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Violence against Women and Girls in Harare, Zimbabwe

By Maybe Zengenene¹ and Emy Susanti²

Abstract

This article explores the phenomenon of violence against women and girls in Harare, Zimbabwe. Section 25 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe stipulates that the State and all agencies of the government at every level must protect and foster the institutions to adopt measures for the prevention of violence. Regardless of such recognition, there have been rampant incidences of politically motivated and domestic violence against women and girls in the country. Domestic violence against women and girls is a violation of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and all of the treaties, conventions, charters and optional protocols on the rights of women. Owing to the prolonged violation of the human rights of both sexes in Zimbabwe, this paper shows that women are more vulnerable to violence. A number of factors predispose women and girls to violence as men are the sole perpetrators of violence against women in Zimbabwe. In this context, policymakers, scholars, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), women's organisations, development practitioners, and all responsible bodies regarding women's issues should further direct their attention towards the alleviation and eradication of violence against women and girls in an inclusive and sustainable pattern of development within the Zimbabwean and wider African context. This paper is based on a qualitative study which further explains violence against women and girls from the Althusser Repressive State Apparatus perspective, thus providing transformational solutions to the turmoil at hand. The results of the study show that despite the enactment of laws at the national and international level, women and girls are affected more by the violence in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Keywords: Violence, Zimbabwe Defense Forces, Zimbabwe Republic Police, Gender, Repressive state Apparatus

Introduction

The word *violence* is related to the Latin word "violare", which means to violate. It is the unlawful exercise of physical force (Lewis and Short, 1994). Violence against women is a worldwide negative phenomenon which dates back to time immemorial. In Zimbabwe, a hostile environment exists for women and girls. The status of women and girls is worsened by democratic decay and violence has been the defining feature of the political environment (Eve 2009, Bosha 2018). Both domestic violence and political violence have negatively affected Zimbabwean society. Political violence, institutionalised intimidation, a "thugocracy," lawlessness, the inability to accept defeat, and multivariate conflicts have marked Zimbabwe's political landscape. This is promoted by resource distribution, ideological contestation, social differentiation among the classes, political parties, genders and ethnic cleavage as stated by Nowrojee and Ralph (2000), Bird and Prowse (2008), the Report by the Zimbabwean

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Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZDHR) and Research and Advocacy Unity (2010). This has had an enormous impact on the Zimbabwean people in general and women and girls, in particular, as they are continuously being violated.

The persistent proliferation of political violence should not come as a surprise, given that violence is, and has always been, the very essence of politics (Bufacchi 2005). In support of that, Sachikonye (2010) avows that in Zimbabwe, violence has been a decisive instrument in the attainment of independence and for him, violence has remained the cancer that corrodes the country's political culture. In this way it has led to the exacerbation of violence against women and girls. The armed Zimbabwe Defense Forces (ZDF) and the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) for years have been used by the ruling party to safeguard its partisan political interests and consequently, many human rights violations have been committed in the process. The harassment and violence against humanity and especially defenceless and innocent women and girls has become an ugly and evil scar on the Zimbabwean political landscape.

With the spread of women's rights organisations and the human rights movement in Zimbabwe, the attention paid to the violence inflicted against women, be it domestic, societal or national, has increased. Violence against women has become a world-wide concern as it occurs in every country. It is because of these reasons that there is a need for laws, conventions and agreements at national, regional and international levels. These laws include the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child; the 1995 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women; the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women; and the 57th Commission on the Status of Women agreed Conclusions (Brockman, 2009, Eve 2009, The United Nations Report 2014). In addition to the above, the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals number 5, 10, 16 and UN Women devised by the United Nations, provide a context for advocating for gender equality and the eradication of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. CEDAW notes that the extensive discrimination against women continues to exist. It further emphasises that such discrimination violates the principles of equality in rights and respect for human dignity. CEDAW Articles 2, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 16 point to the view that states that parties should condemn discrimination against women in all of its forms (Human Rights Bulletin Zimbabwe, the Report by the Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZDHR) and RAU 2010, 2011). State parties are encouraged to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters.

UNFP, ILO, OHCHR, UNESCO, WHO, UNDP 2014 and UN Women 2019 together with ZHRC (2019) have condemned the de-socialisation, de-humanisation and sexualisation of women and girls in Zimbabwe. Violence against women comes in many forms such as physical, sexual, psychological, verbal/emotional and political socio-economic violence among others, (Nowrojee and Ralph 2000 Prescott and Madsen 2011, Manyonganise 2017, Towers 2017). The political situation in Zimbabwe is worsened by the pervasive patriarchal structure. According to Kottak (2009), patriarchy describes a political system that is ruled by men in which women have inferior social and political status including basic human rights. A patriarchy steeped in misogyny has taken hold, one that regards women's issues as anathema. This has become true in the Zimbabwean context whereby the political system has been and is still being dominated by men. These men have continued the violation of human rights such as violence against women and girls. For Kottak, violence against women continues to be a worldwide phenomenon.

