

# Explaining Co-operation and Conflict in Southern Africa: State-building, Foreign Policy and Regional Order

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**Abstract:** Between 1975 and 1988, the Southern African regional system was marked by high levels of systemic conflict involving direct and indirect armed confrontation between South Africa and its neighbours. This reality sharply contrasts with the co-operative environment that has gradually formed since 1989. Following the trends towards deepening and widening the systemic comprehension of international relations, this study seeks to understand why there were changes in the pattern of co-operation–conflict in the Southern African regional system in the last 40 years. The central hypothesis is that (i) the state-building process and (ii) regional and secondary powers' foreign policy formation and execution towards the regional order are factors which have directly affected the regional pattern of co-operation–conflict. Specifically, this article studies South Africa and Angola's state-building process and foreign policy formation and execution from 1975 to 2015. The research concludes that these states produced co-operation or conflict as part of their balance of positions towards the systemic order, which is an interactional result of their state-building process (state capacity and state–society relations) and its impact on foreign policy's formation and execution (interests and security of the elites and foreign policy position and impetus towards the regional order).

**Keywords:** Co-operation; Conflict; Southern Africa; Regional System; Foreign Policy; State-Building; Regional Order.

There is limited knowledge in Brazil and worldwide about how countries in Africa relate to each other, how their process of decision-making in foreign policy is characterised, and which constraints, processes and actors set foreign policy in the region's major powers. For instance, it is widely known that between 1975 and 1988 Southern Africa was marked by high levels of systemic conflict involving direct and indirect armed conflict. This reality sharply contrasts with the co-operative environment that gradually formed after 1989, which, in turn, still presents some difficulties in advancing into a full integrative project. Although this historical narrative is commonly known, there is lack of systemic comprehension of what factors could explain these great changes in the regional level of co-operation and conflict and why regional countries still lack deep regional integration. In this case, the globalist perspective usually adopted to explain Africa's international re-

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lations has limited capacity to understand regional politics, where agency and *realpolitik* calculus is as present as elsewhere in international politics (Chazan et al. 1999: 361–3).

This paper seeks to contribute to overcoming these theoretical limitations through a study that aims to explain changes in the regional pattern of co-operation–conflict in Southern Africa, highlighting aspects of unit agency. The central hypothesis is that (i) the state-building process and (ii) the foreign policy formation and execution of the regional and secondary powers towards the regional order are factors which have directly affected the regional pattern of co-operation–conflict, and stand as possible causal variables. The argument is divided in two different parts. First, the changes in the pattern of co-operation–conflict were mostly due to the different positions that the regional and secondary powers sustained towards regional order (or *status quo*), forming what I call a balance of positions. Second, the comprehension of what caused those states to maintain or change different positions towards the *status quo* should be found not by means of mechanical logic situated in isolation at the structural level, but by an evaluation of foreign policy formation and execution in the context of the state-building process.

In specific terms, one analyses South Africa and Angola's foreign policy execution towards the regional order, informed by their state-building process and foreign policy formation. The article is structured into three sections. Firstly, it introduces the debate on how to assess changes in regional systems and possible causal factors founded on state agency power, namely the connection between state-building and foreign policy. The second and third sections argue that interaction changes in Southern Africa's regional system in the periods 1975–1988 and 1989–2015 relate to the balance of positions between the regional power (South Africa) and the main secondary power (Angola) towards the regional order. These positions are explained by unit variables constrained by the system, such as the state-building process, the interests and security of the elites, and foreign policy positions and impetus towards the *status quo*. The conclusion presents our main findings, which are part of broader research that incorporates the cases of Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

## **Continuities and changes in regional systems: the role of state-building and foreign policy**

This study intends to collaborate with the theoretical efforts towards deepening and widening the systemic comprehension of international relations, through more complex systemic theories (Jervis 1997; Buzan et al. 1993) and new evidence from regional systems and foreign policy processes in the global South (Braveboy-Wagner 2003; Hettne et al. 2000), including the African continent (Clapham 2005; Grant and Söderbaum 2003; Khadiagala and Lyons 2001; Wright 1999). It seeks to evaluate the agency role of the regional and secondary powers of a peripheral regional system, Southern Africa, and analyses their foreign policy in a historical-sociological perspective. It observes its impact on the system's interaction level (pattern of co-operation–conflict), informed by variables at the level of the unit (state-building) and structure (regional order).

In Southern Africa around 1960 and especially after 1975, an interaction change occurred from a co-operative environment to one marked by conflict (interstate, internal and proxy war). However, after 1989, a transformation began from this pattern of conflict to an environment markedly co-operative that has seen the strengthening of regional institutions and connections in political, economic, security and social spheres – but still with some focus of tensions. This transition occurred in 1988–1989, marked by the New York Accords of 22 December 1988, when Angola, South Africa and Cuba reached an agreement to end 13 years of interstate conflicts. While a deeper theoretical and empirical discussion is presented elsewhere (Castellano da Silva 2015), this article maintains that the most robust explanation for this transformation seems to be related to the agency role of systemic units and the connection between the state-building process and foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>

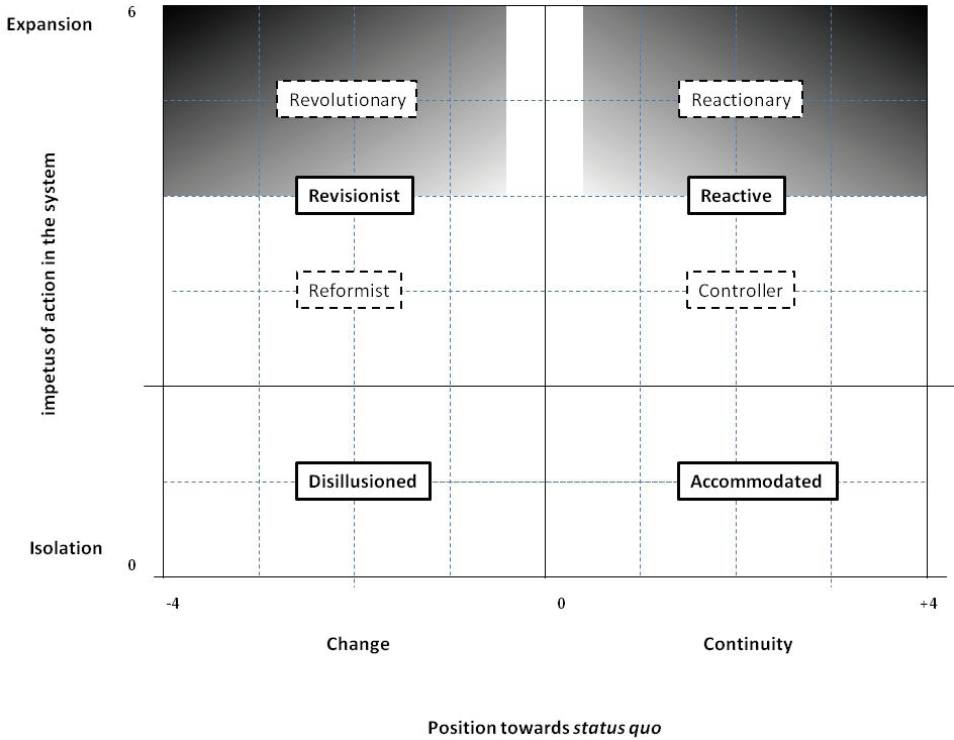
The argument is divided in two parts. First, changes in the execution of foreign policy of the regional and secondary powers towards the regional order can explain in relational terms changes in the pattern of co-operation–conflict. This logic I call ‘balance of positions’. Second, state-building process and foreign policy formation can indicate why different foreign policies are executed and, as a consequence, positions are adopted. These two propositions I describe below.

