal of all of them.

Amongst the liberation parties in power, there are complex histories of solidarities, camaraderie, and personal ties rooted in the tradition of an anti-colonial liberation struggle that continues to influence current approaches to security and conflict issues (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Enduring solidarity still dominates the SADC region among "sister liberation movements" and "brother presidents" at the helm of governments in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, South Africa, and Zimbabwe (Reed 1993; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2011). It is on this basis that Adolfo (2009, 14) argues that

The Liberation parties in the SADC region have ... fought the bloody wars together as brothers/sisters and comrades for many years and even decades. It is essential to acknowledge that these SADC sister states are still very young, and the liberation wars they fought ended as recently as 20 years ago. Most people engaged in the liberation struggle – including the peasantry that felt the wrath of both colonial and liberation forces – are still alive. Therefore, this history still holds some significance for the people of the SADC region and cannot just be swept away. The liberation parties within SADC have continued to develop and strengthen their relationship.

Although the SADC region is not a homogeneous entity, it is crucial to note that liberation struggle credentials owe some states their status in the bloc (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). This explains why it has been difficult for the former liberation movements to welcome and embrace the MDC as a legitimate alternative to ZANU PF (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). The perceived or suspected Western regime change strategy heightened the sensitivities of these African actors. It led to their low opinion of opposition parties in their respective states, genuinely seeing them as agents of this grand strategy (Raftopolous 2010).

As an outgrowth of the liberation struggles and initiative of liberation movements in power, the SADC sought to lead a new struggle for economic justice and development, necessitating the relaunch of the nationalist ideology, emphasising the defense of national sovereignty and the resolution of the national question (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). ZANU PF's push for land reform, couched in its rhetoric of anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, and pan-Africanism, resonated with the fellow former liberation movements (Adagombe 2003). Zimbabwe became a site for contestations between decolonisation and the claims of good governance, human rights, and democracy (Ranger 2003). Hence, the liberal-democratic principles enshrined in the SADC's peace and security policies emerged as second fiddle to anti-imperialism, stability, and regime solidarity (Aeby 2018). It therefore suffices to state that the mindset of the political elites, hailing from the former liberation movements, operates like Leninist vanguard parties, a clique of elites who have developed a sense of entitlement to power and privilege such that a potential loss of power is equated to recolonisation (Alao 2012). Except for South Africa and Namibia, other liberation parties in power have a feeble commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and good governance (Matlosa 2004).



Liberation movements were thus complicit in allowing the erosion of democracy in Zimbabwe while prioritising support for the survival of the ruling elite. This “domestic imperative of political survival underpinned by political solidarity” from other parties with “a shared, fortunate experience of national liberation struggles against white settler colonialism” (Bratton and Penar 2018, 41) was pivotal in the perseverance of ZANU PF. Melber (2003) suggests the tag of being a liberation party within the SADC region has over the years constructed a sustained identity that is underpinned by the politics of resistance to perceived threats of regime change, the notions of “African solutions to African problems”, as well as a vigorous defence of vanguard governments (Barner and Taylor 2005; Alao 2012). This perspective has generated a lasting cohesion among the dominant parties in power and a sort of insurance against losing power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020). These parties are skilful in rallying ideological solidarity among sister parties to sustain and ensure regime survival (Levitsky and Way 2010). The same parties have paid lip service to the need to overcome the democracy deficit in Zimbabwe, as evidenced by their endorsement of flawed elections in Zimbabwe between 2002 and 2013.

The idea of mistrust and possibilities of neo-colonial and neo-imperial encroachment persists among liberation movements explaining why they rarely issue statements or make resolutions publicly in the aftermath of their summits or forums (Bischoff 2002; Bourne 2011). Any political party without liberation credentials risks being labelled stooges of Western imperialism. For this reason, throughout the entire GNU period, the MDC failed to penetrate the SADC liberation movements to garner support and rally sympathy ahead of ZANU PF (Barner and Taylor 2005). Discourses of anti-imperialism, the lack of liberation credentials, links to Western powers, and questionable governing fitness made it hard for the MDC to dispel the imperialist proxy image propagated by ZANU PF and the liberation parties in the region to accept the MDC as an alternative (Bourne 2011). The SADC region respects the vanguard parties, informed by history, historical friendship, and solidarity. It is an essential factor in a logical explanation of Mbeki’s facilitation and reasons for morphing what became known as quiet diplomacy.

#### **4. Quiet Diplomacy and Thabo Mbeki’s mediation**

Efforts by Mbeki in his mediation came to be known as quiet diplomacy. His adherence to quiet diplomacy effectively served the purposes of authoritarian consolidation of power by ZANU PF. Although quiet diplomacy received stern criticism for its

ineffectiveness in dealing with ZANU PF and Mugabe, it was workable in handling the mediation, especially in dealing with ZANU PF's hard line stance. Whereas ZANU PF and Mugabe successfully manipulated quiet diplomacy for their selfish gains, its intended outcomes were partially achieved by dragging it to the negotiating table and subsequently agreeing to share power during the GNU.

