HUMAN RIGHTS AND REGIONAL COOPERATION IN AFRICA: SADC AND THE CRISIS IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

Since the early 1990s African regional and continental organisations have been playing an active role in maintaining military security and promoting democracy, good governance and respect for human rights in Africa. However, their efforts have often proved ineffective. This article contributes to the analysis of the causes of the difficulties African multilateral organisations have been facing in promoting democracy and human rights on the continent through a case-study of SADC's policy towards the crisis in Zimbabwe. The article shows that SADC efforts aimed at restoring democracy and putting an end to human rights abuses in Zimbabwe were critically hampered by the history of political antagonism among the Southern African governments, and by SADC's inability to draw a clear distinction between respect for human rights and the promotion of a neoliberal strategy of regional development. In the end, SADC diplomatic efforts were caught between the demagogic rhetoric of the ZANU-PF regime as represented by President Mugabe, and the international consensus on development. SADC ultimately proved unable to both help redress the deep economic and social inequalities in Zimbabwe and uphold human rights in the country.

1.   Introduction

After the end of the Cold War an international consensus rapidly emerged on the need for new and more effective instruments for promoting and protecting human rights in Africa. Not only did the democratisation processes spurred by the popular struggles against authoritarian one-party regimes usher in a new commitment to human rights on the continent, but Western donors, finally freed from Cold War strategic considerations, started conditioning the disbursement of their development assistance to the respect for democratic practices, the rule of law and human rights.

Together with national actors and foreign donors, African continental and regional organisations since the early 1990s have been trying to promote democracy and human rights on the continent. However, their efforts did not live up to expectations, as they often proved ineffective. This outcome has often been explained in the academic literature as a consequence of African leaders' reluctance to openly criticise their fellow heads of state and set a dangerous precedent that could later backfire on them (Hope 2006).

This article aims to offer an original contribution to the debate on the role African regional organisations have been playing in the promotion of democratic practices and respect for human rights in Sub-Saharan Africa after the end of the Cold War, through an analysis of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) policy towards the crisis in Zimbabwe. The article shows that SADC efforts aimed at restoring democracy and putting an end to human rights abuses in Zimbabwe were critically hampered by the history of political antagonism among Southern African governments, and by SADC's inability to draw a clear distinction between respect for human rights and the promotion of a neoliberal strategy of economic development. Thus, SADC diplomatic efforts were caught between the demagogic rhetoric of an authoritarian regime that, under the pretext of pursuing social justice, has ruthlessly kept the reins of powers in its own hands, and an international consensus that considers human rights as instrumental to the implementation of a neoliberal development paradigm. Having embraced this consensus, SADC not only deprived itself of the political instruments necessary to help redress the deep economic and social inequalities rooted in Southern Africa's history

of colonial exploitation, but, as the analysis of its policy towards the crisis in Zimbabwe shows, also undermined its own efforts aimed at upholding human rights in the region.

Far from being an isolated case, events in Zimbabwe are a local and dramatic manifestation of a global crisis of citizenship rights currently sweeping large parts of the developing world. The roots of this crisis are to be found in the tensions inherent in a hegemonic development model that to date has proved unable to provide effective answers to claims of social justice. As in other developing areas (Grugel 2009), the persistence of high poverty rates and deep social and economic inequalities in Africa are eroding the political legitimacy of liberal democracy and human rights. Given that the mainstream vision of human rights conceptualises them as "individual rights grounded in the liberal jurisprudence of essentially free-market economies" (Shivji 1999: 259), human rights risk both becoming just a "fig leaf for the continuation of the [social and economic] status quo" (Uvin 2004: 53), and being overwhelmed by the rise of new forms of authoritarian populism.

Within this context the academic debate on the crisis in Zimbabwe has witnessed a split between 'patriotic agrarianists' and 'critical cosmopolitans' (Moore 2004: 409). While the former sacrificed human rights on the altar of land reform and social justice (Moyo, Yeros 2007), the latter resolutely condemned human rights abuses in the country, but failed to criticise an ideological model that merges human rights and neoliberal economic development (Compagnon 2011).

This article highlights the urgent need to go beyond divisions between human rights advocates and supporters of social rights and to rethink the relationship between development, social justice and human rights in Southern Africa, in order to simultaneously promote models of democratic citizenship and inclusive development.

The article is organised so that the next section analyses African collective efforts aimed at promoting democracy and human rights on the continent after the end of the Cold War. At the same time, the link between human rights and neoliberal development is critically scrutinised. The third section examines the difficulties SADC has encountered in upholding democracy and human rights in Southern Africa. The analysis shows that the legacy of armed conflicts, the deep political divisions among the Southern African governments and the limits and contradictions of the neoliberal development model

pursued by SADC, have hampered its efforts aimed at promoting liberal political values in the region. The fourth section examines SADC policy toward the crisis in Zimbabwe and explains its shortcomings in terms of the Zimbabwean regime's determination to maintain the reins of power in its own hands and SADC's inability to untie human rights and neoliberal economic development. Some conclusions follow.

