

SOUTH AFRICA'S MEDIATION SURROUNDING THE 2008 ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract. *The question of free and democratic elections in Zimbabwe is core to our present endeavour. We have analysed how South Africa mediated agreements between the political parties in Zimbabwe, resulting in a series of electoral reforms, decreased violence during the electoral process and, ultimately, a government of national unity. While the creation of an inclusive government formalized the success of South Africa as a mediating power, Zimbabwe was plagued by a struggle for power inside its central apparatus, whereby good governance principles were cast aside. Our research details the entire situation, ultimately providing an assessment based on several strings of IR theory and practice.*

Keywords: *theory of international relations, national unity, governance, inclusiveness, political conflict*

1. Introduction and short framework

Our paper focuses on the situation in which South Africa was called upon to intervene in Zimbabwe's national politics, as two opposing parties could not reach common ground before, during and after the elections taking place in 2008. Although this research piece is reliant on both liberalism and realism (in their classical and 'neo-' iterations), we have chosen to not put emphasis on the said theories of international relations (IR) at play, but rather provide a description of the events as they have unfolded and encourage readers to draw their own conclusions as to which paradigm can offer these events the most suitable interpretation. As what we have presented is not a matter of classical international relations, having quite a strong national component, rendering it in the light of IR theories might seem a stretch. However, one distinct element allows us to present the facts in this light: the presence of two states and the umbrella of an international organization the two are a part of. In addition, we feel compelled to note that several other IR theories could equally be accommodated in the present analysis. A Marxist interpretation, for example, would delve on the centre-periphery (or semiperiphery-periphery) relations at play in the struggle to reinforce democracy in Zimbabwe; another, reliant on critical theory would have us question how the power relations between South Africa and Zimbabwe came to existence – either through colonialist theories or those of hegemony. To provide another example: a social constructivist interpretation – belonging to the discourse theory string – could have us deconstruct how hegemonic discourses shift under the impetus of superimposed, external narratives.

That being said, we will not diverge any longer - rather we will briefly present some theoretical aspects, which can be used to guide any reader through this piece of literature, namely: what international (governmental) organizations and mediation are, and what liberalism and realism entail.

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International organizations are both stake-holders in the democratization of global spaces and normative institutions in charge of shaping and sometimes enforcing the rules of the political game for their members, both regionally and globally. They are reliant on their member states for their mandates and the power they yield, and, in return, offer clear rules of engagement to those members, concomitantly answering calls for good or effective governance. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is one of these entities.

Realism as a theory of IR is tributary to self-help, statism and survival. By overly simplifying, one might say realism argues that states are the only important actors in an anarchic and threatening international system, and that they can only rely on their own power in order to ensure their survival. Neorealism was created as an adaptation of classical realism, in order to make the latter fitting to the global situation of the late 1970's. It was developed by Kenneth Waltz (1979) and many other theoreticians, and, contrary to the first, incorporates liberalism's view that power can be attained through non-military means. For realists, the focus is mostly on relative gains, albeit neorealism also takes into consideration absolute ones.

Liberalism, on the other hand, sees the world with different eyes, arguing for state interdependence as a way for ensuring perpetual peace and the presence of international institutions as regulators of anarchy. It fathoms that the ultimate goal of nation-states and other actors is not mere survival in solitude, but achieving a common good from which all can benefit. For liberalism, absolute gains are the only ones states should take into consideration in their interaction with counterparts. Both classical and neoliberalism have three forms: internationalism, idealism and institutionalism.

Mediation is a way of dealing with conflict resolutions, with a long-standing history in both its formal and informal strains. Moore (1996: 15) defines mediation as:

"the intervention in a standard negotiation or conflict of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power but who assists the involved parties in voluntarily reaching a mutually acceptable settlement of issues in dispute".

In other words, mediation is a form of arbitration, in which an impartial third party is called upon to ensure that negotiations succeed. The particular mediation process, in which a country's leader is mandated by an international governmental organization to help conflicting counterparts reach an agreement in the realm of national politics is not entirely fitting to the practice of liberalism, nor can it fully be accommodated and explained by realist theories.

