

**ZIMBABWE-BOTSWANA RELATIONS UNDER PRESIDENTS ROBERT MUGABE  
AND IAN KHAMA C. 2008-2017: A CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper analyses the relations between Zimbabwe and Botswana which have been characterised by tension, confrontation, and cooperation. It is informed by constructivist approach in order to unpack how the relations between the two have been influenced by the construction of different realities. The paper makes an observation of Zimbabwe-Botswana relations around a plethora of factors which include; Khama criticism of the regime, migration and unchecked Zimbabwe migrants, Botswana's liberal attitude towards Zimbabwe's democratization process and Harare attitude towards Gaborone for hosting USA Africa Command, foot and mouth, security cooperation versus security dilemma, trade ties, border disputes, military and economic diplomatic attachés, perspectives on elections.*

**Key words:** *Zimbabwe, Botswana, small states relations, Constructivism.*

**Introduction**

Since the attainment of Botswana's independence in 1966, Botswana has been viewed as a beacon of democracy in Southern Africa and in the African continent at large in terms of managing its domestic affairs as well as power transition as an emerging state. Botswana ranks fair than most of the African countries in the world democracy indices. Zimbabwe-Botswana international Relations are hardly studied, explored and examined. One immediately notes that the study of relations between small states such as Botswana and what can be regarded as a middle power state such as Zimbabwe are often neglected in the study in the study of international relations. Small states have been judged as vulnerable victims or reactors to external circumstances that often have no option but to gang-up or opt out of international politics (Berwell 2011; Graham, 2017).The interactions between such states are

neglected and this has led to the dearth of literature, analysis and relations between the two states. The reluctance to study relations between Small and Medium states appears to suggest that the pursuit of trying to understand their patterns of interactions, drivers in relations, modes and methods of communication is irrelevant, a futile pursuit, unimportant as studies have often examined South Africa's international relations, South Africa's relations with the Southern African region, the role of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), South Africa's relations with BRICS as well as South Africa's role in mediation, conflict resolution, peacemaking her relations with middle such as Angola and Zimbabwe and her Apartheid international relations. This has created an impression among academics, researchers that international relations between small and middle states are unimportant, the paper seek to re-insert into international relations discourse and analysis of small and middle states relations.

The ascension to power of Emerson Mnangagwa as President of the Republic of Zimbabwe has witnessed a thawing of relations between the two countries. The two countries seem to have hit the reset button with respect to the nature of their relationship which was characterised by mistrust, tension, conflict, and suspicion and hostility which was palpable between Robert Mugabe and Ian Khama. The relationship between the two leaders was frosty, tense, and unfriendly characterised by what can at best be described as animosity between the two. This can be substantiated by the fact that the Zimbabwean President never paid a state visit to Botswana under Khama's rule, Bwititi (2018) notes that 'it had been a decade since a Zimbabwean Head of State went to Botswana on a State visit...' an indication of how unfriendly relations were between Mugabe and Khama. Interestingly, one observes that this had not always been the case, relations between the two had been characterised by good neighbourliness, co-operation, mutual respect, friendliness and like all relations between allies occasional friction, misunderstandings and tension, but never enough to warrant a boycott from each other's countries by the respective leaders. Botswana which attained her independence in 1966 contributed towards the liberation of Zimbabwe from the throes of the racist Rhodesian settler regime. She provided shelter, sanctuary and safe passage for the two main liberation movements which were waging a bitter war against the minority regime of Ian Douglas Smith following the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1965. When Zimbabwe attained independence on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1980, the two countries continued to work together but the economic deterioration in

Zimbabwe from about the year 2000 as well as the political repression, political violence, a lack of democratic space witnessed Zimbabweans migrating to various parts of the world, Southern Africa and Botswana became a host to a number of Zimbabwean economic migrants. Mugabe's rhetoric and brand of politics did not sit well with the younger Khama who represented a new breed and generation of Southern African leaders and leadership, Khama laid the blame for the putrefaction squarely at the feet of Robert Mugabe whom he publicly berated and criticised for having overstayed in office, for bad governance, corruption and running the country and its economy down. Mugabe did not take kindly to what he considered interference in internal Zimbabwean matters as well as the fact that the criticism was coming from one younger than him. Regarding himself as an elder statesman and a representative of Pan-Africanism, Mugabe felt that Khama's rebuke and criticism was unbecoming and unAfrican.