2.   Human Rights and Interstate Cooperation in Africa

Since the end of the Cold War, African continental and regional organisations have been trying to maintain security and promote democracy, good governance and respect for human rights in Africa. Within this context, African governments' decision to replace the Organization of African Unity (OAU) with the African Union (AU) in July 2002 signalled their new resolve to collectively address the multiple political transformations set in motion by the end of the Cold War and the crisis of the post-colonial models of authoritarian state-building on the continent.

Continuities and discontinuities with the historical record of the OAU are clearly evident in the Constitutive Act of the AU. As with the OAU Charter of 1963, the Act also lists among its principles the "sovereign equality" of the AU member states, the "respect of borders existing on achievement of independence" and the "non-interference by any Member State in the internal affairs of another" (AU 2000: art 4). At the same time, the adoption of the Act has set in motion a reassessment of this latter principle that since independence had been a mainstay of Africa's interstate relations. The Act not only recognises 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 as well as a serious threat to legitimate order to restore peace and stability to the Member State" (AU 2003: art 4), but also commits the AU to uphold "respect for democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law and good governance" on the continent, and to voice its "condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of government" (AU 2000: art 4).

The AU's emphasis on the promotion of democracy and human

rights found expression in the Protocol establishing the Peace and Security Council (PSC) adopted in 2002, where African heads of state declared themselves to be "aware also of the fact that the development of strong democratic institutions and culture, observance of human rights and the rule of law, as well as … sustainable development policies, are essential for the promotion of collective security, durable peace and stability, as well as for the prevention of conflicts" (AU 2002: preamble).

Primarily devised as a military security mechanism, the PSC has also been tasked to "follow up … the progress towards the promotion of democratic practices, good governance, the rule of law, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms [and] respect for the sanctity of human life" in Africa (AU 2002: art 7). However, while the security tasks of the PSC were well defined in the Protocol, the latter does not clearly spell out how the Council is supposed to uphold democratic practices and respect for human rights. Small wonder that, since its creation, the PSC has mainly dealt with military conflicts in Africa, generally leaving the resolution of political crises on the continent to the AU Assembly and the African regional organisations.

As the PSC Protocol clearly shows, the central place of human rights and democracy within the AU institutional framework is directly linked to the international consensus on the mutual links between military security, economic development and democracy. In spite of the vast resonance this consensus has achieved within academic and political circles, it fails to problematise the relationship between development and human rights. Since the early 1990s "the discourse of human rights [has] been constructed in a global context in which … aid from the EU and the OECD has linked neoliberal economic policies to the 'good governance' agenda and political conditionality, in which the emphasis has been placed on elections and formal political and civic rights, rather than on social and economic rights" (Raftopoulos 2010: 709). As a consequence, according to Makau Mutua, "acquiescence to a free market vision of political democracy has robbed the human rights corpus … of the impetus to think beyond markets and systems of exploitation that produce ugly social structures" (Mutua 2008: 31).

As the crisis in Zimbabwe has dramatically shown, this 'impoverished' version of human rights is vulnerable to the challenge

posed by authoritarian regimes which do not hesitate to manipulate claims of social justice and to abuse human rights and political freedoms in order to remain in power. Not surprisingly, the AU has long avoided public condemnation of the Zimbabwean regime, insisting on the need for the government and the opposition to reach a political settlement in Zimbabwe, and for international donors to cooperate with the Zimbabwean government in the search for a lasting solution to the land issue in the country.

At the continental level the ideological merger of neoliberal development and human rights has been reinforced by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Adopted by the OAU Assembly in 2001 as "a new framework of interaction with the rest of the world" (OAU 2001b: para 48), the NEPAD was the brainchild of South African President, Thabo Mbeki. The document emphasises the need for African governments to reform their governance institutions in order to stimulate economic growth and attract foreign direct investments. It also appeals to the G8 countries to reward the governance accomplishments of African governments through debt reduction and additional financial aid.

According to the NEPAD, the consolidation of democratic practices, respect for human rights and economic liberalisation are the preconditions for Africa's economic recovery. In addition to that, African multilateral organisations should guarantee military security on the continent (OAU 2001b: para 72). The NEPAD pays scant attention to human rights and considers the latter as instrumental in promoting economic growth, since it argues that "development is impossible in the absence of true democracy, respect for human rights, peace and good governance" (OAU 2001b: para 79).