This article argues, therefore, that even though laws against violence have been enacted, the government of Zimbabwe falls short on the violation of women's and girls' rights. Therefore, this article examines violence against women in Harare from Althusser's repressive state apparatus perspective. According to Althusser (1969), the term apparatus is used to refer to how Western legal political conditions are reproduced as an ideology in the service of capitalist exploitation. This is applicable in the Zimbabwean context whereby the instruments of the apparatus such as the army, police and the law itself are used by the government of the day to suppress its citizens in general and women in particular. Althusser formulated two sets of apparatus or institutional system domination methods, namely repressive state apparatus (RSAs) and ideological state apparatus (ISAs). Conversely, it is the repressive state apparatuses that has formed the basis of this study. As Althusser puts it (2014) "there are political entities that are comprised of the state and most of its branches. These, among others, maintain rule by force primarily and ideology at a secondary level". In this case, it is the ruling party of Zimbabwe that is suppressing its citizens, especially women as seen by the continuous violence against them. This has been a part of the Zimbabwean political sphere since 2000, and it has also been present in 2002, 2005, 2008 and August 2018- January 2019 (Moyo, 2013, Chikerema et al 2014, Manyonganise, 2017, Bosha 2018). Many women have become prey to the hungry Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) and the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP)—armed forces that are abusing and torturing women without any action taken against such toxic acts. The RSA functions in an overwhelming preponderant fashion of repression (physical repression). RSAs (the army government administration, police, and specialised repressive courts, judiciary and prisons in Zimbabwe) have been used as a repressive state apparatus. The effect of this is clearly shown by the continuous culture where for years women have been the victims of politically motivated violence to an extent that some have lost their lives in the process (Bird and Prowse 2008, Prescott and Madsen 2011, Bardall 2018). Every time another wave of politically-motivated violence emerges, it is met by a stony silence from the government and political leaders as they are the sole perpetrators of such horrific atrocities. This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the phenomena of political and domestic violence against women and girls in Harare, Zimbabwe. The paper argues that the two are inseparable and deeply intertwined. Violence against women and girls is an expression of gender discrimination, stigmatisation, oppression, structural inequality, subordination, patriarchy, and it is a human rights violation that is promoted by the political culture that has become hardened with an ingrained and broad acceptance of violence against women and girls. This repressive state apparatus involves a notable form of violence that has been used to support the status quo with serious negative consequences for women and girls.

Research Method

This study used a qualitative approach in order to unravel the existential nature of gender and violence in Zimbabwe. This article utilised the qualitative tools of a focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Bricki (2007) stipulates that the qualitative research methodology is characterised by its aims which relate to understanding some aspects of social life and its methods. This generates language/ words rather than numbers as the data. Qualitative research seeks to interpret behaviour with the intention of assigning meaning to the particular actions of an individual or a group. The article has also benefited from secondary sources such as books, journals, articles, online archival collections and online newspapers. The primary data was collected through the means of in-depth semi structured telephone interviews and a focused

group discussion (FGD) with the informants who were selected using purposive sampling and the snowball technique. The research involved more than 10 (10) informants for the online focus group discussion between the ages of 22-47 years old and fifteen (15) informants for the online in-depth interviews. The informants were women and girls in Harare who have been the victims of political and domestic violence. The study has also benefited from significant others, who are the people who are not directly affected by the violence. Rather, they have a comprehensive knowledge of the act of violence against women and girls in Harare. For instance, the significant others in this study included people from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development and the Zimbabwe Women's Lawyers Association. This was in addition to nurses from the Sexual Gender -Based Violence Clinic (SGBV). In examining the experiences of women, who have been victims of politically-motivated violence, questions were used to guide the study that were formed mainly on the basis of the Althusser Repressive State Apparatus theory. These include how, why, when, where and what kind of questions are to be asked. For example, how do cultural and traditional practices influence the violence against women in Zimbabwe? and What is the role and extent of the government state apparatus in the brutalization, killing, campaigns of violence, intimidation, harassment, rape and assaults of women and girls in Zimbabwe? The researcher was able to identify the main factors contributing to the violence against women and girls. The data was analysed by categorising and classifying the major themes and presenting them qualitatively in the form of narration. The study revealed that the female informants face violence from different sources that is politically motivated, including domestic violence. It emerged that the majority of the informants find it difficult to seek legal help as the same system that should be helping them is the same one that is committing the crimes against them (women). The analysis and discussion of these women's experiences enable the researchers to examine the phenomenon of political violence through the use of the state apparatus in Zimbabwe. The analysis presented in this paper is based on the data that is mainly available from the August 2018 general elections through to the 2019 January Shutdown Protest.