The two Southern African neighbours' relationship faced a challenge with what Harare perceived to be interference from Gaborone in its domestic affairs, Gaborone's comments regarding democracy or a lack of it in upset Harare and was seized upon as evidence of a 'Big Brother' and hegemonic attitude. Harare often accused Gaborone of being a stooge, an outlet and outpost of Western, American interests which sought to destabilise Harare. In essence, Harare viewed Gaborone as a staging port to be used by Britain and the United States of America to launch an assault upon the sovereignty of Harare which projected itself as upholding the values and ideology of Pan-Africanism. Despite these differences, Zimbabwe and Botswana share a number of similarities which compel them to co-operate, nature and geography binds them together as both are landlocked, further to that they share a border the Plumtree border-post, they are trade partners as Zimbabwe acts as a Transit State for Botswana, both members of the Southern African Development Community ( SADC), body which compels both states to mutually co-operate in order to advance the interest of the region in various sectors such as trade, peace and security, economic integration, health, combating climate change and education, they are in the African Union, this bounded both countries to cooperate. The casualty in this toxic relationship was the cordial, convivial relations between the two countries.

The study of small states as well as Zimbabwe-Botswana relations is still a relatively new and has not been explored sufficiently. This is hardly surprising as the study of International Relations mainly focusses on big powers be they global powers or regional hegemonies, in

Southern Africa, South Africa has attracted the most attention although lately Angola is turning out to be of interest to analysts and scholars. Studies on relations between the two have therefore been at the periphery and side-lines of academia with very little being written. The paper therefore sets out to fill the lacunae by analysing Zimbabwe's relations towards Botswana which have been characterised by cooperation, tension and suspicion.

### **A Constructivist Approach to Zimbabwe-Botswana Relations**

This paper is anchored upon the tenets of constructivism which is a sharp break and contrast to realism which tends to dominate discourses when studying relations between states. Realists tend to view states as selfish, interested in self-preservation, their own survival, their own security-essentially protecting themselves in a world that is anarchical. However, constructivists argue that it is not the material that informs the behaviour (s) of states but place at the epicentre of the debate and discourse the role of ideas, images and by extension ideology and how this has an influence on how state's interact and their relations with each other. Constructivism is a theory of international relations that emphasizes the construction of international politics. This is opposed to neorealist view that international politics is shaped by the rational choice behaviour and decision of egoistic actors who pursue their interests by making utilitarian calculation to maximise their benefits and minimise their losses (Waltz, 1979, Wendt, 1996). It is a structural theory which makes the following critical aims (a) the key structures in the states are inter-subjective rather than material, (b) states identity and interests are important part constructed by those structures rather than exogenously to the system by the humans. It is important to observe that, just like human beings states are living in the world of our making characterised by the discourse of norms, identity and culture. Constructivism conceives international politic as a sphere of interaction which is shaped by the actors' identities, practices and constantly influenced by changing institutional structures. For constructivists, Zimbabwe's attitude towards Botswana especially shifted from one of cooperation, towards one of confrontation and conflict Botswana was perceived as a player which sought to maximise its outcomes at the expense of Zimbabwe, a player that was a conduit for neoliberal ideology, regime change and disruptive to the political structure and liberation party political ideology of ruling parties in the region at large.

This paper is qualitative in nature and data was collected through reading newspaper articles. The newspapers were used because they constitute the primary sources of the information analysed from Botswana and Zimbabwe.