In the case of the first proposition, the balance of position thesis maintains that structural factors are important but war or co-operation only occurs because of efficient causes (Waltz 2004: 289), such as the agency power of state and the interaction factor of elites agreeing or disagreeing with each other’s policies. Foreign policy execution, a unit level element, can be read in diverse ways regarding its impact on the dynamics of co-operation and conflict in a system. One way to observe it systemically is through analysing the attitude and behaviour of systemic units towards the systemic order (DiCicco and Levy 2003: 126; Lemke 2002: 41; Organski and Kugler 1989: 173). States do not always automatically act out of necessity, balancing power (Waltz 1979) or threat (Walt 1987). They also try to implement their will, and work to see their interests and preferences accomplished in the systemic order (Gilpin 1981: 10).

The order is a systemic element at the structural level which relates to rules, norms and institutions that govern systemic interactions and distribute benefits and interests asymmetrically across the units (Gilpin 1981: 34; Keohane 1989: 3; Bull 2002: 13; Morgenthau 2003: 45). On the one hand, the attitude towards the order involves each unit’s interests in continuity or change, according to its perceptions of a satisfactory order and its preferences regarding political, economic, social and securitarian institutions.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, each unit’s behaviour depends on the type of actions the actor will adopt to accomplish its interests, evaluating costs, benefits and risks. States can be positioned in diverse areas of attitude (change or continuity) and behaviour (isolation or expansion) regarding the existing order. As suggested in Figure 1, the variance goes from high levels of action (revisionist or reactive), including the possibility of the use of force (revolutionary or reactionary), to isolation, either interested in the maintenance (accommodation) or transformation (delusion) of the *status quo*.

Relevant inflections and restructuring (Dessouki 2008: 167) in foreign policy orientation towards the regional order produce changes in the level of co-operation–conflict, since different interactional combinations of those different positions and impetus tend to instigate more or less regional conflict and co-operation. For instance, coexistence of revolutionary and reactionary powers tends to produce a high probability of systemic conflict, as seen in the conflict zones (dark areas). The opposite could be said about the coexistence of countries that maintain proximity in their positions. In this case, they tend to co-operate, mostly if they defend similar change or the continuity of the *status quo*. Therefore, the balance of power or threat mechanics alone cannot indicate when balancing may create systemic conflict. Systemic conflict and co-operation occur depending on the positions that systemic and secondary powers maintain *vis-à-vis* the systemic order (*status quo*) (Lemke 2002: 23; Gilpin 1981: 50).

Figure 1 – Regional foreign policy, systemic order and conflict zones

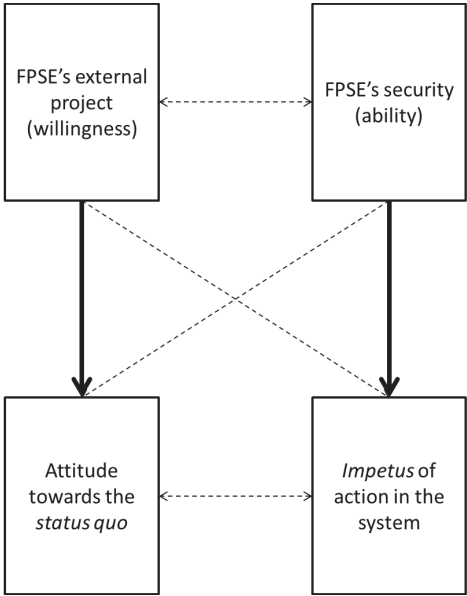


Source: Elaborated by the author.

Note: On the horizontal axis, the attitude is defined by the four pillars of the systemic order (political, economic, social and security), where each point (1 to 4) refers to attitude for the continuity or change regarding the order in each pillar. On the vertical axis, we establish seven broad types of behaviour: 0 = denial of using any instrument; 1 = inaction; 2 = use of discursive and diplomatic instruments; 3 = economic and institutional instruments (including significant participation in institutionalised peacekeeping missions); 4 = indirect military instruments (proxy war and covert operations); 5 = direct military instruments; 6 = total war.

However, now considering the second preposition presented above, what could explain the continuity and change in a foreign policy orientation? How willing are states to maintain a position of continuity or change towards the *status quo*? What most directly affects the impetus of their policy towards the system? In order to properly answer these questions it is necessary to observe the process of foreign policy formation, more specifically the willingness (interests) and ability (security) of foreign policy-setting elites (FPSE) to execute their preferences in relation to the regional order (Schweller 2006: 59). We agree with defensive and neoclassical realists that states are not unitary, rational and coherent actors as proposed by structural realism (Keohane 1986: 164–5). Decisions taken by state elites are themselves immersed in a complex historical and sociological process of state-building (Halliday 2005: 40; Ripsman 2009: 174). This context will indicate who governs and what capacity this elite can find in the state (state capacity) in order to relate to and extract resources from society in a sustainable way. As a consequence, the general political project of the FPSE defines its attitude towards the regional system, be it more conservative, liberal or developmentalist (Hentz 2005; Ayoob 1999). Moreover the FPSE’s security or insecurity in relation to other elites, social groups and external pressures will affect mostly its impetus for action in the system, making it more expansionist or isolationist in terms of instruments adopted for action (Taliaferro 2009: 220; Hill 2003: 137).

