

THE ZIMBABWEAN CRISIS AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Alois S. Mlambo¹

1. INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe has been in economic, political and social crisis since the turn of the 21st century. The crisis is the result of the combined effects of misgovernment, political intolerance, economic mismanagement by the ruling élite, a virulent HIV-AIDS pandemic and a severely deleterious economic meltdown. International ostracism of the country in the wake of Zimbabwe's controversial "fast track" land reform since 2000 and the human rights abuses accompanying it precipitated the economic collapse. Meanwhile, shortages of foreign currency and the disruption of the country's agricultural industry led to a collapse of the local manufacturing industry, high levels of unemployment and inflation, estimated at the beginning of 2006 at 80 and 780%, respectively, and severe shortages of basic necessities of life.

As the country sank deeper into an economic quagmire and government increasingly trampled on human rights, there was widespread condemnation of the Zimbabwean Government, mainly in the West, but with little notable effect. In fact, international responses to the Zimbabwean crisis have been largely ineffectual. The question is why international responses have been so ineffective and why denunciations of the Zimbabwe government have come mostly from the Western countries, while Zimbabwe's own neighbours on the continent have either remained silent or have openly supported Zimbabwe's policies. This paper attempts to address these questions and understand why there has been little consensus among the African governments and Western powers on how to deal with the Zimbabwean situation.

2. BACKGROUND

The current crisis in Zimbabwe began at the turn of the 21st century, with the invasions of white commercial farms by some veterans of the liberation war of the 1960s and 70s and other supporters of the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African

¹ Department of Historical and Heritage Studies, University of Pretoria. E-mail: alois.mlambo@up.ac.za.

National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) in retaliation against white farmers who were seen as the main funders of the recently established opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). That the government targeted white farmers is significant, given the role that the land question has always played in Zimbabwean politics and society since the establishment of British colonisation in 1890.

The attack on white farmers has to be seen within the backdrop of the legacy of colonial land policies, the failure of the independence government since 1980 to resolve the vexatious land question and the mounting political challenge to the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government by opposition forces at the turn of the century. Much has been written on the history of land alienation by the colonial settlers since the colonisation of Rhodesia in 1890 and how land remained the source of much friction between Africans and whites in Rhodesia (Palmer 1977; Moyana 1984; Mlambo 1972; Phimister 1975; Riddell 1980; Moyo 1995). Both the First and Second Chimurenga/Umvukela uprisings of 1896/7 and 1960s-80s, respectively, were fought largely over the issue of land alienation by the white settler community. At independence, because of several factors sketched out below, the land question remained unresolved and, therefore, a potential source of conflict in the country.

3. THE LAND ISSUE, 1980-2000

The land question remained unresolved throughout the first two decades of independence because of the limitations imposed on the incoming independence government by the 1979 Lancaster House Constitution and other factors. Essentially, the Constitution safeguarded the whites' economic interests by requiring the incoming government to pay market prices for any land it acquired on a "willing buyer, willing seller" basis. Thus, the government could not embark on any radical land reform without violating the terms of the Constitution. Moreover, white farmers were generally reluctant to sell their land or, at least, to sale good quality land to the government, apart from the problem of inadequate funding for land acquisition and the government's own inept and half-hearted approach to land redistribution. As a result, there was very little headway made in land reform in the first decade of independence.²

When the government passed the 1992 Land Acquisition Act, after the lapse of the Lancaster House Constitution, empowering it to compulsorily acquire land in return for fair compensation, it ran afoul of international donors and multilateral financial

² For a detailed discussion of the role of each of these factors in retarding meaningful land reform in post-colonial Zimbabwe, see A Mlambo, "'Land grab' or 'taking back stolen land': The fast track land reform process in Zimbabwe in historical perspective", *History Compass*, 3 (2005).

agencies which condemned any measures that would violate the sanctity of private property. Afraid of discouraging foreign investment at a time it was implementing the austere economic measures of the International Monetary Fund-sponsored Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), the government could not implement the Land Acquisition Act fully.

Failure to agree on the modalities of ensuring a just and equitable distribution of land in Zimbabwe led to deepening disagreements between Western donor countries and Zimbabwe. Meanwhile, as late as 1997, more than six million Africans still lived in the overcrowded and marginal communal areas with "poor soils and unreliable rainfall" where they had "no water rights and are excluded from the bulk of the nation's natural resources", while 4 500 mostly white farmers dominated the country's agrarian economy. This, according to Zimbabwe's leading scholar of the land question, Sam Moyo, was the "main factor which fuels today's land question" (Moyo 2000:2).

Consequently, flustered by what appeared to be Western country efforts to frustrate a meaningful land reform programme and to maintain white monopoly of land in Zimbabwe, in November 1997, the Zimbabwean government decided to defy the international community and went on to publish a list of 1 471 farms earmarked for compulsory acquisition, giving landowners 30 days to object in writing as provided for in the 1992 Land Acquisition Act. In June 1998, government announced its intention to compulsorily purchase 5 million hectares from commercial farmers over a five-year period.

Already unhappy with the international donors over their insistence on the "willing seller, willing buyer" concept, the government was further incensed by efforts by the British government to channel resettlement funding through civic organizations rather than through government institutions, alleging, among other things, government's lack of transparency in the way it allocated acquired land. In January 2000, the British Government's Department for International Development (DFID) announced that it would allocate £5 million for land resettlement projects through non-government channels. This angered the Zimbabwean Government, especially since it came at a time when there was mounting opposition among various sectors of Zimbabwe's civil society.