### **Change, Continuity, Confrontation and Co-operation**

The 1960s shaped initial relations between the two countries. This was the era known as ‘the winds of change’ when African countries became independent and colonialists were decolonising. After gaining its independence in 1966, Botswana supported and encouraged the independence of the Black majority rule in Southern Africa against minority white. This was in tandem and in line with the vision of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) which desired to see an independent Africa free from colonial rule. It was therefore natural that Botswana though not having been birthed through the pangs of a war of liberation soon found herself as playing host to liberation movements from Zimbabwe which was known as Southern Rhodesia at the time. It is clear that Botswana’s support for Zimbabwean independence laid the seeds for Botswana’s cooperative engagement with Zimbabwe. Botswana’s commitment towards the independence of Southern African countries is gleaned from its participation in the Frontline States (FLS), which was an alliance of the independent countries of Southern Africa established in 1975 by Zambia, Tanzania and Botswana to dismantle white colonial rule and Apartheid in the region (Bhebhe, 2014). From a constructivist perspective, one notes that Botswana was presenting itself as supporting the cause of African majoritarian rule; she selflessly put herself in danger for the cause of Zimbabwean independence despite her vulnerability to attacks by the two heavyweight militaries in the region-the Rhodesians and the South Africans. She provided invaluable material, logistical, diplomatic and political support to Zimbabwe’s nationalist movements in their fight and quest for independence. Zimbabwe People’s revolutionary Army (ZPRA) freedom fighters used Botswana as a transit state enroute to their military bases in Zambia (Chakamwe, 2016).

Botswana provided sanctuary to the liberation fighters from Zimbabwe operating in exile for security reasons for instance, both Zimbabwe Africa Nation Unity (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) were running offices in Zambia, which organised flights that took Zimbabwean recruits to Zambia. However, Botswana was pragmatic enough to realise that there would be severe military consequences such as raids, incursions from the

Rhodesians who would take the fight into Botswana territory. She therefore opposed the use of her territory as a fighting base; she contributed significantly by offering sanctuary to what it termed genuine refugees from Zimbabwe. One observes that, Botswana bore the cost of political refugees, administering refugee centres and providing travel expenses, education and medical care, while its people provided safe houses and established escape routes and hideouts for the members of the political organisations in exiles and freedom fighters (Morapedi, 2012). She risked her national security by helping the liberation movements. Her first President Sir Seretse Khama laid the foundations for cooperative friendship between the two nations in the 1980s as such one can attest that the relations between the two nations were largely cordial, informed by a desire to see her neighbour attaining independence.

The border has been a source of contestation and conflict between the two countries. They are important in international relations as they form a constitutive facet in defining the state's territorial integrity and sovereignty. They indicate a country's territorial integrity, geographic boundaries and any breach of a country's border are treated as a serious matter. One of Botswana's main exports is beef which she exports to the European Union. This means that she has to guard her boundaries jealously for fear of anthrax as well as foot and mouth disease which can be imported into her territory from Zimbabwe. Not only does she have to battle with threats of disease to her livestock but with illegal migration. The arrests of three Botswana wildlife officers in 2013 who had mistakenly crossed into Zimbabwe territory when they were tracking lions that had mauled cattle in Lesoma, Botswana demonstrated that Zimbabwe does not take it lightly when another state defies this sovereign right. The three officers had to spend three weeks behind bars as a diplomatic solution was sought. The court of law released the three, a decision that displeased the Zimbabwe government which was against the release of the Botswana and appealed against the verdict. The decision by Zimbabwe to appeal strained relations between the two countries as Botswana reacted by recalling its diplomatic attaches in Zimbabwe in protest to Zimbabwe court appeal and ordered Zimbabwe to do the same. In international relations, a tit-for-tat response indicates a state's unhappiness with a decision and Botswana's response showed how displeased she was with Zimbabwe's handling of the issue.

Illegal migration has also been a major faultline between the two countries. Zimbabwe's downward economic spiral, increased inflation, massive unemployment resulted in economic migration with some Zimbabweans moving to Botswana. This included both documented and

undocumented migrants; the net effect of the economic malaise was to place a heavy strain not just on Botswana resources but also on relations between the two countries. Zimbabwean migrants faced hostility from the Botswana who regarded them as economic refugees who were 'taking' away Botswana's jobs, fuelling violent crime such as robberies, and generally disregarding traditional authority. Issues were not helped by accusations of police and the security forces ill-treatment of Zimbabwean undocumented migrants who were subjected to floggings and what Harare perceived to be harassment of its citizens. However, Gaborone held the view that the influx of Zimbabweans was due to Mugabe having destroyed the economy thus to stem the tide of migration into Botswana required a volte-face and a need to tackle Mugabe head-on. Doing so placed the two countries on a collision-course as Mugabe regarded criticism of his regime as interference in internal issues.