Figure 2 – Foreign policy-setting elites and regional foreign policy



Source: Elaborated by the author.

As suggested in Figure 2, a general logic is expected in the causal model, which is made of three hypotheses. First, the FPSEs’ external projects are chiefly responsible for the

countries' attitude towards the *status quo*. Different preferences of the FPSE produce different external projects and, in turn, different relative positions for the continuity or change in the regional order. However, the maintenance of the political project is conditioned by the strength of the FPSE in relation to internal and external pressures experienced by them. Since the FPSEs' main objective is survival in power, their political project may be challenged if internal and external pressures are impossible to overcome without a significant change in foreign policy directions.

Second, the security of the FPSE is primarily responsible for the country's impetus of action towards the *status quo*. Internal and external pressures tend to produce different responses from the FPSE in terms of impetus of action in the system. Low external pressures often lead to the reality predicted by the balance of threats theory: states tend to avoid excessive costs of action when they do not perceive significant pressures coming from the system (Zakaria 1992: 190–1). However, the opposite is not always true. Even if significant external pressures exist, balancing is not automatic and will depend on how impeditive the internal pressures towards FPSE are and what state capacity these elites have at their disposal.

Finally, state capacity is a necessary condition for the sustainability of the implementation of the external project into an effective attitude and impetus towards the *status quo*. In the case of attitude, external projects that lead to very transformative or continuing positions towards the existing order will generate excessive costs due to the opposition that tends to be created internally and externally (given the balance of positions). High state capacity will be necessary for this attitude to be consolidated in action over the long term. Concerning the impetus, high state capacity will be a necessary condition to respond robustly and sustainably to high external pressure. Situations of high external impetus and low state capacity may exist, but they tend to occur briefly and when internal pressures are relatively accommodated. Nonetheless, state capacities are not sufficient to ensure sustainable impetuous action against external pressures. If internal pressures to the FPSE are significant, the impetuous external action against threats will only last until the exhaustion of those elites' conditions to remain in power. This can occur through the victory of rival elites in the political process, due or not to a decline in state capacity.

The general ideas regarding the balance of positions and the hypotheses concerning the relation between state-building, foreign policy formation and foreign policy execution will be verified in the next two sections. The empirical analysis of Southern Africa intends to offer a useful explanation for the changes in the regional pattern of co-operation–conflict in the last 40 years through evaluating the process of foreign policy in the regional power, South Africa, and the main secondary power, Angola.

## **Explaining co-operation and conflict: state-building and foreign policy in South Africa and Angola (1975–1988)**

In 1975, the conservative regional order formed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and centred in South Africa started to be severely questioned. However, its main defender

did not cede easily to its transformation. The political pillar of the order was based on the heritage of the colonial system through the territorial *status quo* and the principle of defence of sovereignty by the state's own means. In the economic area, conservatism (protectionism and mercantilism) was combined with liberalism, since this principle of economic exchanges could favour the centrality of the South African position (Wallerstein and Vieira 1992: 9). Its centrality was sustained by logistical axes (infrastructure) and financial and commercial relations based on the economic hub of the Witwatersrand, the geographic centre of South African economy (Kaniki 2010: 472). In the social pillar, the conservative order was based on the socio-cultural domination of elites linked to the British and Portuguese colonial projects and on discriminatory and segregationist social systems, which favoured the white population (European descendants) (Basil Davidson et al. 2010: 817). In the sphere of security, there was a primacy of the national security idea, with special attention to security challenges produced by the national liberation movements (Thompson 2000: 198–200). The growing contestation of this order and the reactive position of South Africa resulted in increasing levels of systemic conflict, followed by disengagement in 1988.

## **State-building and foreign policy towards regional order in South Africa (1975–1988)**

Between 1975 and 1988, South Africa maintained a reactionary regional behaviour in the face of the revolutionary and reformatory postures of neighbouring states, raising the level of systemic conflict. Within South Africa, the gradual predominance of conservative elites setting foreign policy, although with increasing instability, led to a regional policy in defence of the conservative order (*status quo*). The high capacity of the state in relation to the social forces favoured the articulation of a foreign policy that responded to high internal (liberation movements) and external pressures (threats from neighbouring states and extra-regional forces) with a regional policy of high impetus, until the costs for the ruling elite became impractical.

Chronologically, there were five phases of distinct foreign policy towards the regional order. Between 1975 and 1977, during the government of Prime Minister B. J. Vorster (1966–1978), the National Party's (NP) conservative civilian elite, which had implemented apartheid since 1948, could avoid significant costs by promoting the regional *status quo*. Relevant internal pressures, represented by the uprising of high school students in Soweto (1976), and relatively low external pressures, with spaces for accommodation with moderate African countries (e.g. Malawi, Madagascar, Gabon, Ivory Coast), gave conditions for a foreign policy coordinated mostly by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and limited primarily to the use of diplomatic means (Barber and Barratt 1990).

However, in the following two years (1977–1978) a growing participation of the militarist elite in the foreign policy decision-making ensured the conformation of a new position in relation to the *status quo*. Albeit with a continued impetus of action, a more reactionary attitude emerged, namely towards revolutionary regimes (Angola and Mo-



zambique) and liberation movements (African National Congress – ANC, South West Africa People's Organization – SWAPO, and Pan Africanist Congress – PAC) seen as committed to a communist Total Onslaught against apartheid. This discourse incremented the narrow legitimacy of the regime, which sped up its policy of state-building, manifested in high investments in defence and infrastructure and a new phase of the import substitution programme, also in order to respond to international sanctions (Grundy 1983: 14; Thompson 2000: 200). These transformations were part of a renewed political influence exercised by the Department of Defence, led by minister P.W. Botha, who co-ordinated the formulation of a regional offensive policy in 1977 named Total National Strategy (TNS) (Frankel 1984: 46).