2. The birth of SADC backed mediation between Zimbabwean parties

Free and fair elections not only represent the core of democracy, but are the true litmus test for determining regional security and peace. In Zimbabwe, another condition needs to be added to the mix: that of lack of violence, granted that since the early 2000's, the electoral process had been disrupted by violent outbreaks. In pursuit of the ideal of free and fair elections, the SADC Heads of States codified the prerequisites of such an endeavour in the SADC Principles and Guidelines for Democratic Elections during a 2004 Summit in Mauritius. Although the said principles were not binding, being seen as something to draw inspiration from and, moreover, were subject to domestic law, Zimbabwe introduced new electoral laws shortly after their creation. The Zimbabwean Electoral Commission (ZEC) Act, for example, gave the ZEC exclusive rights regarding voter education and issues related to the electoral process (The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Act, 2004: Chapter 2.12). The Electoral Act repelled a previous piece of

legislation with the same name and introduced a number of noteworthy reforms such as same-day voting or ballot counting in voting stations (Ibid., Chapter 2.13). The Electoral Act also took away the President's powers "to suspend or amend any provision of any law in so far as it applied to an election" (Sibanda, 2014: 34), which was hailed as a great leap forward, especially given past incidents. While the SADC had been invaluable in setting guidelines, in this research piece we will refer to something equally important: ensuring that these guidelines, alongside other prerequisites for a democratic election process are met, through mediation.

3. The need for mediation to resolve internal political conflict

The SADC had been involved in informal mediation in Zimbabwe since 2000, previously culminating with the vexed 2002 presidential elections¹. In the case of this particular SADC-mandated mediation, we will refer to attempts to resolve election- and governance-related conflicts in Zimbabwe. In 2007, a series of events sparked the interest of SADC, which had already been attacked by critics for its failure to tackle the systematic decline in Zimbabwe. On March 11, members of the 'Save Zimbabwe' campaign – renowned Robert Mugabe critics, mostly comprising opposition leaders and civil society representatives – were getting prepared to participate in a prayer alongside supporters gathered in Harare. Police forces intervened violently, beating numerous people present at the gathering, after the former had failed to stop the entire event from taking place. Although freedom of speech and of gathering had been enshrined in Zimbabwe's democratic constitution, Mugabe's inner circle and his loyalists have never shun away from using undemocratic practices to silence their critics and force them into submission. This had been yet another of those instances. As a result of the wave of violence, the SADC organized a special summit in Tanzania, later that month, to discuss the governance crisis that was unfolding in Zimbabwe. Overwhelmingly, the SADC members' leaders expressed their dissatisfaction with the situation and a decision was taken to mandate South Africa to intervene. The decision was a result of two factors: South Africa wielded enough power inside the SADC, being the regional hegemon; and, respectively, it was perceived as both interested and benign enough to intervene in the very delicate situation of Zimbabwean national politics. South Africa's interest resided in the fact that restlessness across its North-Eastern border could affect its security, the interests of its economic actors deployed on Zimbabwean territory and its overall plans for the region. The government in Pretoria had a good reputation in Harare for it had stayed relatively silent to the numerous slippages of the Mugabe regime at times when other international players would have taken decisive actions against the latter.

4. South Africa accepting its mediation duties

In May 2007, South Africa's president, Thabo Mbeki received his official mandate from the SADC to mediate an agreement between the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party and the political opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which had previously split into two factions, namely MDC-M

¹ Before the incident of 11 March 2007, SADC's efforts were part of the AU's broader approach to identify political solutions through surreptitious work done by former presidents Mbeki, Obasano, Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique and some former AU chairs.

and MDC-T². Mbeki was to report to the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Troika. The result of successful negotiations would inevitably lead to alleviating some pressure from both the political and economic environments in Zimbabwe, which had been in turmoil for some time. The negotiations that were going to take place had two main objectives, quintessentially relating to the upcoming election: the election needed to be harmonized - combining the parliamentary, the presidential and the local government elections - and a consensus needed to take shape on the steps to be taken for the ballot to run smoothly for all those involved, so that results would be representative of and accepted by Zimbabweans (Solidarity Peace Trust Staff). Upon receiving the mandate from SADC, Mbeki (2007) also declared that his personal objective in the issue is to:

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

The three parties involved agreed on negotiations, albeit for different reasons and despite grave mistrust both in one another and in Mbeki. ZANU-PF had deflected the continuous criticism of the international community for a decade, whilst traditional allies from the SADC had supported the Mugabe reign. In recent times however, the SADC had gradually shifted its views and policies on Zimbabwe and had started insisting that negotiations be carried out successfully. The MDC-M saw this as an opportunity to remain relevant in national politics, for it had been cast aside by its stronger sibling, the MDC-T, run by Morgan Tsvangirai. The latter viewed negotiations as a facile route towards obtaining power, on the one hand hoping that Mugabe would make strategic mistakes during the negotiations, and, on the other, because pre-election polls were showing that it would overtake ZANU-PF. Relating to trust, the two MDC factions didn't see Mbeki as a particularly credible mediator, for he had opposed Western intervention in Zimbabwe on every possible occasion and had never taken into consideration a more forceful approach from behalf of South Africa or international institutions in subjects dealing with their country. Furthermore, the historic links between the African National Congress (ANC), Mbeki's political party and ZANU-PF were infamous and provided another reason for mistrust.

In Mugabe's case, one might argue that a SADC mandate could have meant the realization that even his regional peers had reached a tipping point with regards to his governmental actions.

5. Brokering the for the alleviation of violence

Under Mbeki's mediation, painstaking negotiations took place, ultimately resulting in a tripartite agreement, which provided that a series of electoral reforms were required. It is our firm belief that the level of violence in the elections was greatly reduced due to these negotiations – especially if we were to refer to the run-off stage. However, that's when a second wave of problems started to surface: the results of the 29 March 2008 elections were only announced after five weeks since the vote had been cast, allowing many critics, both international and domestic, to speculate that the delay was used to manipulate the outcome (McGreal, Tran: 2008). While this may have been the case, we consider the possibility that the delays were caused by the ZEC's realization that the ZANU-PF party would be angry with the results, and it needed preparing, as not to further escalate violence. The ZEC had been under strong pressure, both internally and

² In 2005 the MDC split in two distinct opposition parties: MDC-N(cube), later MDC-M(utambara), led by Arthur Mutambara, and a larger entity, the MDC-T(svangirai), presided by Morgan Tsvangirai.

from international actors. At the SADC summit in Lusaka, in April, which Tsvangirai attended whilst Mugabe did not, Zimbabwean authorities had been urged to release the result expeditiously, and the SADC even offered to send observers, if needed ('Communique', 2008). Tsvangirai (cited in The Independent Staff, 2008) claimed that the elections had not been free, nor fair and that even if MDC wins, he believes that ZANU-PF was trying to subvert popular will. Mugabe, on the other hand, boldly stated on the day of the vote "*We are not in the habit of cheating. We don't rig elections*", further adding that the guilt of such actions would cause him insomnia (Mugabe cited in 'A Report on the Harmonized', 2008: 59). Mbeki remained non-confrontational and, after meeting Mugabe, said there was "*no crisis*" (Mbeki cited in Russell, 2008) in Zimbabwe over the delayed announcements of election results.

The released results showed that Morgan Tsvangirai of MDC-T won 47.9% of the presidential vote, topping the incumbent president Robert Mugabe, whom accumulated 43.2%. (Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, 2008)

In its preliminary report issued on 30 March, the SADC observer mission assessed the election positively, despite some concerns being raised. The mission's head, Jose Marcos Barrica (cited in Reuters Staff, 2008), recounted the election as "*a peaceful and credible expression of the will of the people of Zimbabwe*", adding that the elections had been free of violence.

The MDC was 2.11% shy of a historic victory, being defeated in the majority of rural districts – despite the electorate was expecting ZANU-PF to lose by a wide margin (ZESN Staff, 2008). Yet again, the rural communities, in which the land restitution issue was weighing heavily and which were receptive to Mugabe's rhetoric had pulled through and had secured the president a second chance. Mugabe's second chance in the 2008 presidential ballot came in the form of a run-off. Initially, the MDC dismissed any potential run-off, arguing that the vote had been rigged, particularly to award Mugabe another chance.