4. DETERIORATING ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The main cause of the growing opposition to the government was deteriorating economic conditions in the country, partly the result of the deleterious impact of ESAP (1991-1995) and the failure of subsequent economic reform strategies, such as the

Zimbabwe Programme for Economic Stabilisation (ZIMPREST) to alleviate the economic hardships the common people faced. The negative impact of ESAP has been well documented (Mlambo 1997:83-96). Also contributing to the country's economic problems were two unwise decisions taken by President Mugabe in the 1990s.

The first was his decision in November 1997 to award veterans of the liberation war, numbering some 70 000 or so men and women, a lump sum of ZW\$50 000 and a monthly pension of ZW\$5 000 each as a way of mollifying them in the wake of sustained complaints by the war veterans for being sidelined by the government. The second decision, taken in August 1998, was to send soldiers into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to defend the Laurent Kabila regime that was under attack from various rebel groups (Africa Research Bulletin 2000:13904A). Both these expensive undertakings that had not been budgeted for undermined the country's economy further.

The workers and other civic groups responded in 1999 by setting up the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) to challenge the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) of Mugabe. Under the leadership of the MDC, during the February 2000 National Referendum held to obtain the nation's opinion on a government-sponsored draft national constitution, which included provisions to increase presidential powers as well as to allow the government to confiscate land without compensation, the nation voted overwhelmingly against the constitution.

5. FARM INVASIONS AND THE FAST-TRACK LAND REFORM

Angered by the result of the referendum and faced with mounting political opposition, the Government was desperate for an issue around which to mobilise political support for itself. It found the answer in the long vexed issue of the land question. Exploiting the long-standing grievances of the African people over the domination of the most productive land by a minority of white farmers, in 2000, Government instigated veterans of the liberation war and other government supporters to invade white-owned farms in the name of the final war, named the Third Chimurenga, to win economic independence from white domination. This opened the way for the mayhem that had far-reaching socio-economic and political results and which has made the country a pariah state internationally.

The government introduced the controversial fast-track land reform programme which, between June 2000 and February 2001, listed 2 706 farms for compulsory acquisition. (Zimbabwe Government 2001:para 2.4) Thereafter, the mayhem con-

tinued in the countryside as white farmers and farm workers were driven off the farms, suspected supporters of the MDC and some white farmers were killed and the country's agricultural economy was disrupted and, ultimately, ruined.

The violence and the murders that accompanied the Third Chimurenga and which were reminiscent of the Matebeleland Massacres of the 1980s (Catholic Commission for Justice 1997) were compounded by a systematic attack on the country's judiciary that saw the removal of independent judges and their replacement by compliant handpicked supporters of the government. The independent media was not spared either, with one paper's printing press destroyed by a bomb and other newspapers shut down under draconian media laws that sought to gag any dissenting voices and give the state-run press the monopoly of disseminating information. Throughout all this, the police did little to apprehend the perpetrators of the violence, claiming that they could not intervene in politically motivated activities. Thus, the country was slowly but systematically bled to death and soon became a pariah state condemned and ostracised by the international community.

6. THE CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT

By 2005, Zimbabwe was in the throes of a crisis which took on many forms, including an economic melt down, political repression, human rights violations, repression of the media and manipulation of the judiciary by the government, a debilitating brain drain as professionals vote with their feet and go to greener pastures, and the effects of a run-away rate of HIV-AIDS infections and deaths and the numerous social and economic promises associated with this pandemic.

The lawlessness accompanying the farm occupations, which resulted in the death and maiming of numerous MDC supporters and some white farmers, ushered in a period of rapid economic decline that left Zimbabwe a pale shadow of its former self. Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) suspended its financial support in 1999 in protest against Zimbabwe's involvement in the DRC and the World Bank followed suit in May 2000 citing Zimbabwe's arrears in payments. As a result of these and other factors and developments, the economy plummeted. For instance, inflation rose rapidly to 400% in August 2003 and then to a colossal 622,8% in February 2004 (IRIN News 2004) before dropping to 144% by June 2005.³ The country's exports fell in 2004 to a mere third of what they had been in 1997 and the formal job sector shrank dramatically. Zimbabwe became a food deficit country with a "domestic debt of US\$1,1 billion and foreign debt of US\$1,1 billion" apart from an HIV positive rate of 30%, one of the highest in the world

³ By March 2006, inflation was estimated at over 700% and still rising.

(Mills 2005:3). In addition, according to an International Crisis Group Report, by 2002, life expectancy was "lower than in 1960 and has dropped from 61 years to 34 years" (International Crisis Group 2004:7).

According to leading Zimbabwean economist, John Robertson, at 2005, savings that had been carefully built up over the years, have "turned into almost valueless waste paper", while, by 2004, Zimbabwean currency had lost 99% of its value since 2001, with the Zimbabwean dollar then worth less than one US cent. In addition, "Zimbabwe's gross domestic product in 2001 was about Z\$654 billion and in 2004 it was about Z\$31 700 billion, a 48-fold decrease. Most of the gap between 48 and 100 is accounted for by the shrinkage of our economy, and this ties in with estimates that our economy is now only about half the size it was in 2001. Zimbabwe might have broken a few world records with this achievement. This is simply because no other country appears to have suffered such a sharp decline without having been attacked by a ruthless foreign enemy or by domestic insurgents. A war has been waged in Zimbabwe, but it was not the result of an attack by an external enemy and neither was it because of an attack from within" (Robertson 2005).

