

IS BOTSWANA CREATING A NEW GAZA STRIP? AN ANALYSIS OF THE 'FENCE DISCOURSE'

DOMINIK KOPÍŃSKI

University of Wrocław
dominik.kopinski@uni.wroc.pl

ANDRZEJ POLUS

University of Wrocław
andrzej.polus@uni.wroc.pl

ABSTRACT In 2003 the government of Botswana announced plans to construct an electric fence, officially to stop the spread of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) among livestock. From 2001 to 2003 Botswana witnessed two epidemics of FMD, which heavily affected its cattle industry and caused resentment among local communities. In both cases the source was traced to Zimbabwe. The epidemics coincided with growing tensions between Botswana and Zimbabwe. Due to the unrest in Zimbabwe, many of its citizens have chosen to emigrate to Botswana, whose economic success and political stability are viewed as a positive example across the continent. Thousands of illegal Zimbabwean migrants have begun flocking into the country, shifting the fence discourse beyond what the government initially presented as strictly phytosanitary concerns. Therefore, we argue that the fence has many parallel meanings, and the decisions concerning its erection, maintenance and possible electrification not only remain ambiguous, but also touch upon a wide range of other issues concerning the economy and wildlife.

Introduction

In September 2003, the Zimbabwean high commissioner to Gaborone, Phelekeza Mphoko, stated that “Botswana is trying to create a Gaza Strip” (*Daily Mail & Guardian*, September 8, 2003) by building a fence on its border with Zimbabwe. This rather radical rhetoric often appears in Zimbabwean political discourse. Obviously, the situation on the border between Botswana and Zimbabwe can hardly be equated with the state of affairs between Israel, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority in terms of their engagement in the Gaza Strip. The origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, together with the geopolitical and demographic setting in the Middle East, as well as the involvement of the United States in the region, are major dissimilarities. While the Gaza blockade created by an iron fence and heavily armed Israeli forces is clearly a matter of national security, the Botswanian fence was officially erected as a result of phytosanitary concerns stemming from the risk of transmission of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) among the local cattle. Nevertheless, it is argued that the real agenda of the government was to put a stop to the uncontrolled influx of Zimbabwean illegal immigrants crossing the border. This paper’s objective is to shed more light on this issue.

Botswana has more border posts with Zimbabwe than with any other country it is a neighbor with, although it is not its longest border. The length of the border with Namibia is 1,300 km, and with South Africa 1,840 km, whereas with Zimbabwe it amounts to 813 km. The border between Zimbabwe and

Botswana is poorly demarcated,³⁰ which was the most visible during unrest concerning the Kazungula Bridge Project. Nevertheless, the local communities on either side of the border have always coexisted rather peacefully, some of them even sharing water sources. Furthermore, family links between Botswana and Zimbabweans are common. The two countries share a long history of coexistence, and relative sympathy towards migrants (and refugees from apartheid in the RSA). Botswana's government's decision to raise a fence of this length and height is quite extraordinary in present-day African politics, although fences created in order to protect cattle from wild animals and diseases are quite common in the region. Historically, such huge infrastructural projects were usually raised in conflict zones, and their aims were almost exclusively associated with the idea of defense during war (Sterling, 2009). We argue that the fence on the border between Zimbabwe and Botswana is an example of a classic barrier adjustment to current socio-political conditions, and its idea and understanding are constantly being redefined depending on ideational structures that influence our perception. In the age of globalization, when traditional physical barriers are disappearing and new types of barriers are being created (e.g. economic disproportions), Botswana has decided to raise a fence that is reminiscent of Cold War rivalry and the period of anti-apartheid campaigning. In this paper we trace the developments of the fence project and its status in discourse.

This article is a result of academic research and a field study conducted in Botswana. The paper is divided into four parts. The first part presents the historical patterns and typology of migration in Southern Africa. The second part is devoted to the chronology of the fence's construction. The paper subsequently discusses the five different dimensions of the discourse concerning the fence, namely – environmental, phytosanitary, political, economic and social. The final section presents a summary and conclusion.