During the last two decades the cooperation strategies of African regional organisations have reinforced the problematic subordination of human rights to the implementation of a neoliberal development paradigm. Such strategies are invariably based on the assumption that economic integration fosters development and strengthens interstate political cooperation and military security. Acting on the basis of this assumption, and prompted by the explosion of a number of violent conflicts in Africa, after the end of the Cold War African regional economic organisations engaged in conflict prevention and resolution activities on the continent. In addition, and in parallel with developments at the continental level, African regional

organisations have been trying to uphold democracy and respect for human rights at the national level.

The difficulties African regional organisations have faced in performing this latter task are rooted in the deep historical and political divisions among African governments, in their determination to resist foreign interference in their domestic affairs, and in the contradictory results of the neoliberal integration paradigm pursued at the regional level. While African regional organisations have historically paid scant attention to the dynamics of economic polarisation and social dislocation set in motion by processes of economic integration, the neoliberal cooperation paradigm they have been pursuing since the early 1990s has made them even less interested in actively redressing structural imbalances at the regional level, and has sown the seeds of further interstate economic competition and political fragmentation.

In addition, as Robert aptly observed, African regional co-operation strategies have been characterised by "the slow develop-ment, if not outright absence of social considerations in the integra-tion process [and] even when mechanisms for social policy develop-ment and social dialogue are created, these often remain dormant due to insufficient political or financial support" (Robert 2004: 4). This social policy vacuum has further widened the hiatus between liberal democracy and inclusive development at both the regional and the national level, undermining popular support for the former and abandoning the latter in the hands of authoritarian regimes that, as in the case of Zimbabwe, pretend to promote social justice by attacking human rights and abusing civil liberties.

Due to the ideological merger of neoliberal development and human rights, a procedural view of the latter has taken hold within Africa's multilateral organisations. This view fits perfectly with a hege-monic development paradigm that severely curtails national gov-ernments' ability to effectively address claims of social justice. With its emphasis on both the suspension of a member state in the case of an unconstitutional change of government and the monitoring of parliamentary and presidential elections, the AU has been champion-ing this procedural view of democracy and human rights on the con-tinent. Although this obviously represents a relevant change com-pared with the historical experience of the OAU, the AU still faces several obstacles in promoting political pluralism and free and fair elections in Africa. In addition to that, it is also far from advancing a

model of democratic citizenship that effectively promotes political, as well as economic and social rights.

The latest expression of the broad African consensus on the need to collectively promote democracy, good governance and human rights has been the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, adopted in January 2007 by the AU Assembly. The Charter aims to "nurture, support and consolidate good governance by promoting democratic culture and practice … and inculcating political pluralism and tolerance" (AU 2007: art 2); thereby not only reinforces a procedural view of democracy and human rights, but also sub-ordinates the latter to the promotion of economic development, as "in order to advance political, economic and social governance" it commits the African governments to "improving public sector management [and the] efficiency and effectiveness of public services [and] promoting the development of the private sector" (AU 2007: art 27).

African regional organisations have embraced this same procedural view of human rights. In West Africa, 10 years after its first military intervention in Liberia, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted a Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. The analysis of its content shows not only that the "primary purpose [of the Protocol] is to prevent coups and unconstitutional changes of government and that the promotion of democracy and good governance is ancillary" (Cowell 2011: 339), but also that it merges the promotion of human rights with a neoliberal development discourse centred on "creating an environment conducive to private investment and the development of a dynamic and competitive private sector" (ECOWAS 2001: art 27). As a result, as Ebobrah recently remarked, regional integration policies and instruments in West Africa do "not engage the link between human rights realization and the goal of raising living standards through economic integration" (Ebobrah 2010: 6), and leave it to market forces to bridge the gap between formal rights and inclusive citizenship.

The disappointing results of the neoliberal development paradigm embraced by both the NEPAD and African regional organisations and articulated at the national level by the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers are undermining the political legitimacy of liberal democracy and human rights in Africa. In spite of the high rates of economic growth recorded since the mid-1990s, Sub-Saharan Africa will probably be the only continent in the world where not even one

of the Millennium Development Goals will be met. Even if the Human Development Index improved in Sub-Saharan Africa from 0.401 in 2000 to 0.463 in 2011, the number of people living in extreme poverty (on less than US$1,25 per day) increased from 289 million in 1990 to 394 million in 2005, and then slightly declined (African Development Bank et al 2012: 2).

The failure to transform hard-won political rights into economic and social emancipation has not only caused a fall in voter turnout in several Sub-Saharan African countries, but is also resulting in the re-emergence of authoritarian models of politics and development, as national governments struggle to maintain order and power by manipulating the empty shell of multiparty democracy. In Zimbabwe the contradictions between social inequalities and political freedoms were brought to dramatic proportions during the first decade of the new century as the Zimbabwean government resorted to massive political violence and gross violations of human rights in order to implement radical land reform and remain in power.