Later, with the ascendance of P.W. Botha as Prime Minister (1978–80), the final rise of the NP rightwing to national leadership resulted, on the one hand, in the continuity of the foreign policy formulated in the previous period. On the other hand, an increased impetus towards the system was observed, with the concrete implementation of the TNS (Chan 1990: 13–14). This was a clear result of the free path of the militarist elite in national politics and the rise in external pressures. The latter included communism in Angola and Mozambique, the consolidation of the Frontline States alliance scheme among revisionist states, their renewed support for armed struggle against racist regimes, and a mandatory embargo against South Africa by the UN Security Council (Jorre 1992: 3). The pressures combined with new state capacities for action<sup>3</sup> and a deeper centralisation of decision-making in the *State Security Council* (SSC), presided over by Botha. As result, the impetuous implementation of foreign policy prioritised the creation of a regional economic solution to gather neutral regimes to South Africa's side (the Constellation of Southern African States – CONSAS)<sup>4</sup> and the control of the political transition in allied Rhodesia, where the radical movements ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) and ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union) threatened Ian Smith's racist regime. Meanwhile, Pretoria also employed indirect military action against regional revolutionary states, through supporting insurgent groups in Angola (*União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* – UNITA) and Mozambique (*Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* – RENAMO) (Cawthra 1986: 149).

In the following period, from 1981 to 1988, the high coercive and economic capacities constructed in the late 1970s (with some growing instability) guaranteed the actions of the political elite, favoured by spaces given by the US diplomacy of Constructive Engagement (Price 1990: 145), which re-opened dialogue with the apartheid regime and strengthened its position in Southern African conflicts. The victory of ZANU in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe in 1980 and the immediate entrance of the country in the recently created Southern African Development Coordination Council (SADCC) – a direct rival to CONSAS – significantly increased the external pressures towards Pretoria. A new era of apartheid offensive ensued (Vale 1990: 173). The FPSE, still centralised in the conservative elite of the NP, assured the continuity of the attitude pro-*status quo* and increased the impetus of action to the level of direct military engagement against revolutionary neighbours. Pretoria widely used covert operations, proxy war, direct actions and economic sabotage in the region, transforming foreign policy into a war policy (Gavin Cawthra 2013, personal interview). Direct offen-



sive was predominant in Angola, Mozambique and other countries which gave protection to the ANC and SWAPO, anti-apartheid movements fighting for liberation of South Africa and Namibia, respectively (Jaster 1992: 37–42).

However, after 1988 the crisis in state capacity and the exorbitant instability of the elite in power impacted on the sustainability of the external project and the impetuous action in the system. Regionally, if Botha's strategy turned out well towards more vulnerable and destabilised states (Mozambique, Lesotho and Zimbabwe), the environment in Angola was more complex, and Pretoria was deeply weakened with war efforts and unable to sustain its positions against the renewed Cuban presence after the battle of Mavinga (1987) in southeast Angola (Davies and O'Meara 1990: 202). Extra-regional co-operative initiatives of US/South Africa/UNITA and URSS/Cuba/Angola increased the scale of regional conflict, which had its main chapter in intense battles in the south of Angola from the end of 1987, mainly in the town of Cuito Cuanavale and Cunene province (Baxter 2012: 56–57; Dosman 2008: 215). Domestically, the decline of the militarist elites in FP decision-making, as a result of the failure of the 1983 constitutional reform, which marked a new policy of co-optation and repression, produced a gradual change in attitude toward the *status quo*. The high internal and external pressures, due to increasing domestic and international mobilisation against Apartheid, and new constraints to action (reduction of capacity and external support) led to a decrease in impetus.

In 1989, F.W. De Klerk, the head of NP's enlightened forces and Minister of National Education, rose to the presidency due to Botha's health problems, producing the definitive decline in militarist elites. The upsurge of the DFA as the main FPSE produced changes in the FP decision-making and the attitude relative to the *status quo*, although without a clear immediate project. The high pressure from all fronts contained actions towards *status quo*, which were limited to the use of diplomatic means. The South African FPSE envisioned the possibility of submitting itself to the project of changing the regional order, leading it to ensure the continuation of its political and economic power in the inevitable process of internal transition (Bauer and Taylor 2005: 245; Toit 2001: 20–1).

## **State-building and foreign policy towards regional order in Angola (1975–1988)**

In the case of Angola, factors such as state-building and the interests and security of the elite also deeply influenced foreign policy after independence. Angola stood on the other axis of the order, looking to change the *status quo*. The FPSE faced relative stability in power, but with challenges to build the state (security fragility, economic crisis and social disruption) and control the territory. A developmental foreign policy was adopted, searching for a complete transformation of the elements that supported the regional order. Regionally, Angola defended the idea of regional collective security, distribution of development and social rights, and the protection of the sovereignty of weak states. Moreover, Luanda sought to increase its capacity for action, strengthening the state participation in social development and security. However, this process was effectively encouraged with

the availability of natural resources (oil) and foreign military aid to cope with a high impetus of action, along with South Africa's external invasion and regionally linked internal pressures (UNITA actions).

Chronologically, along the period Angola maintained three different foreign policy positions towards the *status quo*, which revealed two different trends: in the beginning, an increasing revolutionary foreign policy, and, later, a policy tending towards moderate reformism. During the government of the MPLA leader Agostinho Neto (1975–1979), the unstable political leadership (civil war against insurgent groups, mainly UNITA) sought to protect its position by strengthening state capacities, with external aid, and implementing distributive policies that involved a developmental regional project (Birmingham 1992: 52; Marcum 1987: 75). Foreign policy was to serve as an instrument for victory in the civil war, which in turn implied the transformation of regional order (Wolfers and Bergerol 1983: 123–124). For the FPSE, including both Neto (with non-alignment profile) and the party's communist hard line leaders (such as MPLA's Secretary-General Lucio Lara), domestic stability and state/regime survival were strongly connected to regional politics (Malaquias 2002: 15, 19). The growing internal pressures (also from the MPLA's radical wing) and external threats (from South Africa, Zaire and the US) were answered with a high impetus of action for regional change. Neto established regional alliances with the Frontline States, as well as limited military operations on the northern and southern fronts, as a complement and alternative to the diplomatic initiative and especially in support of the national liberation movements opposed to apartheid (SWAPO and ANC).

After Neto's death, due to liver cancer, the former Minister of External Relations and then Minister of Planning and Economic Development, José Eduardo dos Santos, ascended to the presidency in 1979 and redirected foreign policy. The relative increase in the coercive capacities, centralisation of decision-making in the Defence and Security Council, and greater external support (mainly from Fidel Castro's Cuba) ensured Angola's ability to respond to increasing external pressures from South Africa and the USA. Dos Santos showed deeper support to SWAPO and ANC and stronger military reaction against South African invasion by backing UNITA (Bauer and Taylor 2005: 149). The president, who had major personal ties with the communist bloc, represented the advancement of a defensive and combative regional policy suggested by the party hard line. In the end, this would secure state integrity in the conflicts against South African and UNITA forces in the southern region of Angola in 1987–88 (Cuito Cuanavale and Cunene battles).