Results and Discussion

The results of the interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) have shown that women are the most common victims of politically-motivated and domestic violence. The phenomenon of violence against women in Zimbabwe has had much of an impact on women and girls. A number of women have identified the political environment of the day and the patriarchal culture as being the sole factors involved in the brutalisation of women in Zimbabwe. An informant from Harare, Lindiwe Nxobo, a 43-year-old mother, stated that,

“Ndakamanikidzwa kuita zvepabonde pamberi pevana vangu” which literally means *“I was forced to [do] some sexual acts in front of my children by the security force men. I now fear for my daughters. The worst thing as a rape survivor who is a mother is of daughters is to have your children go through the pain that you went through”* (Interview, Harare, 2nd February 2019).

As such, this has become a norm and a dangerous trend that has been used to subjugate women to political-motivated violence. Research by Bellamy (2003), Towers (2017) and Francis (2017) shows that rape has been used as part of a sick political strategy to dominate women and

to induce fear in the communities that they come from, forcing them to withdraw from participation in the political process.

In Zimbabwe, rape has been used to correct and discipline women who take part in the political sphere, especially on the side of the opposition parties. In an interview with a significant person from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, Mr Matosi Kundai (55) said that,

“...despite the enactment of laws such as Domestic Violence 2007 and the constitution prohibiting torture and other cruel inhuman degrading treatment, violence against women and girls remains a serious challenge, especially the violence perpetuated by uniformed forces of men against women and girls.”

He goes on to say that the “security forces systematically assaulted, tortured and raped citizens, in particular women, as they are the perceived opponents of the government.” Therefore, the proliferation of violence against women and girls by the security forces in Zimbabwe, particularly in Harare, illustrates the continued violation of human rights.

An informant, Joyce Uzumba, 26 years old from the Epworth suburb of Harare, testified that “I am infected with the HIV virus and sexually transmitted disease as a result of rape.” In addition to that, she affirmed that ‘Some women tested positive to the HIV virus after some months of rape. Some got pregnant as a result of rape (Interview, Epworth, 5th February 2019). Susan (19) felt desolated after being raped by a gang of men. Thandiwe (36) was stripped, beaten and raped by two men during the post-election violence in Mbare. Left naked, she walked to the nearest highway in search of help. In addition to that, Loreta, who is a nurse at the Sexual Gender-Based Violence Clinic (SGBV), concurs:

“the vast majority of violence, especially sexual-related [violence], are committed against women by known perpetrators who are supposed to be in a position of trust. They should provide protection/ security in their homes, society and at the national level.”

As noted by Bird and Prowse (2008) and UN Women (2019), women and girls who are sexually harassed are prone to HIV and AIDS infection and unwanted pregnancies. According to UNAIDS and the WHO (2015), violent victimisation increases HIV risky behaviour, not being able to negotiate safe sex and unwanted sex (rape). This brutal torture treatment and harassment by the state actors (military and police) has accelerated the vulnerability of women.

In an FGD, one informant noted that, “Kubvira 2000, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2018-19 January vakadzi tiri kungodzvanyirirwa pasina kana zvirikuitwa nemutemo” which literally means: “Since 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013 and 208-19 January, women have been the victims of political violence, intimidation, harassment and rape, so as to restrict women's participation.” This is tantamount to discrimination as it demonstrates the callous nature of the violence against women. “Politically motivated acts of sexual violence against women dates even farther back in Zimbabwe history” said an informant in the FDG. In this context, rape has been used to correct and discipline women who are against the party. In addition to that, one informant affirmed that, “Every time another wave of violence emerges, it is met by a stony silence from the government and political leaders as they are the ones that perpetrate such horrific acts.” This is in line with the observation made by Mrs Danai Marufu (37) from the Zimbabwe Women Lawyer's

Association, “that the case is related to the abduction and torture of female human rights activist Jestina Mukoko by security officials in 2008”. The government has not been held accountable for the ZRP and ZDF security officers who killed, raped and tortured civilians, in particular women, during the protest. There are no independent mechanisms to use to fully investigate the misconduct of the security forces as called for in the constitution, therefore women and girls are affected more by violence in the private and public sphere. Violence is sustained by silence; hence, the continued violation of women and girls perpetuates the culture of violence.