The concept of quiet diplomacy was initially seen as a form of African containment, representing methods used either to stop conflicts from spiralling out of control, reversing their effects, or halting them through peaceful settlement of disputes (Landsberg 2016). Quiet diplomacy was South Africa's approach since Mandela (Landsberg 2016). It was primarily premised on six pillars, namely: personal or direct diplomacy between heads of state with little or no media involvement; limited action or even inaction; calm and tactful but persistent negotiation or dialogue in a non-threatening atmosphere; constructive engagement aimed at solving problems as quiet as possible; and conduct of diplomacy in the context of bilateral or multilateral efforts (Graham 2006). Although Mbeki was involved in the Zimbabwean crisis as early as 2002, he was formally appointed an SADC mediator in 2007 (Landsberg 2016). There was a genuine urge by the South African government to deploy a containment strategy in Zimbabwe, given the growing immigration of Zimbabweans fleeing an imploding economy (Chitiyo and Kibble 2014). Parastatals like Eskom and Sasol lost millions in unpaid fuel and electricity supply bills (Chitiyo and Kibble 2014). The deporting of illegal immigrants was costly, and social migration pressures sparked periodic outbreaks of xenophobic violence against foreign workers (McKinley 2004). South Africa and Mbeki's government came under intense internal and external pressure to address the Zimbabwean situation (Hugh 2009).

Mbeki's efforts sought to address the Zimbabwean situation by solving the legitimacy crisis of the ZANU PF-led government, which mainly evolved from disputed elections (Clemens and Moss 2005). This explains why Mbeki's mediation role focused on dialogue instead of confrontation to resolve the political stalemate, including the need to ensure a conducive environment that would deliver a credible poll in any future elections (Mutambudzi 2015).

Mbeki resisted pressure from Britain and the US that wanted the SADC and the AU to act powerfully on Zimbabwe (Coltart 2008). He aimed to ensure Africa took charge of her destiny. By the time of intense mediation of the Zimbabwean crises, Mbeki had assumed a leading role in the process of building African institutions anchored on his intellectual and ideological beliefs (Coltart 2016; Chan 2010). This manifested in

creating institutions such as the AU transformation from the OAU, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and its African Peer Review Mechanism—APRM (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020). Mbeki became involved in the resurgence of the anti-imperialist posture, which Mugabe later perfected, adding his anti-Western rhetoric (Compagnon 2011).

Moreover, Mbeki was quite conscious of ZANU PF's hardliner stance and Mugabe's unilateral approach. He was, therefore, convinced that only an approach premised on the acknowledgement of Zimbabwe's unjustified colonial legacies would bring Mugabe and ZANU PF to the negotiation table. This strategy enabled Mbeki to facilitate a deal between Mugabe and Tsvangirai.

Mbeki could read, particularly on Mugabe, because he was a unilateralist on issues of foreign policy. You look at Mugabe's bold speeches at the UN General Assembly and the standing ovations he received. Mbeki was thus very cautious in dealing and handling Mugabe so that Mugabe and ZANU PF were always comfortable having him as mediator. As a result, Mbeki moved very gradually and delicately, and frankly until he secured a deal between Mugabe and Tsvangirai (Masunungure 2019).

Mbeki's ideological sympathy had an appeal to ZANU PF. Imperialist designs targeted African states perceived as deviants to Western liberal norms (Scoones, et al. 2010). Zimbabwe was among these states. This conveniently credited ZANU PF's repeated attempts to project the Zimbabwean crises as a case of anti-imperialism and Pan-Africanism (Phimister and Raftopolous 2004). This rhetorical shield resulted in the unquestioned support of Mbeki, which became crucial for the survival of Mugabe's regime (Tendi 2010).

Moreover, the irreparable damage by the British government's denial of any responsibilities to the post-colonial historical injustices regarding Zimbabwe's land question genuinely cultivated Mbeki's active sympathy to ZANU PF's cause (Bowden 2001; Moore 2003). Blair made it no secret that Britain would play a leading role in reordering the global order to bring the values of democracy and freedom to people around the world (Williams 2001). Nothing could be envisaged by a British prime minister whose disingenuous pursuit of moral certainty would become a case of mounting concern (Cooper 2003; Phimister and Raftopolous 2004). The Mbeki

government's quiet diplomacy was a form of appeasement to ZANU PF and Mugabe but, more importantly, designed to wade off Western pressure to meddle in the affairs of an independent African state (Landsberg 2016).

