



WOMEN AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE: AN UPDATE

**REPORT PREPARED BY THE WOMEN'S PROGRAMME,
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BACKGROUND

*“We do not want to pass June (2011) without elections. We want acceleration of pace,”*¹

*“We endorse your candidature. We are saying: stand in the next election and rule forever,”*²

The background to this paper is the September 2010 announcement by President Robert Mugabe of his intentions to push for urgent elections that will see an end to the current inclusive government.

In 2008, ZANU PF lost parliamentary votes to the opposition the MDC for the first time since 1980. Tsvangirai withdrew from the subsequent re-run for the Presidency protesting against cheating and political violence, leaving Mugabe to become President. A unity government was formed to promote reconciliation and lower political polarisation following the death and displacement of many MDC supporters. The GNU created new and positive opportunities for national dialogue in policy options for modernization and transformation of the security sector and for mending the polarized relations between the major political parties as a means to dealing with causes of violence against women.³ On the contrary however, the situation on the ground has not changed in any material detail from that of 2008. The major political issues have not been resolved, and the inclusive government remains polarized and a threat to national stability.⁴ The national healing organ established to promote political tolerance has not made any significant impact on the already existing antagonistic relations between the different political party factions. Zimbabweans remain more suspicious of each other than before, and the political terrain even more explosive and tense.

Politics pundits argue that the announcement for elections by the president has fermented violence, and that there has been an escalation of politically motivated violence since the president’s announcement in September to date. They argue that the announcement has resurrected the 2008 images of torture, rape, verbal and physical violence at the hands of the militia, the former war veterans, soldiers and the police.⁵

Merely anticipating elections in an environment not conducive for such is an indicator of President Mugabe’s quest for violence and total disregard for women’s safety.

¹ <http://news.radiovop.com>

² Ibid

³ Human Rights Watch (2008), Bullets for Each of you: State sponsored violence since Zimbabwe’s March 29 elections, *Human Rights Watch*. <http://hrw.org/reports/3008/zimbabwe0608webwcover.pdf>

⁴ Reeler, A. Hot Seat: Analyst Toney Reeler on What Will Resolve the Zim Crisis. www.zimsituation.org

⁵ RAU (2010), What are the options for Zimbabwe? Dealing with the obvious! Report produced by the Governance Programme. 4 May 2010. Harare: Research and Advocacy Unit.

Zimbabwean women often make up the bulk of participants at any rally of political event. The majority of women live in the rural areas where ZANU PF maintains a stronghold, and where women are coerced into voting for ZANU PF using food handouts, force and other means. Rural women are denied a voice and their counterparts like Muchinguri speak for them. Choosing a women's league meeting to announce a decisions for elections is thus seeking to instill fear and influence the way such women will vote. It is at another level an emotional violation of women's right to peace and choice during elections. Likewise, Muchinguri's statement has potential to influence the thinking of women as she is already effectively silencing them and psychologically forcing them to tow the party line in the forthcoming elections.

This paper provides an analysis of violence against women as revealed by the media from the time the president announced that there was going to be elections to date. It does so while acknowledging that there has been violence against women after the formation of the GNU and before the President's announcement, noting however that the proximate causes of the violence between the two periods have changed. An analysis of violence against women from the time the GNU was formed to the time the President announced for forthcoming elections will however not be part of this paper.

Fresh scars

On 29 May 2011 Cynthia Manjoro and 23 others, amongst them four other women, were arrested in Glenview following the murder of a police officer.⁶ Cynthia is a recent graduate of Information Technologies at a local university. She is also a human rights activist and mother to a 2 year old. Evidence abounds that she has done nothing connected to the murder, and was not in the Glenview vicinity when the murder occurred. The police officer investigating this case testifies that she is innocent, but is being used as bait to lure and arrest her alleged 'boyfriend' whom the police suspect of being connected to the murder. Cynthia has given the police all the details of the 'boyfriend', but they continue detaining her. She has been suddenly separated from her 2 year old son, now in the custody of her old and troubled mother. She sustained a growth on the left knee during the violent arrests, and her need for an urgent biopsy has been delayed by a month. Yvonne Musarurwa, one of the women arrested together with Cynthia sustained a fracture on the left hand and blood keeps oozing out of another wound on her right leg. Both women have been denied access to a doctor. They face violence, torture and hard labour. They have recently been transferred to the male section of Chikurubi prison, a holding centre for the most vile and dangerous criminals.⁷ Each time they come for a court hearing, the women can hardly walk. They continuously receive slashes under their feet, to force them confess to a murder they are not guilty of. Cynthia and her fellow women have been denied bail 5 times, and their next hearing is set for 29 July, two month after their arrest. What is happening to them is tantamount to serving a prison sentence for a crime they have not yet been proven guilty of.