As the following section shows, SADC in Southern Africa has also endorsed the international consensus on the relationship between human rights and neoliberal development. Together with the deep political divisions among the Southern African governments and the Zimbabwean leadership's determination to remain in power, this consensus has critically contributed to undermining SADC efforts aimed at restoring democracy and putting an end to human rights abuses in Zimbabwe.

3.   SADC and Human Rights

SADC was formed in 1992 by the member states of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), the economic organisation created in 1980 by the independent countries of Southern Africa with the aim of reducing their economic dependence on apartheid South Africa. During the 1980s SADCC represented a peculiar experiment of economic regionalism in Africa, due to the priority it accorded to functional cooperation over trade liberalisation. The shift from the 'Coordination Conference' to the 'Development Community' in 1992 aimed at creating a stronger regional bloc that could include South Africa once the latter had completed its democratic transition.

The Treaty of Windhoek of 1992 committed SADC to implement a market integration strategy meant to promote sustainable and balanced development in Southern Africa. Although in 1992 human rights and democracy were listed among the SADC principles (SADC 1993: art 4), the consolidation of democracy was only added to the objectives of the regional grouping in 2001 (SADC 2001b: art 5). In addition to its market integration agenda, in 1994 SADC took over the security role previously played by the Front-Line States (FLS) that had disbanded after the demise of the apartheid regime in South Africa. So, since the early 1990s SADC has been pursuing a broad and ambitious cooperation agenda in Southern Africa that embraces development, security and democracy.

If, on the one hand, after some initial difficulties, economic integration gained momentum in Southern Africa with the implementation of the SADC Free Trade Area, political and security cooperation, on the other hand, was long beset by interstate rivalries, armed conflicts and divergent national interests. When in the early 1990s the governments of Southern Africa started discussing how to collectively maintain security and promote democracy in the region, they soon reached an impasse over the definition of the powers and chairmanship of the mechanism that would replace the FLS. In particular, disagreement centred both on the proposal that Zimbabwe would chair the new SADC security sector on a permanent basis, and the rules that would underpin SADC peace-building and peace-enforcement activities. In 1996 a compromise solution was reached. The SADC leaders established an Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (OPDS) that, although primarily tasked with maintaining military security in Southern Africa, listed among its objectives to "promote and enhance the development of democratic institutions and practices within member states, and to encourage the observance of universal human rights" (SADC 1996). The institutional framework and the powers of the OPDS were then the subject of further negotiations. In 1996 the SADC leaders decided that the chairmanship of the mechanism would rotate on an annual basis, and that the Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe would serve as its first chairman.

Political tensions among the SADC member states reached a climax in 1998, when the governments of Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe intervened militarily in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

(DRC). These tensions not only revealed the depths of South Africa's political isolation within the region, but also made the negotiations over the tasks, the powers and the institutional framework of the OPDS extremely difficult (Alden and Schoeman 2003). Discussions mainly focused on security cooperation, so that the role SADC would play in the promotion of democratic practices and human rights became a marginal issue. Small wonder that the Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation adopted in 2001 contained a detailed description of SADC conflict prevention and resolution activities, but made just a brief mention of the SADC responsibility to support "the development of democratic institutions and practices within the territories of State Parties and encourage the observance of universal human rights" (SADC 2001a: art 2), without further specifying how SADC was supposed to achieve such objectives.

The Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (SIPO) adopted by the SADC Summit in 2003 confirmed the high priority of military security for SADC. The document made only a few general remarks on democracy and human rights, and committed SADC to the establishment of "common electoral standards" and "a regional commission for the promotion of and respect for human rights" (SADC 2003a: 20). The central place of military security within the SIPO was a direct consequence of the legacy of armed conflicts that raged in Southern Africa during the Cold War and after. Not surprisingly, SADC policy documents have repeatedly emphasised the link between security and development, considering the consolidation of peace and security as a necessary precondition for economic development in the region (SADC 2003a: 10). Conversely, the assumption that economic development would strengthen democracy and human rights was clearly spelt out in the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) which SADC adopted in 2003 as "a coherent and comprehensive development agenda on social and economic policies over the next fifteen years" (SADC 2003b: 8). In line with the NEPAD, the RISDP embraced a neoliberal development vision that considered market-driven economic growth as the key to poverty reduction. According to the RISDP, by promoting trade liberalisation and the free movement of capital within the region SADC, would strengthen sustainable development, democracy and respect for human rights in Southern Africa (SADC 2003b: 4).