The international community, whilst overwhelmingly observing that the election process had been carried out in (far) better conditions than in the past, was not satisfied with the result. This second round was held on 27 June 2008, amid allegations of widespread electoral flaws and institutionalised violence. It ended with a regression to the pre-29 March era and the infringements of several rights, such as that of choosing one's leaders. Tsvangirai announced on April 15 that he was willing to participate in the run-off only if certain conditions were met: the SADC was to oversee the election, the election was to be conducted "*transparently, freely and fairly*", and all international observers were to be allowed to monitor it (Tsvangirai cited in Sibanda, 2008). Two days later, while in Johannesburg, Tsvangirai said that Mbeki should be "*relieved of his duties*" (Tsvangirai cited in Russel, 2008) as mediator, and asked the Zambian President to "*lead a new initiative ...that will expand beyond that of Mr Mbeki*" (ibid.).

In the pre-run-off stage, violence erupted and, as a result, Tsvangirai decided not to run anymore. On 22 June 2008, he made a formal announcement, motivating his withdrawal on the escalation of political violence and intimidation. As a result, Mugabe ran unchallenged and was declared the winner within 48 hours, in time to participate to an AU summit in Egypt. At the summit, the elephant in the room needed to be addressed, thus the AU mandated the SADC to resume its mediation, noting that the crisis had not ended. In 2002, Mbeki had tried to foster a government of national unity (GNU), heading straight to Harare after Mugabe was sworn-in as president. He asked Mugabe for a GNU and to appoint Tsvangirai vice-president, an honorary position such as that received by F.

W. de Klerk in Mandela's government (Bond, 2002). While Mbeki's proposal was inspired by South Africa's 1994 elections, it seems that Mugabe found no such inspiration in the historical events of its neighbouring state and refused to reward the MDC in any way. Tsvangirai, for his part, was reluctant to push for such a position, knowing that a victory in this battle could mean a loss of trust from his electorate and, consequently, demobilization in the war against ZANU-PF. This time, the situation was different and Tsvangirai knew another chance could not be wasted.

6. The idea(l) of national unity

After the results of the 2008 elections, the SADC was compelled to mandate South Africa, as to allow for a solution to be attained with regards to the key political actors in Zimbabwe. Compromise needed to be reached in order to prevent a political conflict with unforeseeable repercussions, hence Mbeki proposed an inclusive government that, in his mind, would satisfy everyone and put an end to the political standstill. The environment in Zimbabwe had been polarized to such a degree that bridging political opponents, no matter how difficult, seemed the only sustainable solution. Nonetheless, what Mbeki set out to do was not going to be an easy task, as each party had its own distinctive interests and its own apparatus that needed to be taken into consideration. ZANU-PF had to accommodate the needs of an oppressive apparatus encompassing militias, the police, the military and secret services. Each faction of the MDC needed to represent labour unions and the power structures from law and order, the judiciary and CSOs that had not been co-opted by ZANU. Furthermore, there were distinctive economic elites backing each party, whom needed something in return for their support³.

It is our opinion that Mbeki could have drawn inspiration for his proposal from the GNU formed by the ANC, the National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party in 1994, which capitalized by creating South Africa's first truly democratic constitution. Mugabe, on the other hand could have agreed, remembering the past experiences involving unity arrangements. In 1987, amongst civil turmoil, ZANU and ZAPU had signed the Zimbabwe National Unity Accord, a document which vastly favoured the former and ultimately lead to the formation of ZANU-PF. Mugabe knew that the MDC was a tougher nut to crack under the new political conditions than ZAPU had been in the past, still the president of Zimbabwe was more inclined to accept an inclusive cabinet than his opponent, Morgan Tsvangirai. Furthermore, after the independence of 1980, ZANU-PF constantly had to negotiate power with elites –Rhodesian settlers at first, business owner later - as arguably, even the liberation was won by negotiation, not by a full-fledged war. Mugabe had enough time to constantly accustom himself with the stratagems of staying in power. The MDC-T, however, fought the idea vocally from the get-go. One prominent member, went as far as saying “*We won't touch a government of unity – over my dead body, under no circumstances. The people will never accept a GNU*” (Bennet cited in Goodwin, 2009: 179). The will of the people, while constantly supportive of democracy, was nonetheless more tamed, or perhaps tameable. We argue that other reasons were taken into account by all actors when reaching a decision on the possible GNU. History has taught us that GNUs are not the most stable governance forms, or as one author puts it, “*GNUs are fragile, acrimonious, usually transitional arrangements with a high risk of disintegrating at the slightest opportunity*” (Mwanaka, 2015: 15). This particularly

³ ZANU-PF was mostly backed by black business owners, while the MDC had the support of the international business community.

worried the MDC factions which were willing to cede power, while they observed that Mugabe has no intention of sorts.