At June 2005, the Zimbabwean economy had become nearly paralysed by a severe shortage of foreign currency, fuel and basic necessities. Because of the country's failure to produce enough food for its population, partly the result of successive droughts but mainly because of the disruption of the country's agricultural economy since 2000. In 2004, Zimbabwe had to import food to feed millions of its people (Talbot 2004). In June 2005, the country was poised to receive United Nations assistance in feeding an estimated 4 million people in danger of starvation because the country did not produce enough food.

To make things worse, the economic meltdown and the brain drain that it triggered also meant the collapse of the country's health system at a time when its HIV/AIDS infection rate was very high by world standards. The education system, once the country's source of pride, was in shambles, with the number of school dropouts rising sharply because of failure to pay school fees or due to orphanhood, as parents died from the AIDS pandemic. In 2004, there were an estimated 780 000 AIDS orphans in Zimbabwe, with the number projected to reach 1,1 million by 2005 (Talbot 2004).

The impact of the crisis was not confined to Zimbabwe only but spilt over into its neighbours, more spectacularly, in the form of economic refugees. Rising inflation and unemployment, rapidly deteriorating living standards and political uncertainty and individual insecurity, among other factors, fuelled a massive brain drain that saw professionals of all kinds, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, engineers,

academics and teachers voting with their feet and seeking greener pastures in South Africa, Botswana, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia. Large numbers of Zimbabweans were living and working, legally and illegally, in South Africa and Botswana where their presence triggered waves of xenophobia that sometimes resulted in physical attacks on Zimbabwean immigrants. Everyday, both Botswana and South Africa deported scores of illegal Zimbabwean immigrants but, because of the severe hardships they faced back home, many soon found their way back into these countries. Altogether, an estimated four million Zimbabweans or a quarter of Zimbabwe's total population, were estimated to be living in Botswana, South Africa and various Western countries in June 2005 (<http://www.Zimonline.co> 10 June 2005).

The economic meltdown in Zimbabwe has impacted on South Africa in a number of direct and indirect ways. Direct ways include the failure by Zimbabwean parastatals such as ZESA and ZISCO Steel Company to pay for services rendered by South African public companies. Zimbabwe imports approximately 20% of its electricity requirements from South Africa. Since 1999, it has consistently failed to pay ESKOM, the South African public utility company, for electricity imported into Zimbabwe. Already at 1999, ZESA owed ESKOM approximately US\$20 million (Van Wyk 2002:19).

Also, given the fact that Zimbabwe has traditionally been South Africa's major trading partner in the region, the meltdown of the Zimbabwean economy has negatively affected South Africa's trade flows. Indirectly, both South Africa and other countries in the region have suffered in terms of lost opportunities as potential investors are dissuaded by what increasingly appears to be a volatile and destabilizing situation in Zimbabwe and worry about the potential contagion effect of the Zimbabwe crisis, especially given the fact that the land invasions in Zimbabwe triggered demands for similar efforts to redress the inequalities of the past in South Africa and Namibia (Van Wyk 2002:19-20).

7. INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Generally, international reactions have been varied and incoherent. Indeed, in the words of the International Crisis Group (ICG), "(i)nternational response has been divided, overstated, under-implemented and largely ineffectual", while "the Zimbabwean crisis has created divisions between Africa countries and the countries of the West" (International Crisis Group 2003:2). There are some interesting contrasts and parallels between international reactions to Rhodesia during the years of its Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in the 1960s and 1970s and responses to the Zimbabwean crisis. Some of these will be explored below.

8. BRITAIN AND OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES

British policy towards Zimbabwe has been glaringly ineffectual since the current crisis began. Britain's interventions have swung from attempts at negotiating with the Zimbabwe government, resort to what has been called "megaphone diplomacy"⁴ consisting of vociferous public denunciations of the Harare authorities, the imposition of international sanctions to efforts at building a multi-lateral position against Mugabe, to calls for "regime change". All these strategies have not been successful in either halting the crisis or resolving it (Taylor and Williams 2002:554). In some cases, British interventions have, in fact, worsened the situation.

An example is British Prime Minister Blair's statement in the House of Commons on 14 June 2004 that his government "was working with the MDC to effect regime change" in Zimbabwe and that it was "important that we give every chance to, and make every effort to try to help, those in South Africa - the southern part of Africa - to put pressure for change on the Mugabe regime, because there is no salvation for the people of Zimbabwe until that regime is changed". ZANU-PF spokesmen seized on this statement as proof that the MDC was, as they had long suspected, a British puppet and a creature of Blair's imperialist machinations. No wonder, the MDC president, Morgan Tsvangirai, was incensed by Blair's statement and publicly denounced it as "childish and politically naïve" (**Zimbabwe Daily Mirror** 2004).

Generally, British policy towards Zimbabwe has been mistargeted and ineffectual. In this sense, Britain's current policy is somewhat reminiscent of its equally ineffectual reaction to Ian Smith's UDI in 1965. There too, the British government was indecisive, opting to denounce UDI from a distance, to impose international economic sanctions rather than sending in troops to put down the rebellion as African nationalist leaders and many African heads of state advocated, and to engage Ian Smith in endless negotiations which resolved little (Young 1969; Metrowitch 1969; Windrich 1975; Hirsch 1973). According to Christopher Hill (2001:347), UDI and Britain's handling of it showed that Britain no longer had the power and influence to direct events in Rhodesia and had been reduced to a country "having responsibility but not power".