While the RISDP failed to consider the adverse effects that processes of unequal development could exert on both the consolidation of democracy at the national level and interstate cooperation at the regional level, the fact that SADC formulated neither an industrialisation strategy, nor a social development program in order to complement its trade liberalisation agenda, contributed to further entrenching the historical polarisation of economic development in Southern Africa (Pallotti 2004). While the Charter of Fundamental Social Rights in SADC adopted in 2003 listed only some general principles, the social projects implemented by the SADC Secretariat have been deeply fragmented and heavily dependent on international donors' financial support (Pallotti 2012). If, on the one hand, in spite of the deep historical inequalities in access to resources in Southern Africa, SADC has embraced a development paradigm that leaves it to the market to reduce poverty and to promote forms of inclusive citizenship, the crisis in Zimbabwe, on the other hand, has unveiled the contradictions inherent in this development paradigm, putting at risk the political legitimacy of liberal democracy and respect for human rights in the region. Indeed, it can be argued that the crisis in Zimbabwe has been the most dramatic manifestation of a wider trend under way in Southern Africa, marked by both declining election turnouts in several countries of the region and by growing popular support for political parties and politicians who exploit racial and ethnic cleavages and who portray human rights as an obstacle to liberation and social emancipation.

Due to the political difficulties in defining an institutional framework for collectively promoting democracy and human rights within SADC, the SADC Summit has, with few exceptions (Lesotho in the 1990s and, more recently, Zimbabwe and Madagascar) reacted to the outbreak of political crises in the region on an *ad hoc* basis, and mainly through the adoption of non-binding resolutions. In addition, in 2004 the SADC Summit adopted the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections with the aim of promoting the "consolidation of democratic practice and institutions" in Southern Africa (SADC 2004). During the last decade SADC has regularly sent observer missions to monitor elections in the countries of Southern Africa. Although the SADC Summit has almost always refrained from making negative comments on the elections held in the region, the reports drafted by the regional monitoring teams and, in particular, by

the SADC Parliamentary Forum, have often openly criticised the national electoral processes and their outcomes. Thus, like the AU and ECOWAS, SADC has also embraced a procedural version of democracy and human rights that leaves it to market forces to translate entitlements into actual access to social services and economic opportunities. However, when the Zimbabwean regime launched a radical programme of land reform that trampled on human rights in the name of social justice, SADC was turned upside down.

Not surprisingly, when in 2007 the SADC Tribunal ruled that land reform in Zimbabwe had "discriminated against [white farmers] on the basis of race" and ordered the Zimbabwean government to "to take all necessary measures … to protect the … ownership of the lands [and] to pay fair compensation [to the farmers who had] already been evicted from their lands" (SADC Tribunal 2007), the Zimbabwean regime refused to abide by the Tribunal's ruling, accusing it of being manipulated by international actors bent on sabotaging Zimbabwe's land reform. The SADC Summit, faced with the risk of antagonising Mugabe's government, did not hesitate to turn its back on the only regional institution that could pass legal judgements on the human rights record of the SADC member states. In 2010 the SADC Summit decided to suspend the activities of the Tribunal and then in 2012 to disband it altogether (Nathan 2011).

To fully grasp the limits and contradictions of the SADC policy towards the crisis in Zimbabwe, it is necessary to consider how SADC has attempted to mediate the restoration of democracy and the cessation of human rights violations in the country, and the many political difficulties it encountered.

4.   SADC and the Crisis in Zimbabwe

The crisis in Zimbabwe has been one of the most contentious and difficult political issues SADC has faced since its creation in 1992. Due to the key political and economic role of Zimbabwe in Southern Africa, and the negative regional spillovers of the growing instability in the country, it was inevitable that SADC be involved in the search for a solution to the crisis in Zimbabwe. High expectations developed at both the regional and international level about the role SADC could play in resolving it the crisis. However, it did not take long before these expectations turned into a sense of frustration, since SADC

neither suspended Zimbabwe, nor adopted sanctions against it, nor has it been able, to date, to effect a real change of political leadership in the country.

The crisis in Zimbabwe has been the outcome of the complex interaction of a number of long, medium and short-term political factors. In the long-term, the seeds of the crisis were sown by the practices of social and economic exploitation of white settler colonialism that left a legacy of profound racial inequalities, rooted above all in the deeply biased pattern of land ownership. After the liberation war waged by the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) had brought the country to independence in April 1980, the government of Robert Mugabe implemented a development policy that brought about a noticeable improvement in the living standards of the black majority of the population (Dashwood 2000: 40-56). However, economic development came at a heavy cost. In the first place, Mugabe and ZANU concentrated all political power in their hands and brutally repressed ZAPU supporters in the Matabeleland region, causing the death of some 10 000 to 20 000 people and pushing ZAPU to merge with ZANU into ZANU-PF in 1987 (Phimister 2008). In the second place, because of a number of national and international factors, during the 1980s the government proved unable to resolve the land issue. Within this context, the implementation since the early 1990s of a structural adjustment programme set in motion a dramatic economic and social crisis in the country that in the medium-term eroded ZANU-PF political legitimacy and in 1999 led to the creation of a new opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), that drew its support from the trade union movement, civil society and business interests.

