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15. WOMEN AND STATE VIOLENCE IN ZIMBABWE, 2000–2008

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the challenges that were faced by women as a result of the economic and political crisis that engulfed Zimbabwe from 2000–2008. The conflict spared no one but heavily affected supporters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Women in Zimbabwe were victims of political violence engineered by the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) in order to win the 2000 and 2005 parliamentary elections and the 2002 and 2008 Presidential elections. Women became so vulnerable because men left them alone as they fled to urban areas for safety which was not guaranteed after all. In the midst of loneliness and harassment, women had to confront the dual burden of providing for the families and absorbing ZANU PF torture. In view of these abuses, women in Zimbabwe remain practically vulnerable to physical, verbal, sexual and economic abuse during periods of political and economic turmoil. The year 2008 demonstrated that women in Zimbabwe are arguably between a rock and a hard place. This is because there are still cultural practices which stipulate that cultured women are submissive to what men say. Christianity on the other hand does little to liberate women from male bondage. This means that during the 2000–2008 era women were alone because the government, the church, and the society did not sympathise with them and did little if ever to ameliorate the situation.

This chapter is divided into six sections. The main objective of the first section is to provide some insights into the HIV and AIDS situation in eastern and southern Africa. This was done in order to establish how gender based violence (GBV) can exacerbate the HIV and AIDS condition in the region. Violence in Zimbabwe from 2000–2008 demonstrates that if left unchecked, political violence has an impact on the spreading of HIV on the continent. The second section investigates why women should participate in politics. Linked to that, in the third section the authors assess the factors hindering the participation of women in politics. The fourth chapter briefly analyses Zimbabwe's political and economic crisis for the necessary background information on political violence in Zimbabwe from 2000–2008. The fifth section dwells on the challenges faced by Zimbabwean women as a result of the political crisis from 2000–2008. The last section examines the responses of stakeholders and

the challenges faced. Overall, violence in Zimbabwe has had negative effects on women. This therefore cements the fact that violence affects women more than men especially in conflict situations.

GENDER AND HIV/AIDS IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA: SOME INSIGHTS

Gender as defined by UN Women is about the roles and responsibilities that are given to women and men because they are women or men. Some common gender roles are: women are expected to keep the house clean and to take care of the children and have children. On the other hand men are expected to make money for the family and take a leadership role. Men are also expected to do the heavier tasks around the homestead (UN Women, 2013: 3). Gender based violence is recognised as a major challenge to development across the world in general and Zimbabwe is no exception (Wekwete et al., 2014: 24). GBV means physical, sexual, emotional or psychological violence carried out against a person because of that person's gender (SAfAIDS, n.d.: 2). According to Mcfadden (1994), gender based violence can be defined as any act that results in sexual, physical or psychological harm to the survivor. Both women and men are victims of gender violence but women constitute a larger group of victims. Gender based violence is based on power (Mcfadden, 1994). The person who enjoys more power over the other is usually the perpetrator while the one with less power is the victim. In simple terms, gender based violence is discriminatory conduct, action or treatment that causes pain to the victim in many ways. GBV is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy their rights and freedoms and equality with men (Tuyizere, 2007: 134). It is intended to keep women in a subordinate and submissive state so as to perpetuate their dependence on men. It arises from the patriarchal system which since time immemorial has extended control over women's lives. Violence against women (VAW) is rooted in historical unequal power relations between men and women resulting in domination over and discrimination against women by men. GBV throughout the life cycle derives principally from cultural patterns and aspects of religion which perpetuate the lower status accorded to women in the family, the workplace, the community and society (UN, 1995: 77–78). Despite the enactment of many gender responsive laws and policies such as the Domestic Violence Act of 2007, women and girls in Zimbabwe continue to be the victims in 99% of GBV cases, especially within the private sphere (Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, 2012: v). There is a closer link between GBV and HIV which follows that unless GBV is dealt with, the scourge will continue to haunt both men and women.

HIV/AIDS is one of the most devastating challenges to developmental efforts in southern Africa (Wangulu, 2011: 7). The prevalence of HIV in east and southern Africa remains at unacceptably high levels (Guidelines for integrating HIV and gender-related issues into environmental assessment in Eastern and Southern Africa, 2012: ii). Although eastern and southern Africa (ESA) has only 5, 4 percent of the

world's population, it has 48, 3 percent of global HIV infections. Sixty percent of the world's women with HIV live in this region, with a large proportion of new HIV infections being among young girls (Guidelines for integrating HIV and gender-related issues into environmental assessment in Eastern and Southern Africa, 2012: 2). More women than men of the same age in southern Africa are living with HIV (UN Women, 2013: 5). These statistics point to a region in the midst of a virus that has decimated the potential of ESA in achieving its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Swaziland has the highest HIV prevalence rate in the world with an estimated 26, 0 percent, followed by Botswana which has 23, 4 percent and Lesotho with 23, 3 percent. South Africa is home to the world's largest epidemic with 5, 6 million people living with HIV (17, 3 percent) (UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa, n.d.). The biggest question is why is it that with slightly above 5 percent of the world's population, eastern and southern Africa is home to half of the world's population living with HIV? According to UN, the ultimate goal of MDG 2015 number six to prevent the spread of HIV was curbed by lack of knowledge of the virus and how to avoid transmission (UN, 2013: 5). This is true because if people had adequate knowledge about the virus, some of the reckless sexual behaviours such as having unprotected sex with anyone whose sexual history you do not know completely (and it is very difficult to know it), cheating and promiscuity could be avoided. This then explains why there is need for behavioural change so that people avoid risky behaviours.