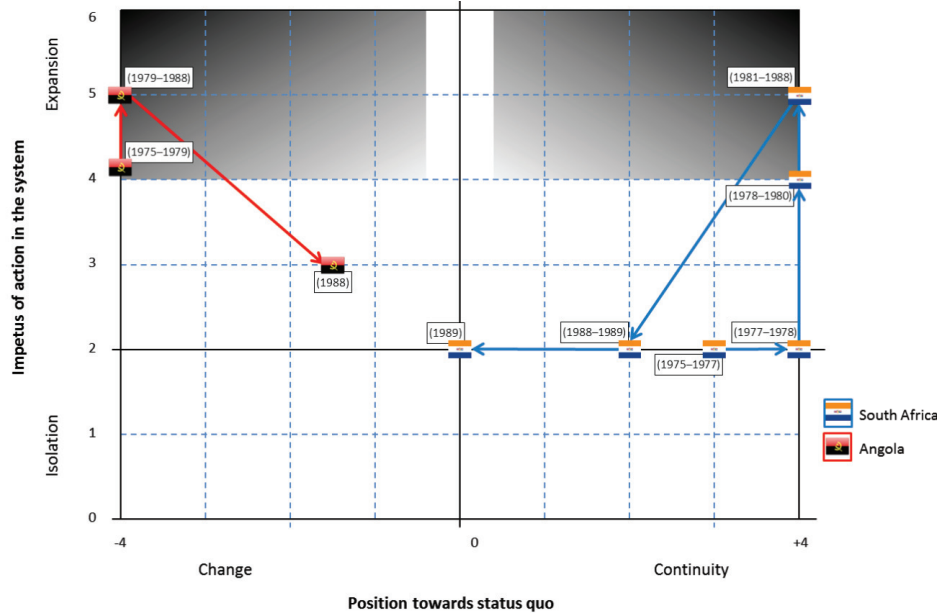
These operations and MPLA's partial military victory, which also involved heavy costs, were a weight factor that assured South Africa's disengagement and forced both parties to negotiate a settlement – together with the Cubans and with the support and mediation of the USA (formal) and USSR (informal). At the time of regional transition in 1988, the decrease in the external pressures with the retraction of South Africa and the instability in state capacities allowed Angola to reduce its impetus of action and relax the revolutionary intents of its regional project. The latter can be evidenced in the acceptance of the linkage policy and greater dialogue with the West.<sup>5</sup> The climactic moment was the signing of the New York Accords among South Africa, Angola and Cuba, on 22 December 1988.

Table 1 – State-building and foreign policy in South Africa and Angola (1975–1988)

Country	State-building		Regional FP – Formation (Elites)		Regional FP – Execution		
ZAF	State capacity	High (declining)	Security	High external pressure High internal pressure	Impetus	High	Reactionary
	State–society relations	Increasing instability of the dominant elite, internal struggle	External project	Conservative	Position status quo	Continuity	
AGO	State capacity	Medium (great external support)	Security	High external pressure High internal pressure	Impetus	High	Revolutionary
	State–society relations	Stability of the dominant elite, internal struggle	External project	Developmentalist	Position status quo	Change	

Source: Elaborated by the author.

Figure 3 – South Africa and Angola: Foreign policy towards the conservative order (1975–1988)



Source: Elaborated by the author.

Table 1 and Figure 3 synthesise the discussion made in this section. The state-building process, including the state capacity and state–society relations, and the formation of foreign policy, namely the interests and security of the FPSEs, were direct determinants of the foreign policy execution of South Africa and Angola from 1975 to 1989. As a result of this domestic process, greatly influenced by systemic forces, both countries situated themselves at extreme opposite sites in their positions towards the regional order and produced an increasingly conflictive regional environment. Moreover, they accompanied each other's movements in their attitude and behaviour towards the *status quo*, from a hard-line profile and then back to moderation, clearly balancing positions.

## **Explaining co-operation and conflict: state-building and foreign policy in South Africa and Angola (1989–2015)**

The conflictive pattern of interaction was followed by an increasingly co-operative environment, albeit marked by significant, but limited, regional tensions. The transition of South Africa's foreign policy at the end of 1980s produced a transformation in the regional order in accordance with the new global order, mostly based on liberal principles. In the region, the priority of human rights and the right to intervene in countries' domestic affairs began to coexist erratically with the principle of respect for negative sovereignty and juridical statehood.<sup>6</sup> Countries in the region widely embraced economic liberalisation, represented by the implementation of structural adjustment programmes, even in former socialist or Marxist–Leninist regimes. Regional integration institutions, notably the reformed Southern African Development Community (SADC), also embraced its foundations. A priority was given to good governance and aid programmes, often detached from the alternative of employment and income for the population (Moyo 2009). Human security sustained the justification of reform of national security forces and a foundation for the management of regional security (Zacarias 1999). This order of a liberal nature was adopted gradually, though not consensually, even by its main defender, South Africa.

## **State-building and foreign policy towards regional order in South Africa (1989–2015)**

Post-1989 South Africa's foreign policy was marked by the idea of transformation (Landsberg 2010). In this period, South Africa was governed by a predominantly liberal elite, with some developmental aspects which aimed at internal reconciliation and the adjustment of regional order to the fundamentals of the US-led global order. From this perspective, it sought to gradually transform regional order under the principles of individual rights; the free market and commercial relations (*laissez-faire*); the priority of civil and political rights; and the principles of human security. Overall, its increasing state capacities were used cautiously to respond to external pressures (crises in Southern Africa and disputes in regional leadership), given the predominance of blocking internal pressures (social reform process, reconciliation and growth). Its regional posture was primarily that

of controller, albeit with episodes of greater impetus, as during the leadership of Nelson Mandela, or approximation, as recently during the government of Jacob Zuma.

During the period, four different positions towards regional order were identified. During the last apartheid government of F.W. De Klerk (1989–1994), the crisis in state capacities and in the ruling elite opened the process of political transition. Externally, the country concomitantly sought a relative accommodation to the liberal global order and the enlargement of diplomatic relations. Regionally, Pretoria intended to control the order in transition, seeking credibility and approximation towards former rival countries and liberation movements and to transit priorities from geopolitics to geo-economics, strengthening the position of private investments connected to South Africa (Hentz 2005; Visentini and Pereira 2010). Nonetheless, lack of confidence was evident regarding the white elite, which was still looking for political guarantees in the new democratic electoral system (power-sharing formulas) (Landsberg 2010: 53–54). The constant internal pressures towards political liberation, the decreasing external threats (increasing international acceptance) and the crisis in state capacities constrained the impetus of external action, which was limited to participation in the political transition of Namibia and renewed bilateral co-operation with Mozambique, Zambia and Zaire. Besides, internal and regional pressures made a transition that favoured a majoritarian electoral system almost inevitable, a factor which would eventually result in a black majority government, ruled by the ANC and its emblematic leader Nelson Mandela.