The defeat of ZANU-PF in the constitutional referendum held in February 2000 marked a turning point in the long-simmering political crisis in the country. In order to win the parliamentary elections scheduled for June 2000, the government and ZANU-PF did not hesitate to unleash a wave of political violence against the leaders and the supporters of the MDC, and to co-opt a movement of land invasions led by groups of war veterans to carry out what Mugabe labelled the 'Third Chimurenga' (Moyo and Yeros 2007: 106).

Through intimidation, political violence and human rights abuses, ZANU-PF narrowly won the parliamentary elections of June 2000.

However, by securing 57 of the 120 seats in the new parliament, for the first time in the history of independent Zimbabwe an opposition party had come very close to ousting ZANU-PF from power. After the June elections, the government inaugurated the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), which provided for land expropriation and the payment of compensation only for land improvements. According to Sam Moyo, in the period 2000-2009 the Zimbabwean government acquired 9.2 million hectares of land, which it divided for the most part between 145 775 small-scale farmers and 22 000 medium- and large-scale commercial farmers (Moyo 2011: 496-497). Although some cases of 'land grabs' by members of the political and military establishment were recorded, available data show that small farmers represented the vast majority of the beneficiaries of the FTLRP.

The implementation of the FTLRP took place within a political context marked by a harsh confrontation between the Zimbabwean government and Western donors. The latter refused to financially support a land reform programme carried out amid widespread political violence and against the rule of law. The implementation of the land reform worsened the economic crisis of the country, as it caused a fall in agricultural production and exports and the freezing of Western and multilateral aid. Hyperinflation took hold of the country, and in 2009 the government opted for the dollarisation of the economy. While this move helped stabilise the macroeconomic fundamentals, it also exacerbated poverty and social exclusion in the country.

It was only after the parliamentary elections of June 2000 that the SADC Summit for the first time officially discussed the situation in Zimbabwe. SADC soon found itself caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, the Western donors and the international financial institutions had frozen development aid to Zimbabwe because of the violations of human rights and the rule of law in the country. On the other hand, the government instrumentally presented the land reform as the last stage of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle. According to Mugabe, social justice had to take precedence over a Western notion of human rights that had historically disempowered black Africans. In addition, the use of political violence against the MDC leaders and supporters was legitimate because, with their repeated calls for respect for human rights and an orderly process of

land reform, they were collaborating with the 'imperialist' powers to prevent the Third Chimurenga from being carried out.

Within this context, SADC tried to facilitate a political compromise between the Western donors and the Zimbabwean government, and to promote a political dialogue between the latter and the opposition, with the aim of restoring economic stability in the country and limit regional spillovers of the crisis. Political divisions among the SADC governments (Angola, in particular, that had militarily intervened with Zimbabwe and Namibia in the DRC, backed Mugabe within SADC, while Botswana criticised the FTLRP for its negative effects on the entire region), the sensitivity of the land issue across Southern Africa, and Mugabe's determination to avoid any foreign interference in the internal affairs of Zimbabwe made the search for a solution to the crisis in Zimbabwe a very difficult and sensitive issue for SADC.

The regional consensus that emerged at the Windhoek Summit in August 2000 considered resolving the land issue in Zimbabwe a priority for SADC, due to "the urgent need to effect land redistribution [in order] to address land hunger and poverty affecting millions of black Zimbabweans" (SADC 2000). According to the SADC leaders, for land reform to be sustainable, it was, on the one hand, necessary for the Zimbabwean government to handle it "peacefully, and within the provisions of the laws of Zimbabwe", and, on the other hand, "imperative for the United Kingdom government to honour its obligations under the Lancaster House Agreement to provide resources for that purpose" (SADC 2000). After 2000 SADC repeatedly insisted on the need for a political dialogue between the Zimbabwean government and Western donors, and opposed any initiative aimed at the international isolation of the Zimbabwean regime.

The search for a political compromise not only between the Zimbabwean government and the donors, but also among the SADC member states came at a heavy cost. For some years SADC avoided openly condemning human rights abuses and political violence in Zimbabwe. The SADC leaders downplayed the many reports on electoral violence and intimidation, and considered legitimate the results of both the parliamentary elections of June 2000 and the presidential elections of March 2002. In so doing, SADC attracted strong criticism from Western countries that accused the Southern African governments, and in particular South Africa, of paying only lip

service to human rights and good governance. The NEPAD became the target of harsh attacks, as the Western governments accused their African counterparts of having betrayed the commitments made in the document.