Worldwide, at the end of 2011 an estimated 34 million people were living with HIV, which is 4, 7 million more than in 2001 (UN, 2013: 35). Sub-Saharan Africa is the most affected region where nearly 1 in every 20 adults is infected. This accounts for 69 percent of the people living with the virus globally (UN, 2013: 35). More resources are now being channelled towards eradicating new infections and taking care of the infected and affected. It is out of question that AIDS is a serious threat to human security. It does not only kill but leave homes filled up with orphans and many dependences who require timely humanitarian interventions in order to get food, shelter and even pay school fees. The number of children who have lost one or both parents to AIDS remains spectacularly high. The global tally rose to 17, 3 million in 2011. Almost all of these children (16 million) live in sub-Saharan Africa (UN, 2013: 35). In 2012, the global figure of children aged 0 to 17 years who had lost either one parent or both to AIDS was 17, 8 million (UN, 2014: 35). It therefore remains true that eastern and southern Africa shoulder the burden of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. This should serve as an eye opener to policy makers about the need for peace in the region. Violence only makes the situation worse.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Women's participation in decision-making does not only benefit them but it is a pre-requisite for development and democracy in general. Any nation that does not take steps to include both men and women in its government cannot be considered

fully democratic because women constitute more than 50 percent of the population (Report: Online discussion on Women, political participation and decision-making in Africa, 2007: 6–7). If women are excluded from decision-making bodies, it limits the opportunities for embedding the principles of democracy in a society thereby impeding economic development and discouraging the attainment of gender equality (Shvedova, 2005: 33). The fiftieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women asserted that the neglect of women and their perspectives at all levels of decision-making means that the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. Women's equal participation is also considered as a necessary condition for women's and girls' interests to be taken into account. This is desirable in order to reinforce democracy and uphold its suitable functioning. It is important to realise that women have specific needs and interests that are better represented by other women than anyone else (Report: Online discussion on Women, political participation and decision-making in Africa, 2007: 7). The equal representation of women in political decision making structures is generally justified. The involvement of women in political structures is recognised as a human right and an important principle of fair democratic representation. Democracy is about representation and resources (Sabha, 2010: 210). When women who constitute the majority of the population are underrepresented in politics, they do not benefit equally from the country's economy and social pie. Following this argument, any nation which fails to include both men and women in its government cannot be considered fully democratic. It is therefore in line with the good democratic practices that women should be represented in proportion to their numbers or at least in equal number to men (Sabha, 2010: 212).

Problems affecting women such as breast cancer, cervix cancer and other cancers of the reproductive system, as well as infertility can be better dealt with women than men. The participation of women in decision making is thus a human rights issue (Report: Online discussion on Women, political participation and decision-making in Africa, 2007: 8). Women and children frequent hospitals more than men. It is therefore important for women to be voted into power so that they lobby governments to address issues affecting other women. The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) posits that every individual should be allowed to participate in, contribute to and enjoy cultural, economic, political and social development (UN, 1995: 136). Guided by this vision, it becomes apparent that governments and political parties in the world should make sure that women are given the same support given to men so that they occupy positions of authority, not for its sake but for democracy, equity and egalitarianism to prevail.

CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING

Political and Socio-Economic Factors

Although women's entrance into politics is important, there are a number of obstacles which inhibit their participation in decision making. Shvedova (2005: 35)

notes that there are numerous political hurdles which define women's reluctance to join politics. Political life is organised according to male norms and values, and in some cases even male lifestyles. Politics is masculine which means men enjoy the game. Women also lack support, for example, there is limited financial support for women candidates. The sacking of Joice Mujuru as the first female Vice President of Zimbabwe in December 2014 reveals that politics is a male field. Women need support from the party and party structures. Women in opposition, for example, face the challenge of being female and of being in opposition. Although women are known to be very good campaigners, persuasive and eloquent, fear sometimes prevents them from contesting elections and from participating in political life (Shvedova, 2005: 45). This fear is mainly generated by the violent nature of African politics especially if you are standing for the opposition. Women in Zimbabwe revealed that they have become increasingly unsafe during elections, and very huge numbers exposed that they have experienced violence during elections (Reeler, 2011: 2–3). Resultantly, politics becomes a man's field. The socio-economic obstacles impacting on women's participation in parliament are: illiteracy and limited access to education and choice of professions; and the dual burden of domestic tasks and professional obligations (Shvedova, 2005: 41).