The problem of migration in Southern Africa

The subject of migration was the original departure point of this research. For a citizen of Botswana, illegal migration from Zimbabwe is probably the most important issue currently underpinning relations between the two countries. Although, as the authors argue, migration is only part of the story, it is useful to shed more light on the problem in the context of Southern Africa and to contextualize the multiple meanings of the border fence between Zimbabwe and Botswana. The problem of migration in Southern Africa is mostly economic in nature. It is usually traced to the discovery of gold and diamonds followed by the aggressive expansion of the mining industry that marked the last decades of the nineteenth century (Crush, 2000: 14). For many years the industry was in constant demand of cheap labour, which drew people from various parts of the region. The migration at that time was strictly controlled and had a fixed contract system that allowed workers to stay only for a limited time (and also prevented them from bringing

³⁰ The official border treaty was never signed.

their families). According to J. Crush (2000: 14), between 1920 and 1940 the number of foreign workers in Southern Africa increased from 100,000 to 200,000 (at its peak, at the beginning of the 1970s, the number stood at a staggering 300,000; 80 per cent of the entire workforce in the mines was estimated to be of foreign origin). An additional factor behind this movement in colonial times was the taxation imposed by the British administration (to be paid in British pounds) and dispossession of the land. This was, for instance, the case of Bechuanaland, whose population was literally decimated by the mineral rush in neighbouring South Africa (it is estimated that a quarter of the male population worked in South African mines) and further weakened by the hut tax required by the British (Harvey and Lewis, 1990: 17). Migration driven by the expansion of the mining industry further increased as the British colonies of Northern and Southern Rhodesia became the region's magnet, bringing about new cross-border migration of unskilled labour – both between mineral countries and from other, non-mineral countries (Crush, Williams and Peberdy, 2005). The inter-regional migration to mines, and to a lesser extent to commercial farms (which on many occasions concerned illegal migration), has made Southern Africa in fact a huge regional labour market which, albeit reshaped and reduced in scale, still continues to exist today.

There are also political motives behind some of the cross-border migration, albeit the scale of this phenomenon is significantly lower. As the independence struggle unfolded in the 1950s and 1960s, some Southern African countries hosted refugees and asylum-seekers from neighbouring states who were involved in fighting against the white minority rule. During the struggle against the Apartheid regime, Botswana (but also Zambia) became a popular refuge among activists from South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. It might be said that there is an established tradition of Zimbabwean migration to Botswana. During the internal conflict in Southern Rhodesia, more than 20,000 Zimbabwean “political refugees” were welcomed in Botswana, and some were allowed to become citizens of Botswana (Crush, Williams and Peberdy, 2005). Botswana adopted an open door policy because of the lack of manpower in the country. Many Zimbabweans obtained important positions in Botswana. It is worth mentioning here that the first permanent representative of Botswana to the UN was a Zimbabwean migrant.

Nowadays the most popular destination for migrants in Southern Africa are Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. It goes without saying that in the 1960s and 1970s the idea that Zimbabweans or Zambians would one day flock into countries such as Botswana and Namibia was rather unthinkable. According to Southern African Migration Project (SAPM) findings, the majority of cross-border migrants in Southern Africa are temporary and circular. Their prime motive is improving their economic situation, and once this is accomplished the migrants prefer to return to their home countries (this only partly applies to Botswana, where a great number of foreign workers wish to stay permanently) (Crush, Williams and Peberdy, 2005). Virtually all countries lack a pro-active immigration policy, and in the vast majority of them immigration – both legal and illegal – is perceived as a source of potential trouble, rather than economic opportunities. This attitude is also rooted in the post-independence legislation that was created with the

intention of perceiving outsiders as threats. Interestingly, Botswana stands out as a country with a relatively open policy towards skilled migration, which is reflected in the number of temporary work permits issued each year (more than in South Africa). At the same time, however, skilled migrants are far from regarding Botswana as a place friendly to foreigners, since they face many formal and informal barriers, and as a result feel more like “permanent temporary” visitors. Recently, this “open door policy” has changed, especially towards migrants from Zimbabwe, who are increasingly perceived as threats.

The geographical factor must be taken into account while discussing migration from Zimbabwe to the RSA and Botswana, as it is relatively easier to sneak into Botswana than to South Africa, since in order to enter South Africa, illegal immigrants must cross the Limpopo River.

The fence’s chronology

The official reason to erect the fence was to control the spread of Foot-and-Mouth Disease from Zimbabwe. The fence was originally intended to be 4 meters high, but it was finally reduced to 2.4 meters. This still did not convince the Zimbabwean authorities, who argued that the fence was designed as a barrier against people, not animals.