Another informant, Pedzisai Chakara (43) agrees that,

“in Zimbabwe, it used to be that the militias rape the women supporters of the opposition party to punish them, to correct them for being “sell-outs” and to convert them to the “revolutionary path/party.”

However, the recent violence against women has gone beyond political affiliation but all in all, it has to be demystified as does the violation of the human rights of women and girls. One informant reiterated that,

“the political landscape in Zimbabwe maintained the status quo which in this context is the discrimination against and subjugation of women”. She goes on to say that *‘rape is used as part of a sick political strategy to dominate and induce fear in the women to force them to withdraw from participation in politics.’*

All of the misogynistic violence against women stems from the patriarchal nature that is embedded in Zimbabwean society.

Another informant, Tsitsi Maramba, a 37-year-old mother of two who lives in Harare suburbs, narrated that,

“Ndakarohwa, kukuwadzaa kumeso, nhumbi dzangu dzakabvarurwa, ndakanwiswa mvura ine tsvina - I have been victimised by soldiers. They made me drink sewage water, they dragged me by my hair and I fell on the ground. My blouse was torn, and he kicked me on the head. I was left with facial bruises.”

From the focus group discussion, it has been noted that regardless of the efforts to mainstream gender in Zimbabwe, women’s rights are still marginalised as all of the departments and institutions are patriarchal and dominated by a political party which seems to have proliferated throughout all of the spheres in Zimbabwe. Politically motivated violence against women in Harare Zimbabwe is prevalent. It is seen of as a tool used to silence and intimidate dissenting voices and to repress women from participating in actions against the government. Women for decades have been the victims of frequent brutality at the hands of police and soldiers, among other security forces. The women have been subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Torture methods by the security forces include beating with sticks, clubs, cables, gun butts, sjamboks (whipping) and beating the soles of the feet.

The FGD results indicate the unequal representation, the reality of not being treated as equal human beings, the collapse of the rule of law and the women in power working hand in hand with patriarchal men. For example, women such as Charity Charamba, the spokesperson of ZRP and Justice Priscilla Chigumba, Opah Muchinguri – Kashiri the Defense Minister and the

Minister of Media (Zimbabwe), Information and Publicity, Monica Mutsvangwa. Consequently, many scholars point out that women have for years become the worst enemies of/to women and girls as they allow the social ills to continue under their nose, prompting deaf ears, blind eyes and folded hands. Violence against women and girls stems from the deficit of a gender responsive government, as it is not gender tailored and insensitive (Manyonganise 2017). All of this has led to the continuous violation of women's rights. One informant notes:

“Ndiri kunzwa kurwadziwa zvisingaita nekuti upenyu hwangu vakakanganiswa nemhirizhonga yematongerwo enyika--“I feel extreme pain (emotional) because I have been abused as a result of political violence. The injuries that I have experienced are quite extensive.”

This is in line with the research done by The Zimbabwe Rape Survivors Association, Bastik (2007), Bird and Prowse (2008), Eve (2009) and UN Women (2019). These scholars concur that many women and girls are the victims of the state sanctioned violence stemming from the economic and political turmoil in the form of explicit support for ZANU-PF that pervades all aspects of life.

One significant informant said, “Sevakadzi ava dzinenge dziri pfambi dzinoda mari - Like these women, they are prostitutes who want money.” As such, the voices of the violated women have not been heard as they are generalised as prostitutes who are after money. The wider purview of blaming the victim in Zimbabwe has brought with it a culture that condones violence against women and girls. It is pointed out that because of the hostile environment perpetuated by the police and the army, police departments such as The Victim Friendly Unit has become ineffective as the police officers are found to be wanting as they are at the forefront of perpetuating violence against the women who they are supposed to be protecting. Charity Charamba stated,

“women should turn to the police to report the rape cases. Critically reflecting on such sentiments, the same police officers who are raping women are the ones who are going to take an accountable action against the perpetrators of rape against women and girls.”

Because of the fear of further torture and violence in the hands of ZDF and ZRP, the abuses are heaped up, and women and girls have had to swallow them silently (Toyi 2014, Makanga 2008, Molestane 2018). Women who are outspoken such as female politicians have not been making a positive move to alleviate the violation of women in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this has led to the continuous violation of human rights of women in Zimbabwe. This entails the crisis that Zimbabwean women are undergoing in both the private and public spheres. For decades, election-related political violence has seen women being violated, hence one can argue that the violence against women and girls is part of present-day gender politics.