In Mandela's government (1994–1999), the gradual recovery of state capacity, mainly due to the renewed legitimacy of the new, inclusive regime, marked the stability of the ruling elite. The project of state-building was centred on an idea of congregation of different social groups in a promise of a new nation, a Rainbow Nation. Mandela's discourse of social tolerance and the promises of restorative justice, based on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, were the pillars of this idea. The country's external project has remained fundamentally liberal, defending a foreign policy based on ethical and human rights. Moreover, the external pressures, perceived as the need to present its credentials as a good global citizen and regional leader, instigated an impetuous external action. Pretoria tried to attack remnant signals of apartheid's foreign policy – for instance, the actions of national private military companies (HRW 2000) – although defending its position in the regional power hierarchy (Vale 2003: 132). This was evident in, at least, two ambiguous situations. First, Mandela was averse to Robert Mugabe's struggle to become the *primus inter pares* in regional politics, opposing his actions in the SADC's main political organ (the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security – OPDS), such as the intervention in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 1998. Second, Mandela defended his own security interests in the region, including the use of military force, adopted in Lesotho in the same year (Tavares 2011: 159–160; Likoti 2007: 260).<sup>7</sup>

The election of the former deputy president Thabo Mbeki (1999–2008) resulted in the consolidation of higher state capacity and the leadership of the ANC, now based on the international and pragmatic profile of the president (Habib 2009). These factors enabled the advance of a foreign policy that has flirted with developmentalism and sustained the focus

of external action in institutional building (Aziz Pahad 2013, personal interview). As an institutional builder, Mbeki led the creation of various institutions that globally promoted South–South co-operation and North–South dialogue (e.g. G20 and India–Brazil–South Africa Dialogue Forum) and in Africa (New Partnership for Africa's Development and African Union). In Southern Africa, the lack of credible competitors, with the crisis of credibility and political decay of the Mugabe regime, offered Mbeki a free path to unblock settlement in DRC and Burundi and to become a regional peacekeeper, funding peace operations and security sector reform programmes. Mbeki also tried to present a new image of being a regional institutional builder (SADC reforms) and a leader who refused confrontation and hegemony, as in the case of political mediation in Zimbabwe, defending a silent diplomacy and pan-African solidarity (Prys 2008: 14–17). However, his natural transit in the international arena did not alleviate domestic problems that had to be urgently addressed and that gradually limited external impetus. Internally, Mandela's Rainbow Nation project entered into a stage of exhaustion with renewed pressures for deeper domestic and regional development projects, factors which marked the political crisis at the end of his government and his resignation after pressures from ANC's radical wing.

Finally, in Jacob Zuma's presidency (2008–the present), the impact of 2008's international economic crisis in state capacities and the reduction in the legitimacy of the Rainbow Nation project constrained the ANC's actions in defending the credibility of a liberal order and kept its impetus of action within the limits of regional institutions. Zuma has shown a tendency to intensify South Africa's regional leadership in response to extra-regional competition (China, Europe, USA) by increasing Mbeki's developmentalism (Vickers 2012: 117). One could observe a strong collective instance in its position to defend the sovereignty of weak neighbours in regional conflicts (in Central African Republic and DRC); to accommodate the Zimbabwean crisis, while defending the priority of liberal rights; and to articulate a more viable regional economic integration in the face of the European Economic Partnership Agreements (Vickers 2011: 186) through reforming DFA (now Department of International Relations and Cooperation) and reinforcing its co-operative and distributive role. By the end of the decade, South Africa was constrained to adopt a regional policy closer to the interests of the secondary powers in order to maintain and boost regional co-operation and its position as a regional leader.

## **State-building and foreign policy towards regional order in Angola (1989–2015)**

In Angola, the resolution of the regional conflict with the withdrawal of Cuban troops and the independence of Namibia changed the problematics of the state mostly to internal conflict. Angola retained its regional policies in the spectrum of change, albeit by accommodating a gradually reformist posture (non-revolutionary). The MPLA held the political leadership, but still struggled to control the territory. Its regional developmental project remained alive, but with declining impetus. During the 1990s, the high external pressures (the UNITA threat from neighbouring countries) were answered with high impetus, al-

though with reduced capabilities. The increment in state capacity concomitant with the rising internal threats at the end of the 1990s ensured the continuation of these policies to the extent that external and internal pressures were accommodated in 2002, resulting in the reduction of external impetus.

Therefore, two different positions towards the regional order were maintained by Angola's foreign policy. In the first period (1989–2002), the instability of state capacities in the early 1990s and the resumption of armed struggle by UNITA's leader Jonas Savimbi in 1998 were answered with investments in the state's coercive capacity (Jane's 2009: 5). This was sustained by the availability of natural resources (oil) and a greater legitimacy of the MPLA regime due to a relative political democratisation. The elite of the MPLA, now devoid of its Marxist–Leninist project and more centred on the presidential figure, still sought the transformation of regional order, except for the growing alignment of economic principles based on market logic. The continuity of high internal pressures, linked to external threats, was answered with great impetus of action in the region through a vision of regional collective security closely attached to the defence of the Angolan state (Khadiagala 2001: 147; Malaquias 2011: 5–6). Dos Santos, with renewed backing from the military strata, engaged militarily in Zaire, Congo-Brazzaville and Namibia to suppress UNITA and its external supporters (Malaquias 2002: 17). The pinnacle of regional involvement and impetus was in the Second Congo War (1998–2003), defending DRC's president Laurent Kabila, and later his son Joseph Kabila, allies against UNITA (Turner 2002).

In the second period, after 2002, reductions in internal and external security threats, related to UNITA's demobilisation, enabled the accommodation of the country's regional ambitions and the transfer of political focus to the reconstruction of internal capacities, given the challenges left by the civil war. On the one hand, winning the civil war positioned Angola as an emergent regional power. With high economic growth after 2002, the modernisation of armed forces, and increasing military expenditure and personnel, Angola for the first time significantly reduced the gap *vis-à-vis* South Africa in terms of aggregate material capacity (Castellano da Silva 2012a). On the other, Angola became increasingly isolationist, because of its focus on maintaining internal security and consolidating state-building, with the help of increasing relations with China and Brazil, in order to implement 'a Marshall Plan to rebuild the country' (Dos Anjos 2008: 10).