The idea of erecting fences is not new in Botswana. Fences were constructed for veterinary purposes already in the 1950s (the Kuku cordon fence) to segregate livestock from wildlife. An example of this is the 100 km-long Nxai Pan Buffalo Fence, built in 1968 (Keene-Young, 1999; Albertson, 1998). Neither is it a new idea to construct a fence along Botswana’s international borders (e.g. the fence between Botswana and Namibia raised in the 1960s). Nevertheless, it is the potentially electrified fence along the border of Botswana and Zimbabwe which captured the world’s attention and stirred a bilateral debate between the two countries. It is argued here that this may be a result of the multipurpose and dynamic nature of the fence and, more importantly, the changing perception of it.

The history of the fence can be traced back to 2003, when the government of Botswana announced plans to build an electric fence, officially to halt the spread of Foot-and-Mouth Disease among livestock. From 2001 to 2003, Botswana witnessed two FMD epidemics, and in both cases the sources were located in Zimbabwe. As a result of the FMD outbreak, Botswana lost 13,000 cattle, which was significant not only in terms of the economic costs incurred by the local communities, but also symbolically, considering the high status of cattle in Tswana culture. The epidemics coincided with growing tensions between Botswana and Zimbabwe which first came to the fore in January 2003, following a prison fight between Zimbabweans and Botswana inmates which resulted in three deaths. In February, Zimbabwean traders clashed with Botswana on the streets of Gaborone over an alleged theft of clothes (Mukumbira, 2003). Botswana’s government was among the most vocal critics of Robert Mugabe’s regime. It was even accused of planning a military intervention in Zimbabwe together with the United States and United Kingdom (Merafhe, 2003).

From 2006 onward, due to the deteriorating political and economic situation in Zimbabwe, Botswana experienced a large influx of illegal migrants crossing its northern borders in unprecedented numbers. Thus, the fence was increasingly seen as a way to put a stop to “tidal waves” and “floods” of Zimbabweans (as noted by Crush and Pendelton (2004), illegal migration in Southern Africa is often described with “aquatic imagery”). In 2006 Botswana deported more than 56,000 Zimbabweans. In 2007 the illegal migration problem escalated even further, as the Zimbabwean economy took a nose-dive with hyperinflation exceeding 50 per cent per month (the minimum rate required to qualify as hyperinflation), to soar higher than the world record rate. As a result, only a few months later, in November, the month-over-month inflation rate was close to 80 billion percent (Hanke and Kwok, 2009). It was accompanied by a rise in unemployment (the unemployment rate stood at 80 per cent in the peak period), and shortages of food, fuel and foreign currencies.

Although the fence was primarily intended to be electrified, in 2006 the government decided to abandon the idea, as this would make it “lethal” and thus inevitably attract international condemnation (*Mmegi*, April 28, 2006). The only step still considered was using low voltage that could deter infected animals from grazing on Botswana’s side of the border (it was actually tested in some places, but the installation was damaged by people and animals). The government’s announcement caused some resentment in local communities, whose cattle had been decimated by FMD and smugglers. The money originally meant for electrification, estimated at P8 million, was diverted to increasing BDF and police presence, and intensifying security along the border (*Mmegi*, July 24, 2006).

In 2008 Botswana completed construction of the fence. The fence, however, originally expected to be 500 km long, was not fully constructed (there are still some missing parts due to the difficult terrain and supply of material). The question of electrifying the fence seems to be still under consideration, however, and is being picked up here and there by the local media. Nevertheless, the Agriculture Minister, Christian De Graaf, stated in May 2011 that, according to his advisors, it would be difficult make the electric fence fully operational due to its length and risk of being destroyed by wild animals (*Mmegi*, May 6, 2011).

The government, interrogated by MPs, announced that the total cost of the fence was estimated at P35 million (approximately 3.5 million Euros) (*Mmegi*, March 2, 2006).