In a discussion document, Mbeki revealed that his mediation in the Zimbabwean crises was to “ensure that Zimbabwe does not end up in a situation of isolation confronted by an array of international forces it cannot defeat” (Mbeki 2001, 56). He was very critical of any attempts and very alert of the EU, the UK, and the US attempts to influence the mediation process of the Zimbabwean crises, as was the case with the pressure exerted by diplomats in Pretoria and Harare (Malunga 2020). Mbeki also prevented the feasibility of neo-liberal interventionism in the region and Zimbabwe as was the template in use and implemented under disguised UN Resolutions and the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (Zhangazha 2019). As he diagnosed:

Many of the Western countries have turned against Zimbabwe, including the Scandinavian countries. Support in Africa is lukewarm and hesitant, while countries in Southern Africa fear the consequences of a deeper crisis in Zimbabwe. Globally it is perceived a negative factor in the context of the development of Southern Africa and Africa (Mbeki 2001, 3).

Mbeki was convinced that ZANU PF as the party of the revolution was better placed in addressing the challenges confronting all sectors of the Zimbabwean society, given its status as a vanguard party. Several scholars assert that Mbeki's mediation was partisan in supporting and defending ZANU PF (Tsvangirai 2004; Mazarire 2013; Landsberg 2016; Raftopolous 2013; Phimister and Raftopoulos 2004). Whilst that could have been the case, evidence suggests that Mbeki was mainly interested in Zimbabwe's stability. An unstable Zimbabwe was bad for the whole region. In this reading, the SADC and Mbeki were not necessarily interested in preserving ZANU PF but in getting stability in Zimbabwe for the region's sake. Thus, Mbeki noted:

The party must admit to itself that, in time, it has lost contact with the masses. It has failed to educate and mobilise the masses of the people to remain conscious actors of the national democratic revolution and the success of a process of social transformation that serves the interest of the people as a whole. As members of the party of revolution translated into access to positions of employment, resources, and authority, so did the

party's structures begin to atrophy and wither away as representatives of the popular will (Mbeki 2001, 17-18).

The frankness demonstrated could not have emanated from a mediator whose underlying motives were only securing the preservation of a ZANU PF regime nor South African economic interests. The historical affinities help explain Mbeki's approach. More importantly, it is also critical to note that quiet diplomacy was regionally preferred and not confined to South Africa alone (Van Wyk 2002; Stremmlau 2003).

## 5. SADC's Collective Diplomatic Approach

In the SADC region, states have pursued a foreign policy to fulfil their expectations of fulfilling the regional desires to attain socio-economic development (Schoeman and Alden 2003). SADC diplomacy can be defined as the set of protocols, declarations, charters, and memoranda of understanding that the regional bloc member states have adopted in their quest to address and manage relations beyond their collective borders (Notshulwana 2015). Article 4 of the SADC Treaty emphasises "sovereign equality of all member states; solidarity, peace and security; human rights democracy and the rule of law, equity, gender balance and cultural benefit and peaceful settlement of disputes" (SADC Treaty 1992). The SADC has also remained consistent with the spirit of pan-Africanism and many of the several principles developed under the OAU and the AU (Vale and Barrett 2009).

SADC states' strict adherence to the doctrine of multilateralism influenced Mbeki's mediation on the Zimbabwean crises, which made it easily predictable what the outcomes could be. The SADC prioritised the founding values of the Front Line States necessitating the whole regional bloc not to tolerate infiltration or decisive foreign forces (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). The sacrosanct values regarding political solidarity against foreign domination of any kind primarily determined the mediation process (Shai and Zondi 2020). Mbeki's mediation was quite alert to these values. He was empathetic in avoiding an image of South Africa as a state quickly submitting to Western interests. Moreover, there was already widespread criticism of the ANC's failure to rectify the legacies of apartheid in terms of the failure by blacks to own the economic means of production. Article 11:2 of the SADC Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security restrains the bloc from military intervention activities upon member states. It emphasises sovereignty issues, including related principles of territorial integrity and

non-interference in domestic affairs of member states and advocates for the peaceful resolution of disputes through instruments such as “mediation, conciliation, negotiation and arbitration” (Adolfo 2009, 11). Informed by these protocols, Mbeki, under the auspices of the SADC bloc, took a stand that, as a region, they should not agree to the option of military invasions.

In addition to the concept of multilateralism, the SADC’s diplomacy is premised on a notion of the region as some form of common and collective security platform (Barner and Taylor 2001). This means collective regime security rather than comprehensive collective security (Akokpari 2001; Chimanikire 2001). The SADC closes ranks on regional issues where there is a possibility of external intervention. There is no closing of ranks where citizens’ livelihoods are threatened by hunger, poverty, despair, and natural disaster because the collectiveness is state-centric rather than holistic (Taylor and Williams 2004). The SADC viewed Zimbabwe’s crisis as a regional and pan-African fight for stability and sovereignty. This enabled Mugabe to hold to his image as a fighter against neo-colonialism, for African Renaissance, and self-determination. Mugabe’s rhetoric further buttressed this perception by strongly championing regional industrialisation, economic indigenisation, land reform, and economic integration (Alden and Alves 2008). Thus, the image of Mugabe at the SADC level was one of a champion of solid regionness (Badza 2008; Alden and Alves 2008).