The UDI crisis was eventually resolved at Lancaster House which, in helping end the Rhodesian war and ushering in Zimbabwean independence, sowed the seeds of

⁴ The term is taken from Mbeki's description of the Australian Prime Minister's loud and open denunciation of Mugabe before the Abuja Commonwealth meeting in which he said, "We don't think that using megaphone diplomacy will work and we hope the Australian Government in particular will understand this position". See **The Australian**, 17 September 2003.

a future crisis through the "sunset" clauses of the Lancaster House Constitution that protected white capitalist interests, including land, for the duration of the Constitution and, thus, prevented any radical redistribution of land as per liberation movements' promise to their supporters during the war. Because Mugabe seemed content to safeguard the economic interests of the local white population, the British were quite happy to work with him and to hold his government up as a good example for African leaders to follow, even at the time that his Korean trained Fifth Brigade was carrying out massacres of the Ndebele people in Matebeleland that resulted in thousands of deaths of villagers in the so-called Dissidents War (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace 1997).

Britain's attitude towards Mugabe only began to change when Zimbabwe departed from the "willing buyer, willing seller" formula by passing the 1992 Land Acquisition Act authorising Government confiscation of land in return for compensation. Zimbabwe's violation of the sacrosanct tenets of neo-liberalism, particularly the sanctity of the market, was unacceptable to the British. Thereafter, throughout the 1990s, relations between the British governments and the Mugabe regime continued to sour and became decisively unfriendly as the decade unfolded, especially with the coming to power of the New Labour government under Tony Blair whose Secretary of State, Linda Chalker, denied that her country had any responsibility for the legacy of colonialism since her generation did not benefit from colonial rule.⁵ Relations worsened even more with the formation of the MDC and the subsequent farm invasions, which resulted in the murder of some white farmers.

Whereas until then the British Government had been willing to negotiate the land issue with the Mugabe government, thereafter British foreign policy seemed to move towards public condemnation of the Harare administration and calls for the assistance of South Africa and other African countries in effecting "regime change" and promoting "good governance" in Zimbabwe. The Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) and the MDC in Zimbabwe, who hoped that this would pressurise the Zimbabwe government into ending its campaign against the opposition forces, apparently encouraged the adoption of "megaphone diplomacy", but this only made Mugabe more intransigent and openly anti-Blair (Taylor and Williams 2002:554).

⁵ A letter from the New Labour Government's Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short, to Kumbirai Kangai, MP, Zimbabwe's Minister of Agriculture and Land, 5 November, 1997, reproduced in full in *New African*, February 2003, stated: "I should make it clear that we do not accept that Britain has a special responsibility to meet the costs of land purchase in Zimbabwe. We are a new Government from diverse backgrounds without links to former colonial interests. My own origins are Irish and as you know we were colonized, not colonizers."

"Megaphone diplomacy" was accompanied by a systematic campaign to demonise Mugabe in the British press as "an unhinged, corrupt and cynical tyrant who is out for white settler blood". British government ministers made it a point to denounce Mugabe's regime as corrupt, while all financial aid to Zimbabwe was cut and open support given to the MDC (Talbot 2004).

In May 2000, Britain imposed an arms embargo on Zimbabwe, stopped the provision of 450 British Land Rovers destined for the Zimbabwe Republic Police as part of a standing Britain-Zimbabwe agreement and, later, together with the European Union, imposed "smart" or targeted sanctions, namely, financial sanctions, travel bans, arms embargoes and commodity boycotts. General sanctions as those that had been imposed at UDI were rejected because they would worsen the suffering of the ordinary Zimbabweans.

The United States, on its part, passed the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Act laying down the criteria allowing Washington to put severe economic pressure on Zimbabwe. The Act also attacks land seizures without compensation, insisting that "the Government of Zimbabwe" must demonstrate "a commitment to an equitable, legal and transparent land reform program which should respect existing ownership of and title to property by providing fair, market-based compensation to sellers". It supports the opposition to Mugabe and his party's leadership and provides for American aid to a post-Mugabe government in Zimbabwe (Catalinotto 2000).

In March 2003, the Bush administration imposed sanctions on President Robert Mugabe and 76 members of his government. The sanctions "prohibit any US corporations from making business deals with Zimbabwe and also freeze any assets these Zimbabwean officials may have in US banking institutions"(Moorehead 2003). In line with American and British thinking with respect to the need for "regime change" in Harare, the then Secretary of State, Colin Powell, painted the following scenario in the **New York Times**: "With [Mugabe] gone, with a transitional government in place and with a date fixed for new elections, Zimbabweans of all descriptions would ... come together to begin the process of rebuilding their country. If this happened, the United States would be quick to pledge generous assistance to the restoration of Zimbabwe's political and economic institutions even before the election" (Powell 2003).

Meanwhile, at the Commonwealth meeting in Abuja and elsewhere, Britain pushed hard for a multilateral consensus on the need to condemn Zimbabwe, resulting in the country's suspension from the Commonwealth and its subsequent decision to withdraw from the body (**The Observer** 2003). This campaign was not very successful, especially in Africa where Mugabe continues to enjoy widespread

support and heads of state have repeatedly expressed their condemnation of Western calls for regime change.