The various dimensions of the “fence discourse”

The environmental dimension

The first dimension of the “fence discourse” pertains to wildlife, which may be adversely affected by its erection. Environmentalists have long suggested that dividing the natural game parks with physical barriers may be harmful to the ecosystem, as it hampers free movement and reproduction of animals

within the area, along with many other negative effects (Boone and Hobbs, 2004: 149). The fences “introduce an entirely artificial constraining upon wildlife movement that is historically unprecedented, in terms of scale, magnitude and extent of impact” (Darkoh and Mbaiwa, 2001: 44). Furthermore, it should be noted that “many game species depend for their survival on seasonal migration between rangelands and water sources” (Darkoh and Mbaiwa, 2001: 44). The decision to erect the fence in Botswana runs counter to emerging projects in the region that entail removing fences in order to create transnational parks and game reserves. A good example is the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park shared among Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

It should be noted additionally that whereas putting up the fence may be effective with regards to smaller animals, larger ones not only do not find it impenetrable, but in fact do not hesitate to demolish it. Reportedly, elephants have been responsible for devastating the fence which then has not been repaired, thus making it easy to cross the border for both infected cattle and “border jumpers”. The elephants have been also accused of destroying the crops and livelihoods of residents (*Mmegi*, February 15, 2008). On the whole, the fence is regularly destroyed by wild animals (mostly by elephants), which increases the cost of its maintenance and creates gaps through which cattle from Botswana and Zimbabwe can mix.

The fence complicates work coordination between park rangers on opposite sides of the border. Reports about the unfair treatment and widespread arrests of Zimbabweans in Botswana were politicized by the government in Harare in February 2010, when two park rangers from Botswana were arrested in Zimbabwe while hunting a pair of lions. The rangers were detained and accused of possessing illegal weapons. At the same time, Botswana announced the recall of its defense and intelligence attaches from Harare, and said it expected Zimbabwe to do the same (*Africa Confidential*, February 19, 2010). In real terms this meant that diplomatic relations between these two states were one step away from breaking down. At this point, the environmental commentary and claims that wild animals do not recognize state borders began to overlap with the political discourse and tensions between Harare and Gaborone.

The phytosanitary dimension

Phytosanitary reasons are the most common in the discourse, and were officially used to legitimize the fence’s construction. Botswana’s government argued that the fence was necessary because Zimbabwe did not fight FMD effectively enough due to the limited resources spent on anti-FMD vaccinations. One of the most strongly questioned issues was the height of the fence. While contemplating the decision to raise a 2.4-meter-high fence, the authors asked themselves the question, “How high can a cow actually jump?”. To their surprise, they discovered that cows can jump quite high, and a 6-foot-tall barrier should not present a problem to them (*Telegraph*, December 17, 2009). More importantly, FMD can be spread not only by livestock, but also by wild animals. During the FMD outbreak in 2003, a lame and emaciated wild Kudu was shot in Botswana, and the samples obtained from it were confirmed positive for

FMD (Mokopasetso and Derah, 2005: 22). No matter how strange the question about cows' jumping abilities might be, the same question becomes less so in regards to wild animals, an example being kudus, which are allegedly capable of jumping over the fence.³¹ Consequently, it may be suggested that erecting a 2.4-meter-fence is legitimate when it is perceived as an anti-animal measure. It is worth mentioning here that from the perspective of phytosanitation, there is no point in making the fence lethal, as a lower voltage of electricity can effectively scare animals and prevent them from crossing the border.

The practice of fence-building in order to prevent animal disease outbreaks is quite common in Southern Africa. There is a fence on the border between Namibia and Botswana, and many more smaller fences all around the region. The outbreaks of FMD between 2001 and 2003 are strong rationalizations for the construction of the fence. Nevertheless, the dominant discourse does not exist in a vacuum and should be correlated with the traditional importance of cattle for Botswana and the economic dimension of FMD outbreaks (i.e. the EU market ban on beef from Botswana – this issue is discussed later). The phytosanitary discourse strongly contradicts accusations that the fence is aimed against the Zimbabwean people and Robert Mugabe's regime.

International and political dimensions

The fence's construction can be perceived as another example of Botswana's desire to manifest independence in the international environment and to send a clear signal to the Zimbabwean regime that the government in Gaborone will not accept Robert Mugabe's policy towards opposition. President Ian Khama is the most vocal African critic of the Zimbabwean president. During recent years, Botswana's foreign policy has been quite extraordinary when compared with other African states, as the government in Gaborone has been trying to establish itself as a continental champion for democracy.³² Botswana did not reject the International Criminal Court call to arrest Omar Al Bashir; it supported the NATO intervention in Libya, and was the very first African state to recognize Alassane Ouattara as the president of Ivory Coast, despite many other African governments' reluctance. Botswana is considered a state where AFRICOM command might be hosted, and is also the only state in the SADC which hosts the Voice of America. The fence might be perceived as the most visible manifestation of Gaborone's disapproval of Robert Mugabe's regime and a signal that Botswana will not accept economic refugees from its neighbor. Simultaneously, Botswana's government is fully aware of possible international condemnation if the fence is electrified and lethal.³³ Besides, although Zimbabwean officials have used "Gaza Strip" and "Berlin Wall" analogies while

³¹ Interview with Dr. Casper Bonyongo, Okavango Research Institute, University of Botswana, August 30, 2011.