From the above discussion, it is clear that women and girls have become prey to a repressive state apparatus such as the army and police in Zimbabwe. Violence in Zimbabwe has been fuelled by the weakening of the state and the rule of law. The judiciary that is supposed to be protecting the interests of its citizens and combating injustices is the one that is committing horrific acts against women and girls. The state has engaged in numerous campaigns of violence, intimidation, rape, assault and even the murder of women and girls (Bird and Prowse 2008,

Moyo 2013, Manyonganise 2017). However, violence against women and girls has remained a serious problem. The army and police, which is supposed to enforce peace and law, is the one found to be wanting in terms of perpetuating violence against women and girls. For the past few decades, the Zimbabwean government has been known for violating human rights and in particular, those of women and girls. The military/ armed men of the Zimbabwe Defence forces (ZDF) and the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) have been used for years to subjugate and instil fear, especially in women and girls. In spite of the violence that women experience in their homes (private domain), this study has noted that more violence is experienced in the public sphere in the form of rapes and physical assaults by the repressive security apparatus or forces such as the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) and the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). It is for these reasons that this article has applied the Althusser repressive state apparatus such as the army and police to examine how and why women and girls in Harare, Zimbabwe have continuously become prey to the violence perpetuated mainly by men in the public and private spheres. Thus, violence against women and girls in Harare and the nation at large is a key element in maintaining male power and the control of women at a structural (politically-motivated violence) as well as individual level (domestic violence).

Conclusion

In conclusion, gender-based and politically-motivated violence has an ongoing, negative impact on women and girls, particularly in Harare and Zimbabwe at large. This article has argued that the state apparatus of the Zimbabwe defence forces (ZDF) and Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), in addition to all other government institutions, are perpetuating violence against women and girls. Even though all women in Harare, Zimbabwe have not been politically violated, the paper argues that after decades of this type of behaviour being condoned and promoted, a political culture has hardened inclusive of an ingrained and broad acceptance of violence against women and girls. Physical violence such as the bodily harm of murder/attempted murder, physical assault, injury and battery has had a negative impact on women and girls in Zimbabwe. Although sexual and socio-psychological violence such as rape/attempted rape, sexual assault, intimidation, verbal harassment and defamation by the state apparatus are rampant worldwide, it is in the context of Zimbabwe where it has reached an uncontrollable state.

The domestic and politically motivated violence against women has affected Zimbabwe as a whole: It dates back to 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013 and the January 2018-2019 protests. As a result, there is a need for transformational leadership that will incorporate a participatory and transparent challenge to the existing powers that is horizontal, inclusive, comprehensive and consultative in relation to the existential needs of men, boys, women and girls. In addition, there is a further need to engage men and boys as they are the change agents towards women and girls, thus creating new gender relations. This a necessary process to achieve respect for human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment.

Recommendations

The values of *Hunhu/Ubuntu* should also be revisited and instilled back into society as there is an implementation gap which has resulted in violence against women. Transformation of value and associated behaviour can lead to the eradication of all forms of violence against women. These values give birth to a new way of thinking and acting that links to democracy and

sustainable development. The study further recommends that there must be a rooting out of the causes that undermine women, ultimately leading to violence against them. All departments should pledge to work together to build a harmonious future where all people are treated with respect.

There is a need for additional external interventions in Zimbabwe to work on behalf of the voiceless civilians as its own government has failed to protect them. Since Zimbabwe has had years of human rights violations, the adoption of transitional justice is critical. Transitional justice is adopted by societies seeking to transform themselves from a period of pervasive human rights abuse such as in Zimbabwe (UN Women 2019) to a period of human rights realizations.

In Zimbabwe, there is a need further to enforce the laws against gender-based violence, violence against women. The rule of law should be reintroduced, respected and awareness raised, especially for women and girls. Having done that, gender differences in terms of representation and violence can be mitigated, harnessing the international human rights instruments identified at the outset of the article.

Eve (2009) purports that the security forces have no place in the realm of politics. As such, the security apparatus of ZDF and ZRP need to be removed from their current role and placed back into the traditional role of maintaining peace and order throughout the country, thereby playing critical roles in eradicating the violence against women. Quotas, the women's agenda, gender responsive budgeting, and gender mainstreaming should be respected such that women and girls are given fully active roles in airing their views and concerns. In addition, women's participation in media is crucial. The use of ICT media has a critical effect on enabling women's organisations to increase the reach and impact of their advocacy campaigns.

Since all of the media in Zimbabwe is state owned and run, it is a propaganda device rather than an outlet for public opinion. There is a need for an independent press, including radio stations and television. These are prerequisites for the outlet of all voices wishing to advance campaigns and awareness to end the horrific levels of violence of women and girls. An independent press will also serve as an impartial observer of the social and political issues that are critically affecting women and girls.

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