For instance, Britain's call for SADC leaders to condemn Mugabe was rebuffed at a meeting of the SADC at Victoria Falls where "the heads of state gathered announced their support for Mugabe, declaring him to be a 'champion of the rule of law'". Similarly, Tanzania's President Mkapa strongly condemned what he called "sanctimonious" statements from the West about Zimbabwe and enjoined African leaders to continue to educate the West of the justice of Zimbabwe's cause (**Business Day** 2005). Western policy towards Zimbabwe in general and British policy in particular has failed to resonate with African, and indeed developing world perspectives, which are suspicious of Western motives and regard the Western attitude as arrogant, while admiring Mugabe's ability to stand up to the West and to dare to correct colonial inequities.

Taking advantage of this sentiment, Mugabe has shrewdly utilised a strongly Pan-African and anti-Western rhetoric that has successfully captured the support of some African heads of state, especially in the light of the fact that early British outrage at what was happening in Zimbabwe was expressed in terms of protest at the murder of white farmers, whereas no such outrage had been expressed when thousands of people had been killed in Matebeleland in the early 1980s and when Black MDC supporters and farm workers had been killed as part of the farm invasions. Africans saw this as evidence of hypocrisy and double standards on the part of the British government. This point was noted by the International Crisis Group in its October 2002 report which stated that "(t)he international media's over-concentration on the plight of white commercial farmers has given Mugabe's liberation rhetoric greater resonance in many African quarters, reinforcing belief that the West cares about Zimbabwe only because whites suffer" (International Crisis Group 2002:6).

Africans are also suspicious of the motives behind Britain and America's call for "regime change" in Zimbabwe, while the West is not calling for such a change in other countries that are experiencing similar or worse political problems such as the Sudan and Pakistan. In assessing British foreign policy, Taylor and Williams make the important point that the failure of many African élites publicly to criticise Mugabe's policies raises important questions about the Labour government's stated objectives in Africa and the strategies it is currently employing to achieve them ... recent events in Zimbabwe are a test both of the credibility of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and of whether an 'African moment' can be discerned in the manner articulated by Tony Blair during his recent tour of West Africa" (Taylor and Williams 2002:548).

This paper would argue differently, namely that the reluctance of many African élites to criticise Mugabe's policies should prompt the British government to re-examine why its motives are suspect in the eyes of the African élite, why, even though they may share Britain's commitment to promoting good governance in Africa, African élites do not want to be publicly identified with British or Western imposed solutions to African problems and why Blair and Bush's calls for regime change in Zimbabwe provoke such strong reactions from African leaders. As Margaret Lee points out, the arrogant prescriptions of the Bush and Blair governments calling for "regime change" have alienated African leaders and made it difficult for such leaders to come up with their own solutions to the Zimbabwean problem, apart from laying them open to the charge from Mugabe of being puppets of the West (Lee 2003). Moreover, Africans are deeply suspicious of Western motives particularly since it continues to champion neo-liberal economic strategies that have come to be associated with the economic havoc caused by IMF and World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes in Africa in the last three or so decades.

9. AFRICA/SOUTH AFRICAN REACTIONS

An interesting contrast is how African countries have responded to the present crisis as compared to their responses to UDI. As is well documented, UDI was met with outrage and strong denunciations on the African continent and elicited calls for Britain, the responsible colonial power, to intervene militarily to end Ian Smith's rebellion (Mlambo 2005b:147-72). The African countries' response was consistent with the Organisation of African Unity's mission, through its Liberation Committee, to support the struggle for liberation in those parts of Africa that were still colonised. At Commonwealth meetings and in the United Nations, African countries denounced the continued white minority rule in Rhodesia and the human rights abuses perpetrated by the government there. The Frontline States, demanding justice and fair play in Southern Rhodesia, provided all the logistical support that they could muster, participated in the international economic sanctions that were imposed on Rhodesia by the United Nations and gave their unstinting support to the liberation struggle until the country became independent in 1980.

In contrast, with one or two exceptions, African countries have been notably silent about the reports of human rights abuses perpetrated in the country since 2000 and have consistently supported Robert Mugabe and his government. At the meetings of the OAU's successor, the African Union, and other fora, some leaders, such as the former Namibian President, Sam Nujoma, and Benjamin Mkapa of Tanzania, have strongly and openly supported the Zimbabwean government's policies, despite widespread documentation of the political and economic crisis occurring in

Zimbabwe. Where, in the past, they were keen to participate in sanctions against the Ian Smith regime in the 1960s, they have been very reluctant to participate in sanctions against the Zimbabwe ruling élite, for example those imposed by the European Union and the American Government.

The reticence in condemning the Zimbabwe regime is not always evidence of support for the Zimbabwean government's policies, however. In fact, some African governments publicly cheered the Zimbabwean government as it drove white farmers off the land only to surreptitiously invite the same white farmers into their countries to develop their agricultural economies. Thus, white farmers kicked off the land in Zimbabwe amidst approving noises from the various African capitals, have been offered land in Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, the DRC and Nigeria, countries that appeared to be highly supportive of the so-called "Third Chimurenga" as a justified campaign to restore land to the Africans. The reasons for Africa's reluctance to condemn the Mugabe regime or to be seen to be siding with the Western powers against another African country are explored below in the discussion of South Africa's position on the Zimbabwean crisis.