Culture

In many countries, traditions continue to emphasise on women's primary roles as mothers and housewives and therefore restricts them to those roles. In African countries, women participating in politics are usually associated with prostitution. This therefore deters many women from taking part in political activities. Culture is an acknowledged contributory factor in many cases of GBV and the spread of HIV and AIDS. Certain cultural and religious beliefs strengthen male dominance and the subjugation of women (Safaids, n.d.: 2). SAfAIDS (n.d.: 2) revealed that spousal violence is the leading form of GBV in countries like Zimbabwe. This form of GBV is grounded in cultural practices which have dimensions of gender inequality. The HIV epidemic in southern Africa is grounded in a cultural context that often facilitates the spread of HIV. This context is evidenced in uneven gender relations that limit communication about sexual matters between men and women which often results in women being unable to negotiate for safer sex with their partners (Chikombero, 2011: 12). HIV protection for women is very difficult because it is a man's choice whether condoms are used or not. Women who try to talk about such issues are associated with infidelity. Women end up being powerless in matters of sexual health (Duffy, 2005: 27). The Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development (2012: v) noted that despite the presence of many policies and laws against GBV in place, implementation has been slow due to inconsistencies between statutory and customary law, lack of resources and resistance based on patriarchal and religious beliefs. Acts of male dominance do not help in the fight against HIV and AIDS. The epidemic can be even brought home

by male partners who go for official missions or go to work in foreign countries. Examples include Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF), Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services (ZPCS) personnel who are actively involved in peace keeping missions in countries such as Somalia, Cote d'Ivoire, East Timor, Eritrea, Kosovo, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, South Sudan and Angola (Netsianda, 2015). These external missions have had an impact on the spreading of HIV and AIDS in the armed forces to and from the civilians both at home and abroad (Duri, 2013: 19).

It must be emphasised that although many cultural practices entrench male dominance, the intention behind cultural practices such as widow inheritance (*kugara nhaka*) was to protect and preserve the family of the deceased (UN Women, 2013: 9). The objectives were noble but now extremely dangerous in the era of HIV and AIDS. This implies that such practices must be halted because culture after all is dynamic. The relatives of the deceased can safely and comfortably look after the children and wife of the dead without “owning” the wife. The other cultural practice that exploits women involves a situation whereby the relatives of the deceased wife provide the husband with a young girl for a wife. The new wife will be known as *chimutsamapfihwa*. There are many practices linked to culture which exposes women and their partners to HIV. Dry sex which is practiced in many parts of southern Africa increases HIV risk for women as a result of lacerations resulting from drying agents used by women to minimise vaginal lubrication during intercourse (Chikombero, 2011: 12). Cultural traits such as widow inheritance and widow cleansing confirm the subordination of women in many African societies. Widow cleansing is known to be prevalent in Malawi. The practice involves having unprotected sexual intercourse with a widow before she can be re-married (Mojapele et al., 2011: 16). Practices such as spirit appeasement (*kuripa ngozi*) where young women are given away to appease/avenge the spirits of murdered people and become wives of the deceased's relatives intensify HIV risk (Chikombero, 2011: 12). Also known as child pledging, the motive behind this practice is to compensate the family whose member has died. By having children in that family, the girl ‘replaces’ the person who has died (UN Women, 2013: 9).

It is also a norm in African communities for a man to engage in polygamy (*barika*). These multiple sexual relationships are not questioned but in fact the eldest wife (*vahosi*) could play a leading role in securing more wives for the husband. Research by Wekwete et al. (2014: 25) revealed that married women in polygamous relationships were more likely to experience GBV than women in monogamous relationships. It is also evident that in societies where female genital mutilation (FGM) is carried out, it is a highly valued cultural practice and social norm (WHO, 2012). All these practices mean that women are usually at the receiving end of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In fact, women are recognised to be more vulnerable and susceptible from all fronts, that is, biologically, economically, and culturally than men (Duffy, 2005: 23).

Religion

According to Mapuranga (2013: 178), the teachings of Christianity tend to suppress women to such an extent that they are not afforded the opportunity to realise their potential in assuming political positions. Christianity is rooted in gender roles and stereotypes which serve to discriminate against women through persistence of responsibilities which sideline women. Women's participation in political and public life is limited by patriarchal traditions which state that men are the head of the family (Colossians 2:3).