Botswana securitised Zimbabwean migrants as security threats in Botswana. The securitisation of migration in Botswana is better understood through constructivism lenses as Botswana constructed images, beliefs and perception that Zimbabweans were 'bad' citizens who needed to be dealt with and sent back to their country. Hammerstad, (2012:5) posit that, 'a securitising move is to present something to an audience as an existential threat to a particular referent object and argue that this threat must be counteracted urgently and by all means necessary'. Therefore, it can be suggested that Botswana responded by securitising Zimbabwean illegal migrants as security threat and prioritized the issue as high politics requiring urgent response. At the centre of securitisation, lies the Botswana President who acted as securitising actor through speech acts which was then accepted by the Botswana audience. The securitisation of Zimbabweans resulted in the compartmentalization of Botswana citizens into two starkly delineated groups as normal versus abnormal, mainstream versus deviant and citizens versus stranger (Marr, 2012), a case where Zimbabweans were placed in the abnormal, deviant and stranger categorisation. Botswana citizens perceived the behaviour of Zimbabwean as contributing and producing increased levels of criminality and immorality and everything bad that occurred was/is attributed Zimbabweans. To further show Botswana's resentment of Zimbabweans migrating to its territory to the interior of Botswana, the Government of Botswana constructed an electrified fence along the border with Zimbabwe with hopes of preventing the entry of cattle infested with foot and mouth and Zimbabwean illegal migrants. While Botswana accused Zimbabwean Government for failure to take care of its own citizen and shouldering extra responsibility of taking care of

Zimbabwean rather focusing on their own citizens, the government of Zimbabwe accused the Government of Botswana for failing to protect the foreigners and ill-treating its citizen. Securitisation of Zimbabwean migrants led to institutionalisation of attitude and practices that dehumanized foreign nationals/ Zimbabweans and other minority groups and excluding them from access to social protection and rights (Hammerstad, 2012). Although Botswana has not recorded acts of xenophobia, a culture of hate and impunity was entrenched in the Botswana territory where it the words of Marr (2012) foreigners have been treated like dogs and called as “animals”. The mass deportation of Zimbabweans signifies how Botswana had prioritised the illegal migrants as high politics requiring massive and vigilant response. One therefore argues that Zimbabwe-Botswana relations have been strained due to Zimbabwe’s failure to control and provide a safe haven for its citizens and Botswana’s radical approach in dealing with the immigration crises.

Matters were not helped by Ian Khama’s seemingly cosy relationship with Mugabe’s political arch-rival Morgan Tsvangirai who was the leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). To say that the general elections in Zimbabwe were flawed would be an understatement. Violence tainted the electoral process as well as a plethora of electoral irregularities, despite the orgy of violence SADC and South Africa decreed the elections to have been free and fair. Khama was one of the few SADC leaders to stand out and speak out against Mugabe and his rule. Botswana accused the Mugabe regime of electoral fraud, intimidation, and regarded him as illegitimate following the sham one-man run-off election of 2008 which failed to meet SADC, AU and United Nations standards; this meant that he lacked legitimacy (Malila and Molebatsi, 2015). When Khama became president of Botswana in 2008, he immediately declared that the time for quiet diplomacy was over and his government called for the removal of Mugabe (Badza, 2009), a campaign it faithfully pursued up the day President Mugabe resigned. The rise of Ian Khama was followed by a paradigm shift of Botswana’s foreign policy away from a policy informed by *real politik* to one that is more aggressively condemnatory of undemocratic practices and human rights abuses abroad (Malila and Molebatsi, 2015). Mhango (2012) posits that, Botswana’s tone and attitude was perceived as representing both a fundamental change between the two countries and break with the SADC consensus around a policy of quiet diplomacy. The same would happen in 2013 Zimbabwe general election where Botswana found itself being the only country condemning the outcome of the election calling for