³² However, in the internal political discourse, the current president, Ian Khama, is being accused of authoritarian tendencies. Interview with Professor Zibani Maundeni, University of Botswana, Department of Political and Administrative Studies, August 22, 2011.

³³ During the peak of the crisis in Zimbabwe, Botswana's Minister of Agriculture, Johnnie Swartz, admitted that "in today's world, we can't erect a lethal fence, as that might attract international condemnation".

speaking about the fence, its construction has not been criticized internationally. Botswana's opposition parties have supported the idea of the fence, and the internal political debate accompanying this issue has not concentrated on the need for the fence, but rather on financial matters associated with the fence's construction.

The economic dimension

The official explanation of the decision to erect the fence primarily focuses on the phytosanitary concerns. Each time FMD strikes in Botswana, the cattle industry is adversely affected. It should be recalled that Botswana's economy continues to be reliant on cattle production and export. Although in macroeconomic terms its significance is small vis-à-vis the diamond industry, which is the backbone of the economy, on the micro level many communities are dependent on cattle. It should be equally stressed that Tswana tribes have been historically defined by a pastoral tradition, and livestock are kept not only for commercial but also for socioeconomic and cultural reasons (Makepe, 2008: 122). Interestingly, the human population in Botswana is smaller than that of its cattle. Having said that, the FMD outbreaks potentially carry high social and economic costs. This is compounded by the fact that the EU, being the most lucrative market for Botswana's meat, has strict regulations concerning the quality of the beef (Mapitse, 2008). The areas that export beef products to the EU market (EU-areas) have to adhere to regulations, which means that when FMD is detected the authorities are either compelled to kill the cattle within a certain area so that the area can maintain its EU status, or vaccinate the cattle and wait until the area opens up for the EU. There have been instances of Botswana's meat being banned from the European market (e.g. in 1980).

It should be stressed that the fence was not meant to affect the legal cross-border movement of goods and labor that continues to thrive and essentially has not been disrupted (formally, Zimbabweans do not need visas to enter Botswana, but obtaining travel documents is, however, a different issue), even though it causes frictions in border towns, as Zimbabweans contribute to the raising of prices (*Mmegi*, April 24, 2008). Botswana has been a logical destination for Zimbabweans due to its renowned, widely acclaimed economic success, but also, of course, because of its geographical proximity. This has increased due to the weakening of the Pula (against the Zimbabwean dollar), the lack of job opportunities, and a shortage of basic commodities. As a result, legal migration is on the rise and the economic situation in Zimbabwe is getting worse. Migrants from Zimbabwe take on jobs that many citizens of Botswana frown upon as too low-paid, such as housemaids, farm-laborers, gardeners and street vendors. In many instances, they are forced to work far below their formal qualifications and/or their new jobs hardly correspond to their prior professional experience.

Having said that, the fence is rather associated with the issue of undocumented migration that arguably provoked Botswana's government to make a more aggressive stand against the influx of

Zimbabweans, although officially the step, as mentioned above, might be explained differently (as a barrier against cattle). The problem of illegal migration “stealing” jobs has been a part of the political debate for some time now. At the same time, according to many locals interviewed by the authors, Zimbabweans are hardworking, efficient and reliable, surely not deserving the negative reputation they have throughout the country. The “border jumpers” are also accused of contributing to the spread of FMD, as they do not go through the proper disinfection process, cutting the fence (allegedly along with some farmers) in order to look for jobs as herdboys (*Mmegi*, July 29, 2011).

While discussing economic rationales behind erecting the fence, a few other issues come into play, namely the costs of handling the migrants who have successfully made it to the other side, as well as the cattle which are allegedly being stolen by Zimbabweans.