⁶IRIN www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?report

⁷www.swradioafrica.com/news010711/outrage010711.htm

The story above is a microcosm of the violence being currently meted out to women human rights defenders and political activists in Zimbabwe. Arbitrary arrests, physical abuse, torture and hate speech characterise a relentless campaign by President Mugabe's disciples in the top echelons of the security organs⁸; namely the army, police, intelligence and militia to intimidate and instil fear in the masses ahead of the anticipated elections.

The call for security sector reforms⁹ in Zimbabwe is long overdue. Security sector reforms are the basis for sustainable peace, and will ensure a clear-cut separation of powers between state and ruling party, and between state organs and ruling party organs. In current Zimbabwe the state is coterminous with the government, and the government with the ruling party. All security organs pay homage and total allegiance to the president and the ruling ZANU PF. This confusion of roles is not out of ignorance but a decided strategy to maintain patriarchal hegemony. Unless these continuously blurring lines are highlighted, there is much cause for fear that the party orchestrated violence of the 2008 elections will continue unabated; given the assumption that '....ultimately the shots are called by whomever has the authority to hire and fire,'¹⁰ and also given the fears the ruling regime already exhibits for being voted out of power. Security sector reforms will also aid in the transformation of gendered relations that currently characterise Zimbabwean security institutions and systems, addressing questions of hierarchy and masculinities which are the major basis for violence against women.

GENDER ANALYSIS

This paper cannot elude a gender analysis, given the fact that women constitute the majority of the Zimbabwean population, and also that women have in the past faced the worst forms of politically motivated violence than men.

Whilst it is true that the majority of perpetrators of gender-based violence are men, gender analysts conclude that identifying perpetrators of gender-based violence as unequivocally male is inadequate and simplistic. There is need to critically assess the socio-historical, political and economic conditions of any given space, so as to unearth the underlying power dynamics which account for gendered relations between women and men in patriarchal societies.¹¹

Colonial capitalism left a legacy of gendered relations in already patriarchal Zimbabwe.¹² Gender division of labour accounts for masculine and feminine identities of power and powerlessness respectively; and gender is a significant determinant of violence in institutions where perceptions of women and men are more pronounced and hierarchically organized to

⁸ Election to Rape (2010): "Sexual Terror in Mugabe's Zimbabwe. AIDS-FREE-World." www.aidsfree.org

⁹In a narrow sense, and for the purposes of this paper, the security sector of a country can be seen as the state's security and justice apparatus and the relevant civilian bodies responsible for its management.

¹⁰ Matyszak, D. "Zimbabwe's Security Sector – Who Calls the Shots?" Research and Advocacy Unit, Harare.

¹¹Mbilinyi, M. *Africa's Liberation: The Legacy of Nyerere*. Fahamu/Pambazuka 2010

¹² Gaidzanwa, R. *Gender, Women and Electoral Politics in Zimbabwe*. EISA 2000

privilege men against women. Gender-based violence is borne out of a sense of men's entitlement to enjoy superiority and to control women. It is aggravated by cultural norms around constructions of masculine and feminine identities. As a result gender affects the way the particular abuse happens – who gets hurt, who does the injury, what forms of weapons are used, and what kinds of rationalizations allow the abuse to exist.¹³

Feminist analysis has gone beyond the colonial patriarchy discourse to further interrogate the persistent normalisation of gender violence in Africa. In her interrogation of 'post-colonial gender politics', Mama¹⁴ argues that Africa's new leaders, who happen to be primarily men, have not included transformation of oppressive gender politics in their political ideologies. In their '*masculinist memories and nostalgia*' they have re-created and maintained the sexual and economic conditions of gender disparities that facilitate the abuse of women.¹⁵ Such heteronormative ideals reinforce the structures of mainstream opinion and representation.¹⁶ Out of fear and socialisation women are forced to accept their oppression as natural and unavoidable, and they become totally silent about it. This silence is less of a problem than the deafness¹⁷ that is deliberately adopted by the perpetrators of violence themselves, the men, who often pretend that gender violence is not a problem, thereby placing culture and tradition as barriers through which women often fail to penetrate for their liberation. Women's '*silences*' and men's deliberate '*deafness*' all combine to produce favourable breeding spaces for more violence against women, and gender violence has become one of the most difficult problems to deal with in our African societies. Patriarchy and militarism work in ways that are 'normal,' 'natural' and in the crevices of everyday routine, in the process creating a culture of fear for enforcing political hegemony.¹⁸