election audit amidst the allegation that President Mugabe cheated. Zimbabwe reacted indignantly to its Western neighbour calling her comments provocative and interference in its internal affairs. It should be borne in mind that, President Mugabe did not tolerate let alone entertain those who questioned his rule or standing. Zimbabwe therefore constructed Botswana as a puppet of the West used as a tool to destabilise Zimbabwe. Furthermore, President Mugabe accused Botswana in 2008 for training MDC militia and youth bandits with the aim to destabilise and cause mayhem in the country. On the other hand, Khama held a grudge against Zimbabwe which supported Namibia over the Kasikili/Sedudu Island strip dispute. Khama did not particularly subscribe to quiet diplomacy as enunciated and advocated for by the then South African President Thabo Mbeki in dealing with the Zimbabwean crisis. Although, President Festus Mogae had been openly critical of Zimbabwean government since 2002, he was careful not to antagonise Zimbabwe and joined other SADC countries in pursuing what was euphemistically known as ‘quiet diplomacy’ (Malila and Molebatsi, 2015). Khama on the other hand was opposed to treating Mugabe with kid-gloves, he openly berated and called him out for overstaying in power likening him to a monarch yet at the same time chiding him and reminding him that Presidents are servants, they are leaders elected to public office by the public to serve therefore they should not make the office permanent. This was a direct aim and jibe at Mugabe who in turn made fun of the fact that Khama was unmarried. Khama unlike his predecessors was not afraid to go head to head with Mugabe on various issues and this always put the two at loggerheads with each other.

Countries do not just interact bilaterally; they interact in multilateral institutions such as regional bodies, and international organisations. In 2017 Mugabe ridiculed Ian Khama whom he accused of having an unenthusiastic attitude towards campaigning for Pelonomi Venson-Moitoi, a Motswana lady who wanted to be the African Union chairperson (Kaelo, 2017). This is a curious incident which reveals the dichotomous nature of relations between the two countries and their leaders, Zimbabwe supported her candidature yet Khama was accused of being lukewarm towards Venson-Moloi. Manayiti (2017) quotes Mugabe saying ‘we worked hard. They worked hard, sweated, they sweated, you sweated, we sweated, (but) one man didn’t sweat. He stayed at home and expected that wonders would happen and they didn’t happen....We have not seen your President here. He doesn’t attend our meetings and what would happen if we placed our organisation in your hands, in his hand?’ Mugabe was in

essence mocking Khama and questioning his ability to lead or galvanise SADC, Khama would not take kindly to this and less than a month later would get his revenge when the Zimbabwean military ousted Mugabe from power, he was the first leader in Southern Africa to urge Mugabe to concede and quit.

Zimbabwe blocked the construction of a bridge connecting Zambia and Botswana. She was aware that this bridge would result in revenue loss for her so it was in her interests to block its construction. Zimbabwe and Botswana had been locked in a border dispute along the Kazungula frontier resulting in the construction of the bridge (Sunday Standard Reporter, 2008). Zimbabwe was suspicious of Botswana's intentions as this was viewed as a means to bypass Zimbabwe transit routes in favour of the Northern routes which were essential for Botswana's transportation of its goods. Zimbabwe is Botswana's transit state as it provides a major road networks with countries which are vital for her economy. Zimbabwe believed that allowing Botswana to construct the Kazungula Bridge would be an act of self-betrayal on its part as this would negatively affect Zimbabwe's economic benefits as she would lose revenue as commercial traffic would by-pass the country tollgates and border post. On the contrary, Botswana regarded the bridge as an important development believing that the bridge would enhance transportation of goods along the regional North Corridor that links the two rich mineral countries Zambia and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to the port of Durban in South Africa (Bhebhe, 2014). The failure by Botswana to construct the bridge speaks volumes of the relations between the two countries. The former Botswana President Festus Mogae together with his foreign affairs Minister, Mompoti Meraphe and Presidential Affairs Minister Phanda Skelemani failed to resolve the dispute with President Mugabe. This demonstrated the power of Zimbabwe in vetoing any international engagement that appeared to jeopardize its interests when Botswana had managed to secure funding for the Kazungula Bridge project from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and African Development Bank (AFDB). On the contrary, President Mnangagwa and President Khama seem to have cordial relations as demonstrated by the meeting held between the three interested countries presidents; Zimbabwe's Mnangagwa, Zambia' Lungu and Botswana's Khama. (Lusaka Voice, 2018). The agreement by Zimbabwe to allow the possibility of joint cooperation of the Bridge signalled the revamping of Zimbabwe-Botswana relations