In 2003, according to Botswana authorities, each day the enforcement arrested 200 Zimbabweans crossing the border illegally. The number grew swiftly. In 2006, the Francistown police reported that between April and September alone, 30,000 Zimbabweans were deported, which means 5,000 per month on average (*Mmegi*, October 26, 2006). Captured migrants are transported to detention facilities, before being returned to the other side of the border. According to the government, these activities are a significant drain on the budget. Botswana’s immigration officials have estimated the costs of deportation of illegal migrants at more than P1.7 million a month. Having said that, erecting the fence can be defended as an economically justified project.

The idea of the fence was also presented to the public as part of a plan intended to curb the smuggling of cattle to Zimbabwe.³⁴ This is, for example, how the Assistant Minister of Agriculture, Peter Siele, explained the government’s decision to the people of the Bobirwa in Gobojango (*Mmegi*, July 24, 2006).

Social dimensions

Throughout its recent history, Botswana has received a great influx of migrants, and the current situation poses an unprecedented challenge for both Botswana’s government and its society. The number of illegal migrants from Zimbabwe is being described as the biggest immigration problem since Botswana’s independence. Nobody really knows how many Zimbabweans live in Botswana. The number ranges from 100,000 to 200,000 (Lesetedi, 2007: 7). While speaking with people from Botswana, one may assume that they have a passionate dislike for illegal immigrants – especially African ones. In Setswana, African migrants are described by the word *makwerekwere*, which literally means a person who speaks a non-Setswana language. During their field research, the authors discovered that they were not referred to as *makwerekwere*, while Zimbabweans were, and in reference to Zimbabweans the expression *makwerekwere* had a derogatory and xenophobic meaning (Morapedi, 2007: 231). Generally, the authors

³⁴ In some cases, it is assumed that locals are also involved in cattle-smuggling and stealing.

felt that words used to denote white Europeans carry no negative connotations, while this word, used for Zimbabweans, does. Hostility and xenophobia in Botswana towards immigrants, particularly African ones, has also been confirmed by a SAPM study (Crush and Pendleton, 2004). The study reveals that among the many policy measures towards immigrants that Botswana wishes to implement, there is electrification of the border fence. According to E.K. Campbell's public opinion survey, almost 60 per cent of Botswana's citizens prefer an iron fence to be constructed on the border with Zimbabwe and switched on to the lethal mode. The survey result is even more shocking when one takes into consideration the resemblance of this fence to the electric fence raised by the South African government on its border with Mozambique during apartheid, and the widespread criticism of the construction at that time. Illegal migrants are also being targeted by the press. The qualitative and quantitative study of David A. McDonald and Sean Jacobs (2005) revealed that the press in Botswana, when compared with newspapers in the RSA and Zimbabwe, published the most xenophobic articles. The media in Botswana argued that the country was experiencing a severe rise in the crime rate. Zimbabweans are being accused not only of hijacking and burglary, but also of murders and brutal attacks on Botswana. According to "Mmegi", in 2006 Zimbabweans were responsible for over 50 per cent of the criminal activity in Botswana (*Mmegi*, October 26, 2006), and throughout the whole country there have been small-scale outbreaks of xenophobic violence against Zimbabweans (Throup, 2011: 10). The other factor that has hardly ever been taken into account in either the media or in the official political discourse is the information that due to the political and economic unrest in Zimbabwe many Zimbabweans have been crossing the border in order to steal cattle from Botswana.³⁵ This factor is significant, considering the symbolic meaning of cows in Botswana. The idea of the fence's electrification was also supported by the opposition; in January 2009 the Botswana Congress Party presented a petition in which it demanded the fence's electrification in the Bobirwa region (*Mmegi*, January 7, 2009). This issue was also raised by the Bobirwa chief in the House of Chiefs. Nevertheless, political parties in Botswana did not attempt to make use of xenophobic feelings among people in Botswana during the political struggle, whereas some MPs, immigration officers and chiefs were quoted making xenophobic remarks about Zimbabweans (Morapedi, 2007: 246).

The fence's construction can also be seen as one of the dimensions of the struggle against the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Botswana. The migrants who live in Botswana illegally are excluded from accessing healthcare and other public services. Botswana is the only state in the world where HIV-positive citizens are provided with antiretroviral drugs free of charge, whereas foreigners are barred from the treatment. Nevertheless, HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment is important for the country's whole population. It is even more crucial when we take into account the common accusations of Zimbabwean women working as prostitutes in Botswana. It is difficult to find statistical data about the number of Zimbabwean sex workers, as the sex trade is criminalized. The halfhearted position of Botswana's government in regards to HIV-

³⁵ Interview with G.R. Motlaleng, University of Botswana, Department of Economics, August 24, 2011.

positive foreigners was revealed in August 2011, when it announced that “it will not provide foreign inmates with life-saving ARV” (*Mmegi*, August 25, 2011).