BACKGROUND TO ZIMBABWE'S POLITICAL AND
ECONOMIC CRISIS, 2000–2008

The period from 2000–2008 is referred to by some scholars of Zimbabwean history as the “Decade of Violence” mainly because of the unmatched levels of political violence used by ZANU PF (Mangena & Hove, 2013: 227). Sachikonye refers to it as “Zimbabwe's Lost Decade”. ZANU PF's unpopularity reached record levels in 2000 when it attempted to amend the country's constitution to give more powers to the executive. The proposed constitution had also the effect of increasing presidential powers. These measures met stiff resistance from the majority (Meldrum, 2004: 120). The vote against the constitution in 2000 marked the first political defeat for ZANU PF. Between 2000 and 2008, Zimbabwe effectively plunged into authoritarianism in which state-sanctioned violence became a major instrument of containing dissent and manipulating the electoral system (Sachikonye, 2012). An honest assessment of the period 2000–2008 reflects on a decade of madness and extreme authoritarianism. The Mugabe regime valued political survival using violent tactics. Economic woes which reduced three-quarters of Zimbabweans to paupers were effectively ignored. The country's economy deteriorated from one of the continent's strongest to the world's worst with the official inflation rate estimated at more than 1,000% in 2006. The situation expectedly resulted in Zimbabwe experiencing critical shortages of liquid fuels, foreign currency, food stuffs, medical equipment, electricity and drugs (Duri, 2013: 16). Economic challenges encountered from 2000–2008 inevitably resulted in utter poverty. Multiple coping strategies were devised in order to mitigate food and foreign currency shortages. Women engaged in cross border trading mainly with regional countries. This exposed them to sexual and other forms of abuse during the execution of their transactions (Duri, 2013: 16). Hyperinflation, large scale retrenchments, unemployment and shortage of foreign currency resulted in a number of households living in poverty. Many people, especially women, were pushed to the informal or parallel economy. Ninety percent of the population is structurally unemployed with many of them earning a living through activities such as vending, illegal mining and currency trading. Women were the most affected thereby making it difficult for them to have a choice of participating in politics. They ended up

focusing on family issues. Of all the countries in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region, Zimbabwe is the only country experiencing a negative economic growth rate following political and economic crisis since 2000 (Duri, 2013: 16).

As a matter of fact, all elections in Zimbabwe since 2000 have been violent, and none have been internationally accepted. The only exception could be the 2013 harmonised elections. The condemnation of the violent and fraudulent June 2008 Presidential re-run was the cause for the establishment of a government of national unity (GNU) brokered by SADC (Reeler, 2011: 3–4). The period between March 2008 harmonised elections and June Presidential run-off elections witnessed high levels of violence as President Robert Mugabe unleashed security forces from the intelligence, soldiers, police and militias to crush anyone who had made Morgan Tsvangirai ‘win’ the 2008 elections. This resulted in many men running away to urban areas where security was far much better. This meant women, children and the elderly suffered the horrors of a regime desperate to hold onto power through the Machiavellian style.

EXPERIENCES OF ZIMBABWEAN WOMEN DURING THE CRISIS PERIOD

Zimbabwean women suffered from state orchestrated violence despite the fact that the country has ratified a number of international and regional instruments which recognise the importance of addressing gender based violence in order to contribute to gender equality and development in general. Below is a list of some of the treaties and/or conventions Zimbabwe is a signatory to:

CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) Recommendation Number 19 (1992)

With the motive of ending discrimination faced by all girls and women, the United Nations endorsed CEDAW on 18 December 1979. CEDAW realised that GBV in all its forms, that is, emotional and verbal abuse, physical abuse, economic abuse and sexual abuse was a form of discrimination that seriously inhibited women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men. The UN enacted CEDAW because in some parts of the world, girls and women are treated differently or unfairly because of being a girl or a woman, even though they have the same rights as boys and men. Such kind of discrimination results in girls and women not getting proper education, health care, jobs and voting or running for elections (UNICEF, 2011: 4). At the fifty-first session held in February 2012, the CEDAW Committee urged the Government of Zimbabwe to devise complete measures to prevent and address GBV and to ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted and punished (Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, 2012: 5). Governments that have ratified CEDAW have an obligation to curb discrimination faced by girls and women in their countries.

Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA 1995)

Zimbabwe is a signatory to BPFA which confirmed that violence against women is an impediment to the accomplishment of the goals of equality, development and peace. This was based on the fact that GBV had the dual effect of violating and nullifying the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms (Beijing declaration and platform for action, 1995: 48).

The Africa Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999)

The Charters ensures that the rights and welfare of children are observed especially concerning gender equality. The charter states that children who become pregnant while in school should be able to continue their education. Moreover, it also addresses healthcare for expectant and nursing mothers, protection from sexual abuse and sexual exploitation and protection against harmful cultural practices (Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, 2012: 5).

The African Union (AU) Protocol to the Africa Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003)

Article 2 stipulates the need by governments to combat all forms of discrimination against women through appropriate legislative, institutional and other measures. AU also encourages member states to eliminate harmful cultural and traditional practices and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes, or on stereotyped roles for women and men (Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, 2003: 4–5). In fact, the African Union's thrust is to ensure that there is gender equality in member states. A host of measures were put in place to guarantee the rights and freedom of women but five years down the line Zimbabwe was butchering men and women for taking part in the activities of the opposition party MDC.