In September 2001, the search for a solution to the crisis in Zimbabwe led the SADC Summit to send a Task Force of six heads of state to Harare in order "to work with the Government … on the economic and political issues affecting [the country]" (SADC 2001c). As President Bakili Muluzi of Malawi declared in Harare: "We are here because … we are very concerned about the worsening economy, the decline in the rule of law and the rise in political instability in this country. Zimbabwe's land problem is not just Zimbabwe's — it is a problem for all of us in the SADC region" (*The Star*: 11 September 2001). But, given its limited powers, the SADC Task Force restricted itself to recommending the promotion of a wide-ranging national dialogue in Zimbabwe in order to find a lasting solution to the land issue and, more generally, to the political and economic crisis of the country.

The SADC approach to the crisis in Zimbabwe suffered from two main political weaknesses. In the first place, the rights discourse embraced by the Zimbabwean leadership exposed the shallowness of SADC neoliberal development policy. SADC had neither the political leeway nor the financial resources required to provide a lasting solution to the land issue in Zimbabwe (and in Southern Africa), and the regional leaders carefully avoided antagonising Mugabe and putting at risk their own political legitimacy among their electorates. In the second place, SADC started debating the problem of land reform in Zimbabwe when the political situation in the country had already deteriorated to such a point that the national leadership had made the FTLRP the mainstay of its strategy to remain in power. Small wonder that the mediation attempted by the SADC Task Force in late 2001 was left in tatters by the determination of Mugabe and ZANU-PF to win the presidential elections of March 2002 at any cost.

The 'smart' sanctions that the EU and the United States (US) administration imposed on Zimbabwe after the presidential elections, not only grossly underestimated the resilience of the Zimbabwean regime, but paradoxically resulted in Mugabe becoming the regional spokesperson of anti-imperialism, social justice and Third World Solidarity. Caught between the international consensus on development

and Mugabe's instrumental appeal to social justice, SADC stressed the urgent need to continue the political dialogue with the Zimbabwean government. When in late 2003 the Commonwealth suspended Zimbabwe, the SADC OPDS voiced its criticism, stating that "this decision will do nothing to assist the people of Zimbabwe overcome their present difficulties". According to the OPDS, "the present situation in Zimbabwe calls for engagement by the Commonwealth and not isolation and further punishment" (South African Department of Foreign Affairs 2003).

After the 2002 presidential elections, the deterioration of the national economy continued unabated, causing an exodus of Zimbabwean citizens to other Southern African countries. Mugabe and ZANU-PF consolidated their authoritarian grip on the country through a growing militarisation of the state and the use of political violence against the MDC, that in 2005 split into two formations: the MDC-T, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, and the MDC-M, chaired by Arthur Mutambara (Sachikonye 2011: 47-48). Within this evolving context, SADC focused its efforts on promoting a dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition, on the assumption that only a political compromise could pave the way to the restoration of stability in Zimbabwe. In March 2007 the SADC Summit officially mandated the South African government to facilitate a political dialogue between the Zimbabwean government and the opposition.

Mugabe's sudden decision to hold parliamentary and presidential elections in March 2008 caused the suspension of Thabo Mbeki's mediation, and marked a new dramatic turning point in the political crisis in Zimbabwe. In spite of the massive intimidation of MDC candidates and supporters during the election campaign, ZANU-PF lost its majority in parliament for the first time since 1980, and Tsvangirai won the first round of the presidential elections with 47,9 per cent of the vote (Mugabe got 43,2 per cent). The delay in the announcement of the outcome of the presidential poll — the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission announced the results one month after the elections had taken place — sparked speculations that in fact Tsvangirai had won the elections with an absolute majority. The months that preceded the presidential run-off scheduled for June 2008 witnessed such a massive campaign of political violence and intimidation against the MDC supporters that Tsvangirai decided to withdraw from the electoral contest. In this way, Mugabe easily won

the run-off with 85 per cent of the vote. This time, however, both the SADC and the AU electoral observer missions judged the elections not free and fair.

It was in the context of this dramatic turn of events that Thabo Mbeki stepped up the mediation effort, and on 15 September 2008 Mugabe, Tsvangirai and Mutambara finally signed a Global Political Agreement (GPA). The agreement committed the Zimbabwean parties to "stop and prevent all forms of political violence" (GPA 2008: art 18), to "conduct a comprehensive … land audit … while accepting the irreversibility of … land acquisitions and redistribution" (GPA 2008: art 8), to draft a new constitution, and to form a new government, with Mugabe retaining the presidency and Tsvangirai becoming prime minister. In February 2009, again under intense pressure from SADC leaders, a new "Inclusive Government" (IG) was inaugurated, with ministers from ZANU-PF, MDC-T and MDC-M.