Obediah Mazombwe (2008), renowned Mugabe loyalist, wrote before the run-off in 'The Herald' newspaper – one of ZANU-PF's mouthpieces that SADC friends and neighbours must encourage a GNU and help create "*a new constitution for Zimbabwe, which would be adopted only after a national referendum*". Mazombwe's article was contested by ZANU-PF officials, which could lead one to believe that Mugabe was sending covert signals, manifesting his interest for a GNU, but only if allowed to keep his presidential seat. Another interpretation is that Mugabe had no such interest, but used Mazombwe to further confuse MDC leaders. We stand by the first, because it is consonant with Tsvangirai's claims that Mugabe had sent envoys immediately after the election, to propose the formation of a government of national unity, but talks had broken down because ZANU-PF hard-liners (Tsvangirai cited in BBC News Staff, 2008). Thus, the run-off, the murders and the multitude of outbursts of violence could have possibly been avoided if the SADC and South Africa's president were more inclined to acknowledge all available information. A tougher stance by either the regional hegemon's chief or the SADC could have led to avoiding the entire carnage. We consider that Mbeki, for his part, saw a personal victory in the way elections had been conducted and appraised his mediation as a closed case. If one round of the election went satisfactory – albeit only to some degree – he figured out that there was no reason for things to go worse in another stage. However, to use a modified phrase from one of Africa's most fierce past dictators, while freedom of choice was guaranteed, freedom after the initial choice was not (Amin Dada cited in Hadejia, 2007)⁴.

We will not provide a full description of what happened before the run-off, but we will summarize using the SADC observer mission's preliminary report, which argued that the period was characterized by politically motivated violence that resulted in property damage, serious injuries and deaths (SADC Election Observer Mission, 2008: 4). In addition, both candidates publicly acknowledged that they will not agree with, nor respect the results of the ballot, thus breaching the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (Ibid.: 4-5).

7. The birth of a self-consuming political matrimony

After extensive negotiations, 11 February 2009 marked the inauguration of Zimbabwe's transitional IG. The festivities were pompous, for its birth represented the culmination of a long and difficult process that had commenced five months earlier, when the Global Political Agreement (GPA) was signed. Both of these occasions were considered historic moments, markedly returning the country to a climate of normality and towards democratic principles. Or at least that's what SADC leaders thought at the time. Finally, the West had been silenced on the Zimbabwe issue, but it did not have any reason to quarrel, as 'African solutions to African problems' had been identified and applied. Thabo Mbeki basked in the sun, for he had been appointed by the SADC to help mediate Zimbabwe's political crisis and it seemed he managed to do just that successfully.

⁴ The initial statement of Idi Amin Dada, President of Uganda throughout 1971-1979 goes as follows: "*There is freedom of speech but I cannot guarantee freedom after speech*".

In that GNU, however, ZANU-PF secured all the relevant ministries⁵, except for the Finance Ministry, where Tendai Biti had the power to push forth MDC ideals (Mwanaka, op. cit.). This was not the only ministry awarded to the MDC, but in most cases, even when the Minister belonged to the MDC, the core of the staff was still composed of ZANU-PF supporters or members, making it really difficult for ‘democratic change’ to be implemented. The weak implementation of the democratization processes heavily advertised by Tsvangirai prior to the elections was also due to his personal failure as a prime minister. The power arrangements had been tailored in such a way that the prime minister had to report directly to the president, and not to parliament, where his party had substantially more power (Ibid.). In doing so, Tsvangirai became more or less a ceremonial leader, seeking presidential approval for his cabinet’s policies. Mugabe was not a forgetful man; accordingly, he never buried the hatchet of war, nor did he intend to allow MDC to severely impact the country’s condition or its behaviour in international politics. When he was not fighting Mugabe, Tsvangirai had to fight the ZANU’s appointed ministers, whom theoretically had to respond, directly to him, but, in practice, were only taking orders and advice from their sending party. Thus, Tsvangirai used the part of the cabinet whom was responsive to his wishes to check and balance the other part of the cabinet - being involved in a constant struggle for power. The MDC continuously voiced its concerns with regards to several officials, from diplomats to provincial governors and senior public servants. ZANU-PF was strengthening its position, taking a firmer grip on financial institutions, by appointing Gideon Gono to be the Reserve Bank’s Governor, and on the judiciary, whom it had pushed into submission several times throughout recent history, thus wilfully breaching the separation of state powers principle. This time, ZANU-PF succeeded in appointing a new Attorney-General, without prior consultations with Tsvangirai or Mutamabara. The new appointee was seen as favourable to ZANU and to Mugabe, and represented a way to provide party members some form of immunity (David Coltart Staff Reporter, 2011). With the aid of the flawed judiciary - in which some justices get protection, while other get ousted and the power-structures it had shaped for decades, ZANU-PF got some MDC members of parliament arrested (The Zimbabwean Staff Reporter, 2017), proving that the struggle for power was far from over as the GNU was only in its cradle. ZANU-PF, on the other hand, was accusing the MDC of establishing parallel power-structures, especially through the office of the prime minister.