SADC Protocol on Gender and Development

Articles 20 to 25 makes provisions for the implementation of a variety of strategies including enacting, reviewing, reforming and enforcing laws aimed at eliminating all forms of GBV and trafficking. The Protocol sets a target for reducing GBV levels by half by 2015 (Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, 2012: 6). Article 28 of SADC Protocol on Gender and Development on *Peace Building and Conflict Resolution* stipulates that member states should make it a priority to make sure that women and children are safe from human rights abuses during times of armed conflict and other forms of conflict. Perpetrators of abuses should also be brought to justice before a court of competent jurisdiction (SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, n.d.). There are known perpetrators of

gender violence in Zimbabwe especially from 2000–2008 but are walking scot free. Documents can be easily signed but it would not help if governments gather year in year out to affirm their disapproval of GBV without taking any concrete action to guarantee the safety and freedom of women.

At country level, Zimbabwe has enacted a number of laws and policies meant to prevent and protect survivors of gender based violence. These include the following:

<i>Law adopted</i>	<i>Stipulations of the law</i>
Section 23 of the Constitution	It prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender and marital status
The Domestic Violence Act of 2007	Provides for protection and relief to victims of domestic violence and long term measures for prevention of domestic violence
The Sexual Offences Act of 2002	Criminalises marital rape and wilful transmission of HIV
The Administration of Estates Amendment Act of 1997	Seeks to protect the property of the deceased for the welfare of the surviving spouse and children
The Maintenance Act of 1989	Ensures provision of monetary or material support for the upkeep of the spouse, children and other dependents where there is a duty to do so.
The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1987	Ensures equitable distribution of property upon divorce.
The Legal Age of Majority Act of 1982	Now part of the General Laws, the Amendment Act gave women all the rights and benefits of full citizens and changed the practice of inequality based on race and sex, upon reaching the age of 18 (Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, 2012: 6).

Despite the enactment of these laws, Zimbabwean women are vulnerable to all forms of abuse. What makes matters worse is that the state is the biggest perpetrator of violence as evidenced by the political crisis that took place from 2000 to 2008 and other previous conflicts such as Gukurahundi in the early 1980s. The laws are there

but lack enforcement and the government is to purely blame for that. This therefore calls for a grand strategy whereby everyone, everywhere and every time should play a part (Mutanda & Rukondo, 2015: 92). The government alone cannot be trusted with reducing GBV as demonstrated by past events.

Many women were targeted for torture mainly because their families were perceived to be supporters of either ZANU PF or the MDC. Reports of rape cases are scanty as a result of the stigma attached to rape and sexual torture (Mashiri, 2013: 96). Women suffered as a result of physical abuse perpetrated mainly by ZANU PF. In Zaka District located in Masvingo Province, a prominent ZANU PF member was killed by MDC supporters in the run up to the 2002 Presidential elections for taking part in terrorising MDC members in the area. After killing the ZANU PF supporter, the group went on to beat his wife. What hurts most is that the vagina of the woman was thoroughly beaten as MDC supporters told her that it was the vagina that motivated the husband to be so overzealous in ZANU PF activities (Mambo, interviewed 15 May 2015). In response, ZANU PF deployed soldiers and militias (called youths although not by definition) to deal with anyone linked to the MDC. This resulted in a trail of destruction as all acts of violence such as torture, arson, theft and harassment were committed. Beasts belonging to MDC supporters were slaughtered at ZANU PF bases. Many men fled away to urban areas for relative safety leaving women and children at the peril of ZANU PF members who behaved without any form of restraint. ZANU PF youths wielding logs sang songs with violent messages on their way to homes of MDC supporters. Women were forced to attend all rallies conducted at these bases.

It is no doubt that women suffered most as a result of ZANU PF activities in the 2002 and 2008 Presidential elections. All acts of violence reported to the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) by MDC victims were ignored. The Zimbabwe Republic Police were rendered passive, a situation that is noticeable beginning in 2000. It is evident that ZRP was compliant to ZANU PF instruction not to interfere with party activities but to support anything holy or unholy. The bottom line is that the force was well conversant of its duties but its hands were tied while some members were just overzealous for political gains (Mutanda, 2013: 41). In such instances, women bore the brunt of ZANU PF's madness because on one hand there were no husbands to provide for the families whilst the state ignored their plea but rather punished them because they supported the opposition MDC.

Although women were easy targets compared to men, they also contributed to violence by selling out other women or relatives with links to the MDC. In one instance, a lady in Zaka District who lives in an area under the jurisdiction of Chief Nhema sold out her sister's son for not joining youths who operated from bases. The base at Padare or Rusere subsequently gathered at the homestead to beat up the mother for "hiding" her son and also to deal with the "evasive" boy. Both survived torture because they were not home by the time the youths arrived. The youths never came back. It is therefore a fact that although women were victims, they contributed to the victimisation of others by either laying false accusations due

to personal vendettas or selling out MDC supporters as a form of security (Masimba, interviewed 9 May 2015). The violence from 2000–2008 substantiates the point that politics is masculine in nature. Women had very little voice but were victims of physical and verbal abuse from men. Men who opted to stay in their areas could do little to protect their wives from torture.