Zimbabwe was suspicious of Botswana's decision to accommodate US- Africa Command Centre (AFRICOM) base in Southern Africa. Despite, the SADC's refusal to support any

kind of US physical military presence in Southern Africa, this call fell on deaf ears as Botswana went on to accommodate US AFRICOM. The decision to allow USA military presence did not sit well with Zimbabwe who viewed it as an aggressive move by Botswana and US to interfere in the internal affairs of Zimbabwe. Added to that was what Zimbabwe considered to be illegal radio broadcasts into Zimbabwe by a radio station Studio 7 which broadcast on the Voice of America (VOA) frequency. Botswana's friendly bilateral relations with USA were viewed with suspicion by Zimbabwe as Zimbabwe was at loggerheads with the USA due to its imposition of sanctions against Zimbabwe under its Zimbabwe Development Recovery Agenda (ZIDERA). As a matter of fact, the Government of Botswana allowed the US government to construct state of the art facilities inside the Thebephatshwa airbase and also hosted joint military exercises such as the Exercise Southern Accord 2012 and Exercise Eastern Piper 12 in 2012 (Moyo and Manyeruke, 2015). In as much as, Botswana is a sovereign state with a right to engage with any country of choice due to the anarchic nature of the international system, her actions to engage the USA did not go down well with Zimbabwe which seemed to lend credence to Botswana as a client state of the USA.

The joint military exercise between Botswana and US as well as established base in Zimbabwe's Western neighbour evoked a 'security dilemma' on Zimbabwe's part as she was understandably insecure fearing Botswana-US intentions against Zimbabwe. The perceived US- Botswana Military relations by Zimbabwe created problems of security between Zimbabwe and Botswana. It can be argued that, in a security dilemma situation, states are not able to comprehend the mind of decision makers of other states due to secretive nature of foreign policy as a result they face uncertainties when it comes to the objectives and intentions of other states (Booth and Wheeler 2008). The interpretation of Botswana's welcoming mood threatened her Eastern Neighbour, thus Zimbabwe responded by associating her national security against a perceived threat. Zimbabwe perceived United States presence in Southern Africa as offensive, aided by its offensive military capability, Zimbabwe felt threatened by the geographical proximity of US military Base and the aggregate power the US wields.

In this respect, Zimbabwe's interpretation of Botswana's actions strained relations and Zimbabwe responded by strengthening cooperation with China so as to balance power and have the support of China in the UN Security where decisions to intervene in countries with

authoritarian regimes are made. One has to bear in mind that, US argued that Africa was a safe haven and breeding ground for international terrorism; hence countries that face economic instability and fragile states could be used by terrorist to hide and carry missions against the US. Furthermore, Botswana's suspicion against Zimbabwe is revealed through 2008's leaked diplomatic cables in Botswana, where Botswana is said to have invited the USA to send troops to guard the Voice of America's Studio 7 station to broadcast into Zimbabwe (Moyo and Manyeruke, 2015). Botswana had reason to believe that Zimbabwe might compromise the station. In fact, Zimbabwe accused Botswana of its pro-Western policy against Zimbabwe and for hosting an illegal radio station which compromised Zimbabwe security. As result of this, Zimbabwe- Botswana relations were strained due to what Zimbabwe perceived as radical approach and undermining the sovereignty of Zimbabwe on one hand, while Zimbabwe's attitude towards Botswana with regards to AFRICOM were shaped by its commitment to the foreign policy of Non-alignment against any Western Country.

The exodus of Zimbabweans into neighbouring countries, especially South Africa and Botswana amidst the economic instability, hyperinflation, and poverty in the beginning of the 21st century contributes to dithering relations between Zimbabwe and other SADC countries. The surge of Zimbabweans into Botswana worsened relations between the two neighbours, Graham (2017:148) postulates that, "a very real trigger for Botswana's foreign policy behaviour relates to its Eastern neighbour and the challenge of illegal immigrants (or refugees) fleeing Zimbabwe's economic collapse and political instability and taking up residence in Botswana". Botswana blamed the Zimbabwean government for failure to take care of its own citizens. Ian Khama accused Robert Mugabe for Zimbabwe migration crises emanating from his misrule resulting in the endangering of Botswana security and stretching its resource to the limit (Southern Daily, 2015). Botswana's population is estimated to be just over two million, and thus having to contend with hundreds of thousands of Zimbabwe crossing its borders and overwhelming local population defined Gaborone's negative attitude against Harare. On the same note, Botswana viewed the exodus of Zimbabweans into the neighbouring countries as a burden to the SADC region as the bad governance of Zimbabwe President contributed to the forced migration of millions who escaped the economic challenge in search of greener pastures. Responding to the challenges of Xenophobia at a SADC summit in Harare in 2015, President Khama said "it is a big concern, millions of Zimbabweans have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, it is a problem for us in the