Of all the African countries, the one whose reaction to the Zimbabwean crisis has been the most difficult for many to fathom and the most frustrating for the Zimbabwean opposition, is South Africa. Here is a country with the necessary economic clout to influence developments in Zimbabwe if it so wished. It is Zimbabwe's biggest trading partner in the region, it commands some of Zimbabwe's most important rail and road trade routes and it is one of Zimbabwe's major suppliers of electricity.

Moreover, South Africa's ruling African National Congress has had a long history of working together with Zimbabwe nationalist leaders, admittedly more with the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) than ZANU, which was more aligned to the Pan African Congress (PAC). Zimbabwe was at the forefront of the anti-apartheid campaign following its own independence in 1980. Indeed, as Jo-Ansie van Wyk has noted, South Africa and Zimbabwe have had a long and close relationship, which has gone "through all the motions of apartheid, destabilisation, liberation, decolonisation and democratisation" (Van Wyk 2002:1). In addition, South Africa is a leading member of the African Union and a champion of both the concept of the African Renaissance and the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), which envisages co-operation with the rich north in efforts to uplift the African economy and the standard of living of its peoples. Everything points towards South Africa's interest and commitment to good governance and economic prosperity on the African continent and, yet, the South African government has done little to help avert or mitigate the Zimbabwean crisis or

condemn the Harare regime for flaunting the very principles of good governance, economic prosperity and rule of law that South Africa espouses.

Indeed, it has consistently allied itself with the ZANU-PF government in Zimbabwe and has opposed the smart sanctions that the European Union has imposed on Zimbabwean government officials. On 8 June 2005, it was reported that the South African arms manufacturer, ARMSCOR, had ignored the European Union's arms embargo on Zimbabwe and sold the country spare parts for its Allouthe helicopters to the value of ZAR1 million to assist with repairs to the fleet which had long been grounded for lack of spare parts. In addition, ARMSCOR was also reported to have donated other military equipment worth ZAR 3 million (<http://www.newzimbabwe.com> June 8, 2005).

Dismissing criticism that South Africa was breaching European Union sanctions against Zimbabwe, Armscor spokesperson, Bertus Cilliers, stated that South Africa was not "part of the EU" and that the door would always be open for arms trade with Zimbabwe. He stated: "The EU has imposed sanctions, but South Africa is not part of the EU, we are not bound by any sanctions from the EU. As long as the South African government approves an export of arms to Zimbabwe, we will continue to do business" (**Financial Gazette**, Harare 2005).

There is a sense of *de ja vu* with respect to South Africa's attitude towards the crisis in its neighbour to the north, for at UDI, when the rest of the world came together to impose economic sanctions against Rhodesia, South Africa was one of the few states that refused to participate in the sanctions policy. Like the present government, the South African government then continued to support the Rhodesian economy by helping it break sanctions, subverting the international oil embargo, and acting as a conduit for Rhodesian exports and imports (Smith 1997:116). Indeed, until its own political and strategic position came under pressure in the 1970s and, in pursuit of its own national interest, it found it expedient to support a negotiated settlement between the African nationalists and the Smith regime in Rhodesia, it consistently thumped its nose at the world and interacted with Rhodesia regardless of world opinion. However, given the fact that South Africa then was under a white supremacist minority government, which shared the same worldview and sought to defend similar interests as Southern Rhodesia, it is not surprising that the South African government supported Ian Smith's government. South Africa's present support of Zimbabwe is, however, not so easy to understand.

Indeed, despite repeated reports of Zimbabwe's violation of human rights and suppression of dissent, South Africa has continuously shored up Zimbabwe's collapsing economy by maintaining its trade links and by granting the country

credit for the supply of electricity and other commodities. It has also repeatedly endorsed the results of Zimbabwe's successive elections since 2000 even when evidence has sometimes pointed to gross irregularities and other observer missions have raised serious doubts about the conduct of national elections. Meanwhile, from the beginning of the crisis, South Africa has insisted on pursuing a somewhat dubious policy of "quiet diplomacy", involving encouraging dialogue between ZANU-PF and the MDC and using other non-combative methods to try and resolve the Zimbabwean crisis. According to Van Wyk, South Africa's approach has generally involved applying, among other methods, "non-coercive diplomatic measures and non-violent strategies such as international appeals (moral persuasion to conflicting parties), fact finding missions, observer teams, bilateral negotiations, third party informal diplomatic consultations, track two diplomacy (by non-official, non-governmental parties), third party mediation, conciliatory gestures and economic assistance" (Van Wyk 2002:22).

All these methods, however, have not produced any tangible results as Zimbabwe has continued to plunge deeper into crisis.

Yet, there is no doubt that South Africa, now, as in Ian Smith's UDI days, wields a great deal of power over its northern neighbour and could exert considerable influence to change things for the better if it applied its mind to it. In the UDI period, once the government in Pretoria had decided that it was in its best interests to encourage the Rhodesian Government to talk with African nationalists, it brought its economic and other power to bear in such a way that Ian Smith and his colleagues had little choice but to comply. Similarly, Pretoria could influence developments in Harare for the better, if it so wished.⁶ In Bond's view, "The parallels between the last vicious outbursts of Mugabe's dictatorial regime and the demise of Rhodesian colonialism during the late 1970s are striking. In both cases, the South Africans have a strong hand given Zimbabwe's desperation and dependency - although instead of crucial military supplies serving as the key lever in the 1970s ... Pretoria now wields more control through trade and electricity sales" (Bond 2002).