Some of the women who chose to contest either as Members of Parliament or councillors dropped out of the election race because they were afraid to be beaten. Cases of abduction were rampant. Standing in elections was not worth the sacrifice they had to make. Mai Lydia Njerere an aspiring opposition councillor candidate for Ward 19 in Gutu was even forced to join ZANU PF and desert the opposition for the sake of her family and life. This followed her abduction by ZANU PF youth militias (Njerere, interviewed 9 January 2015). This was one way of eliminating women from political participation. Houses were destroyed making it unsafe for women to stay at home in the lead up to the elections. The violent nature of Zimbabwean politics deters women from standing for local political offices. Women in Gutu district expressed disappointment at the decline in their representation in Zimbabwe's 2008 elections describing the development as retrogressive. Only six women were elected as councillors out of 41 seats. The women's names were Mai Dhobha of ward 11, Mai Mushoriwa ward 40, Mai Chitsa ward 12, Mai Tabvanya, Mai Chironda and Mai Maswa of ward 16.

In Gutu, just like in all parts of the country, there were bases which were set up by ZANU PF so as to intimidate, conscientise and victimise members suspected to be of the opposition party. The bases in Gutu were established in the following areas: Nyamande, Chitsa, Jaravaza, Mutero, Gonye, Mushayavanhu and Gutu Mission Hospital. It was a reign of terror where women were also supposed to move around campaigning for men and terrorise members of the opposition. There were numerous cases of sexual violence at the bases. Women at bases were forced to engage in sex with ZANU PF leaders. At a base called Padare in Zaka District, there was a ZANU PF member called Shanga who had sex with numerous girls. Refusal would lead the bosses to create false allegations against the ladies leading to thorough beatings by other youths. Shanga also forcibly married a girl at the base. Shanga finally died of AIDS (Ngambi, interviewed 14 May 2015). Many girls were impregnated at ZANU PF bases. Although a lot of girls were forced to attend base "programmes", some volunteered because of "better" life where meat from seized beasts was abundant (Ngambi, interviewed 14 May 2015). As narrated by a victim of ZANU PF violence, women suffered unimaginable forms of violence:

The seemingly drunk youths came to my house at the dead of the night. They tried in vain to break the door but after failing they smashed the window. One of them, probably the commander, jumped inside. I fought back but lost out because he was a huge man. I was raped and then thrown outside. I was frog marched semi-naked to the nearest torture base which was five kilometres away. I was subjected to inhuman treatment that included swimming in

mud, drinking urine and being beaten under my feet. This was done because they suspected me to be a supporter of the MDC. (Chipashu, interviewed 28 May 2015)

It is a fact that there were multiple sexual relationships at bases and this had an impact on the spread of HIV. If one of the prominent persons at a ZANU PF base such as Shanga died of the virus, it implies that many women and ultimately their sexual partners suffered the same fate. This tallies with the evidence that in sub-Saharan Africa, the region most affected by the HIV epidemic, only 39 percent of young men and 28 percent of young women aged between 15 and 24 have comprehensive knowledge of HIV (UN, 2014: 35). Global statistics reveal that the figure of fresh HIV infections has considerably surpassed the number of AIDS-related deaths. This consequently means that more people are living with HIV than ever before.

ANALYSING THE RESPONSES OF “COMMUNITY-BASED” STAKEHOLDERS TO VIOLENCE

The Role of Traditional Leaders

Despite being custodians of tradition and culture in African societies, traditional leaders were part of the system that suppressed civilians from 2000–2008 in Zimbabwe. Under normal circumstances traditional leaders were expected to play an influential role in curbing numerous violations against women because they are highly respected and influential in their communities (Wangulu, 2011: 7). As a result of their position in society, vulnerable groups in the community such as women, children, the elderly and the disabled turn to them for guidance and solutions to an array of challenges they might face. It is an undisputed fact that traditional leaders are recognised persons with genuine authority. They are mandated to settle disputes between villagers and preside over issues of community development (Mojapele et al., 2011: 27). Many African countries recognise traditional kings and queens as custodians of the customary laws and traditional norms that govern people at community level (Mojapele et al., 2011: 27). It is important to realise that traditional leaders have a critical role to play in shaping opinion and public perceptions of communities who hold them in high regard. Sensitising community leaders on GBV helps in promoting the message of social change for a zero tolerance to GBV (Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, 2012: 14). Due to the authority vested in them, traditional leaders have the right to chase away people suspected or found guilty of not conforming to societal norms and values. Chiefs have the power to fine and punish people. In addition, they can act as enforcers of government programmes. In Zimbabwe, traditional leaders such as chiefs, headmen and kraal heads are bestowed with the power to ensure peaceful co-existence in communities.