Despite numerous reports of the worsening situation in Zimbabwe and the emigration of her people, Mbeki and the majority of SADC leaders consistently avoided outright rebuke of Mugabe and ZANU PF. Instead, regional leaders preferred that “criticism of each other be confined within the region and not made in forums or outside the region or in a public manner that could be seen as opposing a fellow Southern African State” (Schoeman 2006, 252). The SADC’s collective diplomatic approach on Zimbabwe was shaped by Mugabe’s regional leadership stature and role as Zimbabwe’s chief foreign policy articulator. Throughout his career, Mugabe gained both admiration and criticism due to his strong stances on anti-colonial and pan-Africanist posture (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). This had a bearing on influencing what the SADC thought was appropriate in handling the Zimbabwean crises (Stremlau 2003). The SADC’s diplomatic approach, especially of the first-generation leaders of independence, is informed mainly by the mutual respect of the region’s elder statesmen, especially those hailing from the liberation tradition. It was perceived un-African to chastise an elder statesman in public (Nyakudya 2013).

Mugabe’s tact proved helpful in muting all critiques at the regional summit level, even when he was criticised openly elsewhere (Nyakudya and Jakarasi 2015). Zambian

presidents Levy Mwanawasa and Rupiya Banda, Botswana's president Ian Sereste Khama, and Malawian president Joyce Banda, who were all critics of Mugabe, became muted at summits attended by Mugabe and, in some instances, even defended Zimbabwe's position, especially with regard to sanctions (Nyakudya and Jakarasi 2015). Mugabe's recognised authority was one of the most critical variables in influencing the SADC's adoption of Mbeki's quiet diplomacy as a desirable mediation approach (Taylor 2002). Leadership is critical in determining foreign policy outcomes (Preston 2010; Pyter 1963; Pye 1962). Leadership in the context of foreign policy is the ability to persuade others to comply voluntarily with one's wishes (Cartwright 1983). The central ideas of Mugabe and regional clout, collectively referred to as Mugabeism, remained crucial in shaping the SADC's response and handling of the Zimbabwean crisis. In addition, Mugabeism's central character deployed through a pan-African redemptive ideology made it difficult to criticise Mugabe at the SADC level (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009; Mpofo and Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2019).

Mugabe was thus strategically positioned as the leader of leaders at the regional level. No one could convince him, and each leader visiting Zimbabwe would leave replicating Mugabe's rhetoric (Chimanikire 2019). Mugabe successfully convinced the region that the MDC posed a threat to ZANU PF and Zimbabwe and the SADC region as Western powers' Trojan horse and entry point for efforts to dislodge the former liberation movements from power (Tendi 2010). This thinking was very present in South Africa, where reports of a third force working towards the dislodging of the ANC government from power made the round (Mahoso 2019). Moreover, Mugabe's erstwhile role in demanding the unconditional end to apartheid as well as an end to the illegal occupation of Namibia paid dividends among those states reciprocating the gesture of solidarity at a time when Mugabe and ZANU PF were facing the severe threat of removal from power (Tendi 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2011). This conditioned the SADC region's collective consensus regarding the handling of the Zimbabwean crises. Mugabe's ideas, views, and personality, as well as experience as an African nationalist and being one of the core leaders of the liberation struggle coupled with his keen interest in foreign policy and diplomacy positioned him as the chief of Zimbabwe's foreign policy (Chan and Patel 2006). It is on this basis that the SADC's handling of the Zimbabwean crisis emanated as one based on consent and respect as opposed to confrontation and coercion.

## 6. Conclusion

SADC mediation priorities and its negotiation of the Zimbabwean crises enabled ZANU PF's consolidation of power. Its approach rendered the SADC complicit in enabling ZANU PF's authoritarian consolidation mainly due to the regional bloc's unwillingness or inability to reprimand Mugabe and ZANU PF during the whole course of the Zimbabwean crisis. Mugabe and ZANU PF's arrogance and utter contempt of the whole SADC mediation and facilitation processes was laid bare such that by the time of conducting harmonised elections in 2013, the SADC had not done much in compelling ZANU PF and Mugabe to comply with the dictates of the GPA. The manifestations of peace and stability considerations ahead of democratisation and institutional reforms capable of delivering a free and fair election became apparent following the military ousting of Mugabe in 2017. The SADC's conspicuous silence to condemn the coup and its quick move to accept Mnangagwa as the new president speaks volumes to a regional bloc that was willing to sustain ZANU PF authoritarian consolidation of power for the sake of the SADC's designs of peace and stability.

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