region, it's a burden, there is no doubt about that" (NewZimbabwe, 2015). Botswana is allegedly hosting over 100000 Zimbabweans.

Bilateral trade between Zimbabwe and Botswana serves the purpose of reducing the rift between the two neighbouring states. Despite the political schism between the two Southern African states, economic interests and consideration served to deconstruct any form of negative perception and modelled their foreign policy in such a way that trade and economic relations were not affected. The geo-strategic vulnerabilities of Botswana have forced it to seek to come to terms with Zimbabwe. Botswana's move to diversify its economy from being a diamond dependent country forced it to explore new opportunities for increasing its exports in coal and other goods, engaged countries like Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique as an alternative for South African Ports (Malila and Molebatsi, 2015, Koch, 2013). The strategic vulnerability of Botswana by being a landlocked country worked against its favour as it needed a cooperative Zimbabwe to advance its trade ambitions. Zimbabwe is Botswana's key Transit State which makes Zimbabwe a vital cog in Botswana's Foreign policy. Furthermore, Botswana signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Mozambique to jointly develop the port of Beira and a rail way link between the two countries (Graham, 2017, Malila and Molebatsi, 2015). It should be noted that such an ambitious move requires a cooperative Zimbabwe as the railway would have to pass through Zimbabwe. From this perspective, one stands to reason that relations between the two countries have experienced a modicum of cooperation in the trade sector.

Zimbabwe's trade relations with Botswana are centralised in the Zimbabwe-Botswana Trade Agreement. This bilateral arrangement ensures that goods originating from either of the two trading partners are exempted from payment of customs duties on condition that the goods meet a minimum of 25% local content. Botswana called for increased and strengthened trade partnership between the two states. Botswana Industry and Trade Center (BITC) said there is a potential to double trade between the two Southern Africa countries which currently stands at US \$333 Million (Muperi, 2017). Botswana The position taken by Botswana was that, Botswana firms should take advantage of opportunities presented by Zimbabwe's textile industry and export products such as T-shirts, towels, juices, cereals, confectionary, sugar, pasta, pipes, horses, salt others cosmetics. Others include live animals, meat and meat products as there is a demand for deboned meat and swine in Zimbabwe as well as medicaments like veterinary (Daily New, 2017). Botswana has key industries such as Botash

which export salt, Chloride Botswana which sells batteries, 03 Beverages for bottled water and BMC for canned beef.

### **Conclusion**

The ascendance to power of Emerson Mnangagwa as Zimbabwe's President offers an opportunity for Harare and Gaborone for cooperative and cordial relations and engagement between the two. While it may seem too early for international relations scholars to determine the relations between Mnangagwa regime and Ian Khama, the presence of President Ian Khama at his inauguration, Mnangagwa's visit to Botswana considering that Mugabe never visited Botswana is an indication of how far relations have evolved between the two countries. President Khama was viewed as a "loner" in Africa for being the only one to boldly tell the Former President Robert Mugabe to step down. This is perceived as an unusual stance for a small and vulnerable country such as Botswana to take, as African countries are known for opposing any foreign policy that favours interference in the affairs of another. Khama's presence, presented a new dimension in Zimbabwe's upcoming foreign policy engagement. One stands to reason that, the recognition of Zimbabwe's new President signalled a thaw in relations and a de-escalation of enemy images and the negative perception and belief the President of Botswana had against the former Zimbabwean President and his regime. Critical to note is what President Ian Khama represented, without a shadow of doubt Botswana's presence in the inauguration signified the Western Countries and USA's recognition of the new government as Botswana has been the face of the West's in Africa constantly calling for democratisation of the African continent.

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