The people in Zimbabwe have ways to peacefully resolve conflicts. A close family friend known as *sahwira* handles disputes usually involving immediate

family members. There is also *Dare* or panel of elders and or wise men chaired either by the kraal head (*sabhuku*) or headman/chief (*mambo/ishu*) who deals with conflicts among the subject people (Mutanda, 2013: 132). Speaking in the context of the role of traditional leaders in combating HIV and AIDS, Mararike (2011: 33) noted that traditional leaders and political party leaders share the same constituents. Consequently, they must cooperate in a number of areas such as HIV and AIDS. This then means to say they must agree on how problems can be solved even if it means influencing people's behaviours. During the period 2000–2008 there was an “unholy alliance” in Zimbabwe as traditional leaders joined forces with the ZANU PF government to terrorise villagers in rural areas. There was no protection from people expected to be fire fighters. At Mugabe's inauguration in 2013, Chiefs Council President, Chief Fortune Charumbira said traditional leaders rallied behind President Mugabe because he was principled and because of his stance towards western forces (ZBC, 2013). If traditional leaders had stuck to their role as protectors of women, children and the vulnerable, incidences of violence could have been significantly reduced. There were, however, a handful of traditional leaders who acted to prevent the harassment and torture of their people. The bulk sold out villagers suspected of supporting the MDC.

The Role of Christianity

Although Zimbabwe is a multi-religious country, Christianity controls a major share of the spiritual market. This means the church plays a critical role in social, political and economic issues affecting the country. Due to historical factors which saw the church working closely with the state, the church became a strategic actor in issues of national interest. Women and men who supported the opposition found no protection from the church which overtly declared its allegiance to ZANU PF. A number of apostolic sects have identified themselves with the ruling ZANU PF and have mobilised support for the party and President Robert Mugabe (Ncube, 2015). Family of God Church leader Reverend Andrew Wutawunashe, Anglican Church leader Bishop Chad Gandiya, Pentecostal Assembly of Zimbabwe bishops: Trevor Manhanga and Rev. Jengeta Jengeta, Johannes Ndanga leader of the apostolic association and Zion Christian Church leader Nehemiah Mutendi among others stampeded to congratulate Mugabe at his inauguration in 2013. Although some leaders did not openly condemn the MDC, the bulk tried to gain mileage by showering praise on the President. Mutendi even told his followers to support the ruling party, of which resistance would lead to expulsion from the church. This implies that those church members who voted otherwise were prone to victimisation psychologically, verbally or both.

Youth militias pounced at church gatherings and forcefully addressed the people. Mai Albertina Madombi was one of the people affected by state instigated violence. She was attacked during a Roman Catholic Church service. She was severely beaten and threatened so that she could be a member of any Apostolic Sect. Many catholic

priests and sisters at that time had run away from violence. Her position as *mbuya vecarticas* (youth catholic trainer) led to her persecution. She was challenged to talk about ZANU PF first before teaching catholic ethos to young people. A lot of people decided to run away from rural areas to urban areas for safety (Madombi, interviewed 3 May 2015).

It is a herculean task for churches in Zimbabwe to end violence against women because the church itself is the biggest oppressor of women. Marrying at a young age is common in apostolic sects such as Johane Masowe Echishanu, Johane Marange and Mugodhi. Child brides are more prone to spousal abuse, often due to generational gaps between spouses. Some male members of the church take in girls as young as nine into the custody of either their mothers or older wives until the onset of puberty. From here they would assume their full responsibilities as wives. According to an insider in Johane Marange (born Muchabaya Momberume) Apostolic Church led by Noah Taguta, in order to hasten the sexual maturity of young girls, older wives fondle the breasts of these girls to initiate puberty (Chiketo, 2012). The dangers of marrying underage girls are that they increase maternal mortality because their bodies would not be fully developed to either safely carry a pregnancy to term or experience a normal delivery (Chiketo, 2012). Young women are also forced to deliver at home. Taguta himself has more than 100 wives and hundreds of children. There are numerous cases in apostolic sects where members can bury as many as 15 children in a space of six years due to shunning of modern health facilities (The Zimbabwean, 2014). Malaria is the biggest killer of children belonging to apostolic sects. Many die between the age of 10 and 11 whilst in grades three or four (Muzenda, interviewed 17 June 2015). Zengeya who was a branch chairperson for ZANU PF in Chihon'a branch from 2000 to 2009 is a Bishop of the Johanne Marange apostolic sect and commands a large following. All church members could be seen at political rallies vehemently supporting ZANU PF. With the inferiority status of women in this denomination, politics is a man's zone. Women are allowed to sing songs and vote. This is an indication that women occupy peripheral roles in the home, church and political arena. As at political gatherings, Christianity restricts women to learning in silence and singing as meaningful leadership roles are reserved for men.