Yet, South Africa continues its ineffectual policy of quiet diplomacy, which has been both perplexing and irritating, particularly, to the Zimbabwean opposition.

Eddie Cross of the MDC spoke for many Zimbabweans in the opposition movement when he expressed his frustration at South Africa's apparent "do-nothing" policy. He wrote: "It is now very apparent to anyone with half a brain that all is not

⁶ This interpretation is partly based on Patrick Bond, "Zimbabwe, South Africa, and the power politics of bourgeois democracy", *Monthly Review*, May 2002.

well in South Africa when it comes to handling the Zimbabwe crisis. Here we have a situation where by every measure, the ZANU-PF led government has failed – the economy is in tatters, half our population needs food aid, the quality of life for the majority has deteriorated to the point where nearly half the adult population has decamped. Almost all basic human and political rights are being abused and worse on a daily basis. And the regime lost its legitimacy because of a well-known and clearly exposed record of electoral fraud and abuse. Yet, the leadership in South Africa and many of its apologists insist on maintaining the position that things are 'improving' ...Its not out of ignorance, its not because they simply want to be perverse. What then is the reason - the real reason for this ridiculous stance?" (Cross 2005).

The reluctance of South Africa to be more actively engaged in resolving Zimbabwe's crisis is the more perplexing given the central role that the South African Government has played in resolving other crises on the African continent, including conflicts in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sudan and Cote d'Ivoire (Nyarota 2005). South Africa's attitude requires explanation.

10. ACCOUNTING FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S POLICY

The question arises why the South African government has continued to support a Zimbabwean administration in the face of all that has transpired since 2000 and, especially, given the fact of South Africa's foreign policy objectives, which are based on the need to strengthen Africa's institutions through the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), to promote the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as a vehicle for social and economic development on the continent, and to strengthen "bilateral political and socio-economic relations by way of effective structures for dialogue and co-operation" and the promotion of "democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance"(Mills 2005:2).

Explanations for South Africa's insistence on "quiet diplomacy" have been wide and varied. According to one school of thought, South Africa is reluctant to intervene in Zimbabwe's politics because he is "wary of the close links forged between the MDC, a trade union-based party and the powerful Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the ANC's most conspicuous political rival". Given the fact that a worker-based party, the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) in Zambia, successfully ousted Kaunda from power and a worker-based party, the MDC, emerged almost out of nowhere to pose a very serious challenge to the ruling ZANU-PF government in 2000, the ANC may be concerned that should the MDC succeed in toppling the Zimbabwe government, this might just send the

wrong message to COSATU about its own chances of challenging the ANC government in South Africa (Nyarota 2005).

Similarly, in Eddie Cross's view, South Africa's policy towards Zimbabwe is based on a fear of encouraging a split in South Africa's tripartite alliance of the ANC, SA Communist Party and Congress of Trade Unions (COSATU) (Cross 2005). Equally, Patrick Bond argues that "the sudden rise of an opposition movement based in the trade unions, quickly backed by most of civil society, the liberal petit-bourgeoisie and the independent media—potentially leading to the election of a new, post-nationalist government" in Zambia, particularly, caused "panic" in Pretoria and accounts for the ANC government's decision to either "hunker down and mindlessly defend the ZANU government against its critics"; or move into a "constructive engagement" mode that might serve as the basis for an "honest broker" role on some future deal-making occasion" (Bond 2002).

Another view highlights the fact that Mbeki has to be careful not to antagonise his own political support at home by being seen to alienate Mugabe, who is regarded in some circles in South Africa as a hero for standing up to the West and undertaking a land reform policy that seems to resonate with some sections of the South African population who are equally aggrieved by the prevailing land tenure system in the country. The fact that Mugabe was the only head of state to receive a standing ovation in May 2004 when he visited Pretoria to celebrate South Africa's tenth anniversary of the end of apartheid, could not have been lost to Mbeki and his government. Thus, in Greg Mills' (2005:5) view, Mbeki's policy toward Zimbabwe must be understood in the context of, among other things, "the history of race and colonialism in the region, and the resonance of these factors including ... land distribution domestically, and a belief that the alternatives, including criticism of Mugabe, will only marginalize the role to be played by external powers. This may explain why President Mbeki has endorsed the efforts of the Zimbabwean government in dealing with the colonial inheritance of inequitable racial land distribution, while at the same time arguing that his critics are wrong if they believe that Zimbabwe's leaders will simply obey what he tells them."

In any case, given the history of the liberation struggle in Southern Africa and the role that ZANU-PF and Mugabe played in it and the support they gave to the anti-apartheid cause, it is not easy for Mbeki, literally, a child of the struggle, and his colleagues who see themselves as fellow comrades to ditch him or be seen to turn against him, especially in the context of what are, sometimes, very crude efforts to demonise Mugabe by some segments of the South African press. Whatever his transgressions, for a variety of reasons Mugabe remains an influential and respected figure among liberation movements in Southern Africa. According to the

International Crisis Group (October 2002:18), "(t)here is great sensitivity throughout the continent about criticising a liberation movement such as ZANU-PF and attacking a leader so identified with the anti-colonial struggle as Mugabe. These sentiments are most pronounced in South Africa with its own liberation history. Some officials there even fear that the West is broadly targeting liberation movements beyond Zimbabwe. . . It is very difficult for Mbeki to break ranks with other African leaders and move against a fellow president who is widely perceived as waging an anti-colonial struggle. While colonialism seems a distant memory in most Western capitals, it is widely felt throughout Africa that economic neo-colonialism is fully intact."