The recent influx of Zimbabweans can be seen in the ongoing debate about building the nation of Botswana, and in terms of the question of who is a “true” citizen of Botswana. According to a survey conducted by Eugene K. Campbell and John O. Oucho (2003: 13), the ability to speak Setswana was a primary condition when defining a Botswana citizen. Two thirds of the respondents stressed the importance of being born in Botswana, while “many feel that it is essential that the parents of a ‘true’ Botswana should have been born in Botswana as well”. The fence may manifest here the desire to distinguish citizens of Botswana from “others”. Zimbabweans may play the role of “constitutive others” in the process of Botswana’s self-definition.

Conclusion

The core ideas behind the fence’s construction are not easy to disentangle. The existence of the fence has many hermeneutical dimensions. The official statements of the Zimbabwean government were highly critical towards the fence, which was compared to the Berlin Wall and Gaza Strip; Botswana was accused of working against regional integration in the SADC and causing environmental damage to the border ecosystem. After analyzing this situation, the authors have distinguished five major dimensions of the discourse with which the issue of the fence has been discussed. None of these exist independently. They are interconnected and facilitated by internal changes in both countries, the SADC region and the international environment in general.

The first dimension under analysis, namely the environmental dimension, implies that the “fence discourse” is potentially significant. The authors are not experts in wildlife conservation, and thus are unable to comprehensively assess the potential damage that the fence may create for the environment. Moreover, the environmental aspect of the fence’s construction is beyond the scope of this research. Nevertheless, the authors conclude that the environmental discourse is not an integral part of the decision-making process concerning the erection and maintenance of the fence. This discourse rarely intersects other aspects of this problem. Further research in this area is required.

The phytosanitary aspect of this problem was officially used to legitimize the fence’s construction. Outbreaks of FMD are quite common in Botswana, which has created a situation that justifies the quarantining of livestock. Prevention of the spread of FMD is closely connected to the economic situation, as FMD generates severe losses for the cattle industry. When one looks at the political rhetoric of the government in Harare, it seems that it is very difficult to defend the statement that the fence is aimed at “ordinary citizens of Zimbabwe”, as Zimbabweans are allowed to cross the border without visas. However, this argumentation is only valid if we assume that the state of Zimbabwe functions properly. Due to the internal situation in Zimbabwe, it is very difficult to obtain either a passport or emergency document that

would allow one to cross the border officially. Passport prices, corruption and the time needed to have official documents issued, force many Zimbabweans to resort to illegal crossing of the border.

In the internal political discourse, the idea of building the fence has not been challenged by any political party. Botswana has sent a clear signal to Robert Mugabe's regime that it would take all necessary measures to stop illegal immigration, including having Botswana Defense Forces concentrated on the border. Internationally, Botswana has confirmed its dedication to democracy and the possibility of working together with Western states.

In the economic dimension, the problem is essentially twofold. Firstly, there is the cost of FMD incurred by local farmers, which is linked not only to phytosanitary concerns but also to the social dimension, due to the importance of cattle in Tswana culture (the latter being compounded by cattle-stealing and smuggling across the border). Secondly, there is the fence's construction as a measure to halt illegal migration, which connects with the social dimension in two different ways - a fear of jobs being stolen (mostly false) and an increase in the crime rate (in many cases true). This, in turn, makes it a political issue which the government of Botswana is expected to address.

The last aspect concerns Botswana's perception of foreigners. This intercepts all other aspects, with the exception of the environmental aspect. Perception of the real or imagined threat of the influx of people from Zimbabwe can be correlated with the spread of FMD, which can be seen as a reasonable rationalization for the fence's construction. Negative stereotypes about Zimbabweans, connected with an increase in the crime rate, jobs being stolen from the citizens of Botswana, and economic perils, also strengthen the idea of the fence. Botswana's government and political elite are concerned about the public's anxiety towards Zimbabwean migrants and the international disapproval of Robert Mugabe's regime, thus the decision about the fence's construction has been relatively easy.

To conclude, there are many dimensions of the debate concerning the fence, which, however, should not be treated as autonomous. The fence has multiple and dynamic meanings which depend on the perspective from which it is examined.

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