The formation of the IG was followed by two important developments. In the first place, there have been signs of economic recovery in the country. In the second place, Western donors have recently adopted new aid programs for Zimbabwe, with a focus on humanitarian projects. However, the political situation in the country is far from normalised, and human rights abuses are still reported by civil society organisations. Mugabe, who remains in control of the security apparatus, continues to effectively rule the country, thus relegating Tsvangirai to a marginal political role. While a new constitution was adopted in March 2013 and signed into law in May, the next elections nevertheless risk plunging Zimbabwe into violence and chaos. As new "SADC Facilitator on Zimbabwe", South African President, Jacob Zuma, has put pressure on the Zimbabwean parties to fully implement the GPA. In addition, not only has the OPDS Troika openly condemned the continuation of violence in Zimbabwe (SADC 2011), but the SADC Summit has also urged the Zimbabwean parties create the conditions for holding of free and fair elections (SADC 2012). However, it remains to be seen if SADC diplomatic pressure will secure the full implementation of the GPA and the holding of free and fair elections in Zimbabwe during 2013.

5.   Conclusion

This article has analysed the SADC policy towards the crisis in Zim-

babwe within the framework of the contemporary debate on the limits and contradictions of African collective efforts aimed at upholding democracy and human rights on the continent. The article has shown that since 2000 SADC has been trying to promote both a solution for the crisis in Zimbabwe and the resumption of the political dialogue between Harare and Western donors. However, a number of factors have frustrated the SADC policy towards Zimbabwe.

In the first place, the Zimbabwean government has been wary of any external interference in the internal affairs of the country. It not only castigated Western governments and the international financial institutions (IFIs) for the suspension of their financial assistance and the adoption of sanctions to promote political change in Zimbabwe, but it has also constantly cautioned other African governments from involving themselves in Zimbabwe's internal affairs.

In the second place, the SADC policy towards Zimbabwe was shaped by the political divisions that soured regional relations during the 1990s and, in particular, by the South African government's need to overcome its political isolation within Southern Africa, with both Thabo Mbeki, and subsequently Jacob Zuma, continuously trying to intervene in the Zimbabwean crisis through regional institutions and with the political backing of SADC, rather than bilaterally.

In the third place, SADC found itself paralysed by Mugabe's strategy. By placing social justice before human rights and the rule of law, the Zimbabwean president exacerbated the contradictions between the international consensus on development and the historical problem of the persistence of high poverty rates and deep socio-economic inequalities in Southern Africa. While Zimbabwe became a local manifestation of a global crisis over citizenship rights, the regime crushed the opposition, accusing it of betraying the objectives of the liberation war. Given the strong echo that the political and social issues raised by Mugabe found within other Southern African countries, the SADC governments tried to strike a balance between the donors' request for a clear condemnation of Zimbabwe's land reform programme and the risk of antagonising Mugabe and eroding their own national political consensus. In the end, SADC could not prevent the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy and prevent the autocratic Zimbabwean leadership from clinging to power and abusing human rights.

From a more general perspective, the analysis of the SADC

policy towards Zimbabwe has highlighted the need to critically interrogate the ideological merger of human rights and neoliberal development that became the centrepiece of the cooperation strategies of African continental and regional organisations after the end of the Cold War. In the case of the crisis in Zimbabwe, this merger has been detrimental to the promotion of human rights, since the latter have been identified with a neoliberal development model that to date has not effectively redressed structural inequalities in Southern Africa. Paradoxically, Western reaction to the crisis in Zimbabwe helped Mugabe drive a wedge between human rights supporters and advocates of social justice at both the national and the international level. This article has shown that the debate among the two would greatly benefit from a reconceptualisation of the relationship between human rights and development on the basis of the assumption that development "must be consciously directed toward increasing the enjoyment of human rights by incorporating a concern for the internal distribution of the fruits of development" (Donnelly 1984: 277).

After long negotiations the GPA was signed in 2008 and a year later the IG was inaugurated in Zimbabwe. Although criticised for its silence on past human rights violations (Raftopoulos 2010), the GPA has been defended by SADC as the only viable way out of the political impasse in the country. However, the consolidation of political stability and economic recovery in Zimbabwe and the normalisation of the relations between the Zimbabwean government and Western donors and the international financial institutions now critically depend on the next elections. SADC will be called to play a very important role in order to ensure that these elections are free and fair. If, as in the past, the government will resort to political violence and intimidation against the opposition, the consequences for Zimbabwe and Southern Africa would be dramatic, since the arm wrestling between Harare and Western donors would once again strengthen the most radical elements within ZANU-PF and the army, put at risk the country's economic recovery and deepen the international isolation of Zimbabwe.

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