Therefore, from 1989 to 2015, the same logic relating the state-building process and foreign policy formation seemed to affect the foreign policy execution of South Africa and Angola, as shown in Table 2 and Figure 4. The shift from a conservative to a relatively liberal regional order, gradually operated by South Africa, contributed to reducing the levels of conflict, but did not put the states in the region on the same axis of position towards the *status quo*. Less extreme opposition regarding the regional order still produced political conflicts and resulted in military actions in the peripheral regions of the system (DRC and Lesotho). Nonetheless, recent accommodation of attitude and impetus in relation to the regional order, despite the increasing power of Angola, has generated a more co-operative pattern of interaction and reproduced the balance of positions.

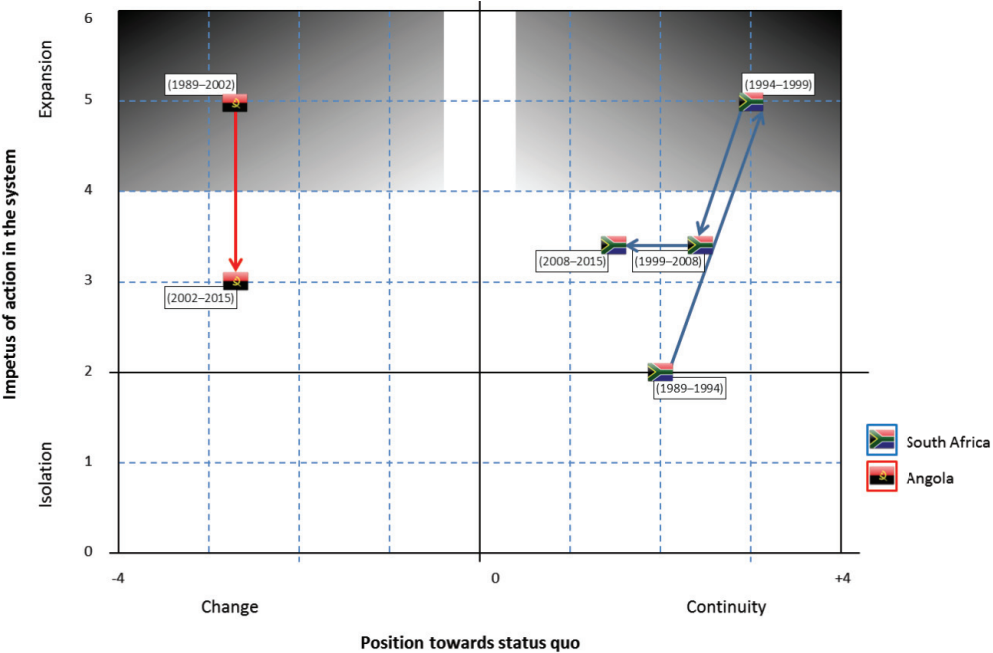


Table 2 – State-building and foreign policy in South Africa and Angola (1989–2015)

Country	State-building		Regional FP – Formation (Elites)		Regional FP – Execution		
ZAF	State capacity	Medium (increasing)	Security	Medium external pressure	Impetus	Medium	Controller
				Medium internal pressure			
	State-society relations	Reconciliation, stability of the dominant elite	External project	Liberal	Position status quo	Continuity	
AGO	State capacity	Medium (increasing)	Security	High external pressure (declining)	Impetus	High (declining)	Revolutionary – Reformist
				High internal pressure (declining)			
	State-society relations	Stability of the dominant elite, internal struggle	External project	Developmentalist	Position status quo	Change	

Source: Elaborated by the author.

Figure 4 – South Africa and Angola: Foreign policy towards the liberal order (1989–2015)



Source: Elaborated by the author.

## Concluding remarks

This article analysed the agency of local states as the cause of changes in the pattern of co-operation–conflict in the regional system of Southern Africa in the last 40 years. As Figures 3 and 4 attempted to synthesise, the particularities of state-building and foreign policy formation, both linked to domestic and international environments, produced very oppositional regional foreign policies in South Africa and Angola. The former pursued an intense expansionist and conservative regional project, while the latter also put into practice an expansionist but developmentalist project that opposed the *status quo*. Systemic conflict was an expected consequence. On the other hand, in the 1989–2015 period, international and domestic transformation entailed changes in the state-building process and the FPSE's interests and security that created new foreign policies towards the region. They stood in opposite quadrants, but presented less extreme attitudes. Moreover, an important variable that noticeably changed between the two periods analysed (1975–1988 and 1989–2015) was the intensity and the locus where the conflict occurred. In the latter period, the opposed interests and high impetus of action between regional states were manifested in conflicts in the periphery of the system (DRC and Lesotho) and not in the older nucleus of interaction. More recently, Angola's relative isolation concerning regional issues and South Africa's slow movement of approximation towards developmentalist principles are factors that offer uncertain prospects of deeper regional integration.

The experience of conflict and co-operation in Southern Africa's regional system suggests that states balance positions towards the systemic order rather than responding to power or threats mechanically. In the recent history of Southern Africa, a similar configuration of power (predominance of South Africa) led to different environments of war and peace. Moreover, the actions of South Africa and Angola in the region cannot be understood only in the sense of threats directed towards these countries but also in terms of threats as well as interests regarding their projects of regional order. That is why the comprehension of positions and their transformations throughout history should not be automatic. It demands the understanding of the foreign policy process, and the relevance of variables such as state-building (state capacity and state–society relations), foreign policy formation (preferences and security of the FPSE) and foreign policy execution (attitude and behaviour towards the regional order). This affirmative brings us back to the evidence regarding the three hypotheses manifested at the end of the first section.

Firstly, as far as the attitude in relation to the *status quo* is concerned, the study demonstrates how external projects of the FPSE are central to shaping a position of continuity or change *vis-à-vis* the regional order. The case of South Africa (ZAF) especially shows that the rise and decline of the FPSE led to the change in position relative to the *status quo* (ZAF 1989, ZAF 1994, ZAF 1999, ZAF 2008). However, in important cases both in South Africa and Angola (AGO), elites avoided their decline by transforming their external project and ensuring greater security of their position in power domestically (ZAF 1977, AGO 1989–2002, ZAF 1988, ZAF 1989–1994). Finally, the reduction in external pressures also allowed for a change in attitude towards the *status quo* (AGO 1988, AGO 2002), as they

represented clear signs that the systemic order had become harmless to the interests of the FPSE.