The SADC had retracted, leaving the three parties in power to monitor and evaluate if the GPA was being implemented, through a Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC). Instead of either monitoring externally or creating an independent structure to handle the chore, the SADC decided to let the coalition take care of the issue, essentially making them defendants and jury members concomitantly. As a result, the effectiveness of the JOMIC decreased with time. Furthermore, as one member of the committee announced, interaction with the SADC was limited, even if the latter relied on JOMIC to assess the situation in Zimbabwe (Mushonga cited in News Day Staff, 2011). Lack of communication implied that Zimbabweans were left to pursue their democratization and problem-solving processes. Here, the question of sovereignty comes to mind. Did the SADC want to be non-invasive and not to breach sovereignty? If this was the case, we consider that the institution should have learned from past mistakes. Surely, now it had the conditions to get involved more: Mugabe’s anti-imperialist discourse was

⁵ Ministries of: Defence, Security, Justice, Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, Mining, and, in part the Ministry of Home Affairs.

still strong, but not directed against the Development Community. All parties had allowed the involvement of the SADC and South Africa in mediation; in fact, MDC was still calling for aid, including with regards to this issue. Allowing ZANU-PF to pursue its own plans, without fear of retaliation, even if only verbal, was a clear path to disaster. ZANU-PF dragged issues and threatened to collapse the GNU and the GPA several times (Dzinesa, Zambara, 65). By 2011, South Africa observed what going on, and it approached the issue, but several occasions had already been missed.

8. Interpretation and conclusive remarks

Is what we have presented a story of failure or one of success? Is it a story of institutionalism or does it incarnate realist claims that institutions are just the cover in which pure statism unfolds? None of the two questions posed above has an easy, trenchant answer. On the one hand, this might be a story of success, albeit not a resounding one, for the initial situation was far worse than the outcome of the consecutive stages of mediation. The implication of the SADC did ensue some democratic progress, an alleviation of violence and a (somewhat) functioning government of national unity in Zimbabwe. On the other hand, possible failure resides in the inability to mediate the creation of a government for the people, rather than one that gets consumed by the constant pursuit of the forestalling and the maintaining of political power. It is a story of structural neoliberal institutionalism, inasmuch as a state of national political anarchy – in which political parties threaten to ignore the rules of engagement codified in national and international law– can be mediated through the usage of international regimes and institutions such as the SADC. It is a tale of realism, for under the framework of an institution, we see statism unfolding: one powerful state - arguably the regional hegemon, is mandated (somewhat by choice) to mediate between the opposing political forces in another. South Africa did so in pursuit of its own foreign policy objectives, which, amongst others included ensuring regional stability – vital for its own dominance or, better put, the survival of its position. It is a story of liberalism, for in the absence of one overarching institution to call it him to action, South Africa's president would have been surely accused of breaching sovereignty and acting as a neo-imperialistic power, if trying to tackle the internal power struggles of its neighbour. Furthermore, in its attempt to spread democracy to a space in which a democratic deficit was becoming apparent, South Africa worked for a stable social environment in Zimbabwe, which is a *sine qua non* condition for the stability and prosperity of the region. It is a story of liberalism, for absolute gain was the focus of South Africa in its interaction. Strong economic, cultural and political ties with Zimbabwe were determinant factors in how the mediation process was conducted.

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