Moreover, in South African ruling élite circles, the MDC is widely regarded as a creation of the West and a party representing the interests of white interests. This perception was entrenched in the eyes of its detractors when it entered into an alliance with the South African opposition, the Democratic Alliance, that is regarded in South Africa and Zimbabwe as "essentially, a white interests party". This explains why Mbeki and the ANC have shown little sympathy for the views of the MDC and have preferred to work closely with a sister liberation party with known struggle credentials, ZANU-PF (Nyarota 2005).

Given this situation and the fact that Mugabe shrewdly employs a Pan-African, anti-colonial and anti-Western rhetoric, it is difficult for Mbeki and other leaders in Africa to take positions on Zimbabwe that appear to be siding with former colonial masters against fellow nationalists and liberation fighters, thus running the risk of being labelled "sell-outs" or lackeys of Western imperialism. Clearly, Mbeki would not want to be labelled as such and, in any case, as an African leader who is determined that Africa should have a greater role in resolving crises on the Continent, he takes great exception to what he regards as Western interference and arrogance, especially with its call for "regime change" in Zimbabwe. Mbeki has repeatedly made it clear that he will not be pushed into participating in any regime change strategy, stating: "What (US) president (George W) Bush calls regime change is not going to happen ... The particular focus on Zimbabwe... suggests that particular agendas are being pursued here. And we are being dragooned to ... fulfil and implement other people's agendas. [<http://www.solidarity.co.za/home/content.asp>].

Consequently, Mbeki has consistently insisted that only Zimbabweans can determine their future. Thus, for Nyarota Mbeki's cautious approach to the Zimbabwean crisis has most likely been influenced by the "fear of being perceived to be prescribing a Western-sponsored solution to an African problem"(Nyarota 2005). Evidence of the truth of this argument is a statement by a leading ANC official, saying: "We will not fall into the agenda of the West. We will be very wary of

being seen to be working with the U.S. If we are perceived to be allying with the U.S., we will then be perceived by the region and the continent to be advancing the U.S. agenda. We will never have the West dictate to us about who will lead Zimbabwe (International Crisis Group 2002:19).

In addition, it has been argued that South Africans, like other Africans on the continent, resent what they see as the West's encroachment on African sovereignty when it appears to be issuing instructions on what they should do, especially with regard to developments on the African Continent. Hence the South African Deputy Foreign Minister, Aziz Pahad, could say: "We don't believe that their (Western) megaphone diplomacy and screaming from the rooftops has helped....If it is not diplomacy we pursue in dealing with Zimbabwe, then it is war. We will not go to war with Zimbabwe. We do not need to be lectured to about democracy, respect for the rule of law and human rights....What are they proposing we should be doing? Jack Straw and others must tell us what they expect SADC to do" (**Sunday Times** 2002).

Finally, a different view advanced by Dale McKinley (2005:1) is that South Africa's foreign policy towards Zimbabwe is largely driven by South Africa's economic interests, or, more specifically, the interests of certain classes in South African society that stand to benefit from the chaos in Zimbabwe. In his words, South Africa's foreign policy is driven by "the combined ... class interests of South Africa's emergent black and traditional (white) bourgeoisie" in both the public and private sectors. Thus, there is more continuity than change between South Africa's policy towards Rhodesia in the UDI years and its current policy under Mbeki, with South Africa being first and foremost concerned about expanding and consolidating its hegemony in the region and promoting its economic interests, the rhetoric of brotherhood and neighbourliness notwithstanding.

According to this view, it is in the interest of certain business classes in South Africa that Zimbabwe's economy should melt down in order to eliminate competition from the one economy that posed some challenge to South African economic hegemony and also to provide easy pickings for South African capital that is keen to invest more in the country. Thus, all talk about South Africa wanting to ensure that there is no collapse of "the sister Zimbabwean economy whose health is so important to South Africa" through providing credits to the Zimbabwean Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA) and being determined to avoid being seen as the "hegemon" in the region and to avoid "unilateralism", should not obscure the economic interests of the South African bourgeoisie (Mackinley 2005:3). Clearly, views on the motives behind South African and, by extrapolation, African reactions

to the Zimbabwe crisis differ but they all agree that responses have been ineffective and inadequate.

11. CONCLUSION

This article traced the origins of the Zimbabwean crisis over time and argued that farm invasions and the problems that developed from them have to be understood within the context of long-standing grievances over the land question stemming from colonial practices, the failure of the government to redress the inequities of the past after independence due to a number of factors, including the restrictive conditions of the Lancaster House Constitution, the reluctance of white farmers to avail land to the government for redistribution, inadequate funding and the Zimbabwean government's own ambiguous attitudes towards land reform, at least in the early years of independence. With the farm invasions of 2000 and the implementation of the, so-called, Third Chimurenga and the onset of the Zimbabwean crisis, characterised by political conflict, economic and social decay and massive outward migration of the Zimbabwean population, the international community reacted in different ways.

The article pointed out some similarities and differences in the reactions of the British and South African governments and attempted to understand the reasons behind the governments' reactions or policies. Lastly, it speculated on the causes behind the divergence of opinion between the Western governments, particularly Britain and the United States, and African governments over what needs to be done with respect to Zimbabwe and why the Zimbabwe issue seems to be dividing the world into a black and white polarised debate.

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