Secondly, the study also found empirical evidence that the security of the FPSE is primarily responsible for their impetus of action towards the *status quo*. Cases such as ZAF 1975–1978 and AGO 1988, 2002–2015 show that elites tend to avoid excessive cost when they do not perceive significant pressures from the system. In addition, when they subjected to important external pressures, states tended to respond fiercely, as seen in ZAF 1994–1999, AGO 1975–1988, AGO 1989–2002, ZAF 1999–2008, ZAF 2008–2015, ZAF 1980–1988, and ZAF 1988–1989). It is noteworthy, however, that in all cases – mainly ZAF 1999–2008 and ZAF 2008–2015 – the threats were not necessarily connected to national security, but essentially to the interests of the FPSE regarding the regional order.

Thirdly, state capacity was also perceived as a central variable to the sustainability of the impetus of action towards the *status quo*. On the one hand, state capacity brings more explanatory possibilities than aggregate national power (Zakaria 2000). States with high relative aggregate national power may experience constraints to action due to the limits of state capacity to extract resources (coercion, capital and legitimacy) from society, as seen in South Africa at the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s. When capacity is low or declining, the state experiences concrete limits to balancing against threats. On the other hand, great impetus of action may be adopted even by states with reduced state capacity. This was the case for Angola in the early 1990s, until the resumption of UNITA's armed struggle in 1998 and the reconstruction of state capacity. This kind of behaviour contradicts the notion that only capable states adopt impetuous policies. On the contrary, the fiery action may be precisely the source of power in shortage in the domestic environment, a form of elite survival. The same occurred in the military advance of South Africa in Angola between 1987 and 1988. However, without state capacity, these magical attempts of elites to both definitively resolve external pressures and acquire new power resources are extraordinarily brief. Finally, capacities are not sufficient for ensuring the sustainability of external action because the FPSE can be destitute in the political process, as seen in ZAF 1999 and 2008. If elites remain in power, however, they will have their external impetus guaranteed as far as they ensure high state capacities. Otherwise, the very disintegration of capabilities may lead to their political defeat, as observed in ZAF in 1988.

The work concludes that, in order to comprehend interaction changes in peripheral regional systems, one should not only observe the penetration forces imposed by extra-regional powers (overlay) (Katzenstein 2005) or the predominant regional power's policies (Destradi 2010; Prys 2010). Evaluating the impact of the USA's or China's extra-regional penetration or the individual behaviour of regional powers such as South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Brazil, Turkey and India only serves halfway to comprehend regional realities. A deeper understanding of regional systems necessitates relational knowledge of the regional and secondary powers' state-building process and foreign policy formation and execution towards the regional order. This proposition may guide new historical-comparative studies on other regions inside and outside Africa, which may provide better comprehension of the evolution of foreign policy towards regional orders, as well as the possibilities and constraints faced by regional powers, especially in the global South.

## Notes

- 1 Most popular literature on co-operation and conflict in Southern Africa has adopted a globalist, identitarian or proto-systemic narrative. The globalist analysis has highlighted the submission of the regional level to global dynamics – such as the capitalist world system and great power politics, including Cold War competition – largely ignoring local agency (Vieira et al. 1992; Shubin 2008). The identitarian perspective has prioritised relevant variables such as race, culture and ideology (Schlemmer 1976; Shaw 1973), but has tended to neglect the continuous existence of intra-identitarian conflict and extra-identitarian co-operation in regional dynamics (Bowman 1968: 234). The proto-systemic view addresses the relative autonomy of the regional (sub)system, sustaining an interactional focus on the dynamics of cooperation and conflict in diverse issue areas, regional interdependence, and the evolution and effectiveness of regional organisations (Shaw and Heard 1976; Amin et al. 1987). As in the case of early systemic theories (Waltz 1979: 54–59), this view usually ignores the impact of systemic structures and maintains a pre-theoretical analysis to the detriment of evaluating causal mechanisms (Shaw 1974: 640). The three dominant approaches as a whole have neglected the relation between the regional system's structure and the role of unit agency, such as the analysis of the perspectives and actions of regional and secondary powers *vis-à-vis* regional structures (e.g. order) and the complex process of foreign policy. This perspective is adopted by the present study.
- 2 In the political field, the order represents the predominant view of legality and legitimacy of the external behaviour of states (autonomy/interference/war) and its political organisation (sovereign states/colonies/protectorates). In the economic field, it involves the legality and legitimacy of the economic organisation (which mode of production is socially accepted) and the predominant economic interactions (which model of economic development and wealth distribution prevails). In the social sphere, systemic order refers to the role of race, nation, ethnicity and the stage of the process of acquisition of rights by the population. In the security field, it refers to the prevalence of the securitisation of certain threats and the predominance of certain referent objects (human, national or regional security). For analytical purposes, the model adopts ideal types of orders, named conservative, liberal or developmental, which are better described in Castellano da Silva (2015).
- 3 Due to space constraints, many indicators of state capacity had to be omitted. A deeper data analysis can be found in Castellano da Silva (2015).
- 4 The CONSAS would increase dependence on and the centrality of the South African economy, which had historically developed the social connections of migrant workers (mainly Mozambicans, dependent on South African jobs) and trade and infrastructural dependence of neighbour states (mostly Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland) (Mbeki and Nkosi 1992: 70).
- 5 The linkage policy of US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker connected the long awaited independence and elections in Namibia with the withdrawal of Cuban and, then, South African troops from Angola.
- 6 Juridical statehood indicates a state's condition given its negative sovereignty, guaranteed legally, mainly after the UN Charter, by the right of non-interference in internal affairs. Empirical statehood, in turn, refers to the effective (positive) realization of sovereignty, which involves to govern and protect the state's territory and people (Jackson and Rosberg 1982; Jackson 1990).
- 7 The full entry of South Africa in the re-inaugurated SADC in 1994, the later reintegration of the DRC in Southern Africa's regional dynamics, and the complex logic of conflict from Central Africa's Great Lakes produced relevant regional tensions (Dokken 2008: 49; Castellano da Silva 2012b). The Second Congo War produced political conflicts between old rivals within the SADC's OPDS. South Africa initially opposed the intervention of Zimbabwe (president Mugabe also presided over the Organ), Angola and Namibia in August 1998, and later in September made its own intervention in Lesotho (Mathoma 1999: 73–5).

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