It is no secret that numerous women especially in apostolic sects suffer abuses in the name of religion. Abuses in the church are not questioned because it will be tantamount to opposing the "Holy Spirit". A woman who divorced her husband belonging to the Paul Mwazha apostolic sect where she was the second wife revealed that she was now in love with a husband belonging to Marange apostolic sect to be the third wife. Before divorce, they were each allocated two days per week for sex and if the husband was tired there was nothing to do about it, although such instances were rare (Muza, interviewed 5 June 2015). It is also common in apostolic sects, especially those which permit polygamy such as Marange for wives to provide for their children. If the husband comes to your house the wife must appreciate by preparing delicious meals. It does not matter where you get the food

from. There are even instances where the wives carry a chair for the husband to sit whilst they do work in the fields (Mombe, interviewed 29 May 2015). Many apostolic sects in Zimbabwe are patriarchal to the chore. Children are usually not sent to school on the basis that they are taught self-reliance. It is actually 'Boko Haram style' where western education is considered evil. There is even an example in Zaka District of a lady who was the 18th wife to an apostolic husband belonging to Marange. The husband provided her with everything in terms of basic needs but she still engaged in sex with other men in the area because she lacked enough time for sex (Matendera, interviewed 7 June 2015). Apostolic sects' belief of marrying many wives exposes them to HIV and AIDS especially considering the neglect many of these women experience. Even those who are provided with basic needs end up engaging in prostitution. Many men now know the situation of apostolic wives and take advantage of it to propose "love". The challenges faced by the church itself are an eye opener to the challenges faced by women as a result of political violence. Women were made to participate in politics as men desired.

The Johane Marange Apostolic sect commands a following of over 1, 8 million people, which means more than 10 percent of the country's population go by the doctrines of this institution for their day to day needs including medical care (Chiketo, 2014). Although not unique to apostolic sects, low levels of education also contribute to spousal abuse. A Chitungwiza man who belonged to an Apostolic sect was dragged to court for not sending his nine year old daughter to school because of his Apostolic religious beliefs. He rather argued that:

I will not send my children to schools that were established by white people because our religion does not allow us to do that. At these schools, there are some activities like traditional dance(s) and the reading of the Bible, which we condemn in our church. (Saunyama, 2014)

The most disadvantaged in such situations are girls who end up marrying men who will be in total control of women submerged in elements of Christianity and culture which reinforces patriarchy. In addition, hundreds of apostolic sect members, particularly children, die because their churches forbid them from seeking medical health (The Zimbabwean, 2014). Spousal abuse is therefore facilitated by early marriages, lower levels of education and lack of financial independence, to mention but a few. Women trapped in such marriages are very vulnerable. Only 9 percent of women in Zimbabwe have property registered in their names (Safaids, n.d.: 2).

Although churches acted as agents of ZANU PF violence, those members who opposed the party suffered abuse and even death. At Mukaro mission in Gutu, a catholic sister's convent was burnt to ashes in the 2008 presidential run-off. The priest in charge was abducted and severely beaten. Thinking he was dead, they left him by the road side. He was only saved by a Good Samaritan and taken to Parirenyatwa hospital for medication (Hama, interviewed 23 March 2015). This was a clear message to anyone including women that death was imminent to those harbouring political ambitions.

CONCLUSION

Despite being a signatory to many laws and conventions governing the fair treatment of women, Zimbabwe does not respect the rights of women. Cases of GBV in the private and public spheres are rampant. The government shoulders the largest chunk of the blame in light of its role in perpetrating and perpetuating GBV from 2000 to 2008. This implies that there is need for a multi-pronged strategy by the civil society, in total cooperation with the civilians, to handle challenges affecting women during times of conflict. Although many traditional leaders were accomplices in the violence that took place from 2000 to 2008, they still remain central in protecting women in their constituencies. The Zimbabwe Republic police cannot be trusted considering the partisan manner in which they handled and still handle cases of political violence. Women in positions of authority cannot be trusted because they remained silent when their colleagues were being butchered. All hope is not lost though. Communities should be solid when it comes to GBV and other forms of violence. This means that they should promote peaceful co-existence than petty hatred based on political orientation. Importantly, there is need for political will on the part of the government in order to thwart all forms of violence. Of course it is a mammoth task to convince the perpetrator to stop it. Although the 2013 harmonised elections had incidences of violence, they moved nearer towards what is expected in an election free of violence and madness. Unity of purpose among communities remains central if societies hope to stop violence in all its forms in the future.

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Interviews

- Interview with Dongo Mambo (pseudonym) on 15 May 2015, Harare.
- Interview with Father Hama, 66 years, 23 March 2015, Gutu.
- Interview with Gift Muzenda, 38 years, 17 June 2015, Harare.
- Interview with Mai Albertina Madombi, 55 years, 3 May 2015, Gutu.
- Interview with Mai Lydia Njerere, 37 years, 9 January 2015, Gutu.
- Interview with Masimba Masimba (pseudonym) 22 years, 9 May 2015, Harare.
- Interview with Miriam Muza (pseudonym), approx. 25 years, 5 June 2015, Harare.
- Interview with Neria Ngambi (pseudonym), 28 years, 14 May 2015, Harare.
- Interview with Ngonidzashe Matendera, 24 years, 7 June 2015, Harare.
- Interview with Sarudzai Mombe (pseudonym), 19 years, 29 May 2015, Harare.

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