Feminist analysis also asserts that politically motivated sexual violence or violence against women cannot be seen solely as an assault on the body, but constitutes major political acts.¹⁹ They are an attack on the 'body politic' aimed at controlling an entire socio-political process by crippling the enemy group.²⁰

Nordstrom argues that rape and violence in the context of war are not sexual but aggressive acts that have nothing to do with natural sexual impulses.²¹ Rape is rather "... *an act of aggression and violence through sexual means rather than an aggressive manifestation of sexuality.*"²²

¹³ Bennett, J. "Gender Based Violence Paper", 2000

¹⁴ Mama, A. *Changes of State: Gender Politics and Transition in Nigeria*. 1997

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Reddy, G. *With Respect To Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*. University of Chicago Press. 2005

¹⁷ Deafness refers to the deliberate refusal by men to listen to women's problems or to acknowledge the existence of such. The term was coined by Terrence Ranger at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair 1999 in relation to the topic of women's 'voicelessness.'

¹⁸ Honwana, J. *Child Soldiers in Africa*. University of Pennsylvania Press. 2007

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Brownmiller, L. in Honwana J. *Child Soldiers in Africa*. 2007

²¹ Nordstrom, C. *Rape: Politics and Theory in War and Peace*. Canberra Peace Research Centre, 1994

²² McKay, S. and Mazurana, D. *Where are the girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, Mozambique: Their lives during and after War*. Montreal: InterCentre for Human Rights and Democratic Development. 2004

Honwana also argues that violence against women in times of conflict touches on ‘*the core constructions of identity and ontological security*,’²³ and is a strategy for maintaining patriarchal and militaristic hegemony.

This being said, one can safely argue that violence against women in Zimbabwe is not a regrettable side effect but an overall military strategy to instill fear and perpetuate dictatorial rule. Likewise politics in Zimbabwe is not about liberating women. It is about further entrenching oppression and silencing them. Evidence on the ground affirms that Zimbabwean women remain excluded in the current political discourse. A look at the country’s recent history under the Government of National Unity (GNU) evidences how the Zimbabwean women’s agenda to assert their rights has remained elusive and on the fringes of democratic discourse. Recent SADC resolutions do not contain any clause that even tacitly mentions the peace and security of Zimbabwe’s women.²⁴ JOMIC is controlled and dominated by men, and women remain window dressers, devoid of making any decisions or inputs that benefit their constituency.

INCIDENCES OF VIOLENCE: FACTS AND FIGURES

On 19 February, 11 HIV positive women were arrested alongside Munyaradzi Gwisai and 32 other ISO activists in Harare while holding a meeting to discuss events in Egypt and Tunisia. They were detained beyond the 48 hours prescribed by law and were charged with treason, a crime deserving death penalty. The activists were denied access to their lawyers, to medical check-ups and to ARVs. One of the women had a lactating baby who spent the night in cells and was released into the custody of her father the following day, leaving the mother behind. The women were tortured and harassed, receiving ‘assaults all over (their) bodies, under their feet and buttocks through the use of broomsticks, metal rods, pieces of timber, open palms and some blunt objects.’²⁵

In the month of February through to March, members of the Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), were arbitrarily arrested, unlawfully detained and subjected to torture and other ill-treatment while in custody. WOZA is a social justice movement that engages in non-violent peaceful protests against the disproportionate impact of the economic decline on women’s access to basic goods and services in Zimbabwe²⁶.

On 14 February, during one of their usual peaceful Valentine’s Day marches, more than 150 women were arrested and detained for unnecessarily long periods in police cells. Three days later, on 1 March, 14 WOZA activists were also arrested during various meetings on social

²³Honwana, J. *Child Soldiers in Africa*. 2007

²⁴Mazurana, D. and McKay, S. *Women and Peace-Building*. Montreal. Quebec: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development. 1999

²⁵<http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/news/35374/elections-2011-what-sadcs-must-do.html>

²⁶Amnesty International Report (2011), Zimbabwe: Briefing to the Pre-Session Working Group of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. 51st Session. Amnesty International Publications, UK

issues in Bulawayo, followed by 83 others who were arrested and denied bail two weeks later. Four of the arrested had swollen faces and hands resulting from physical torture. Nomsa Sibanda could not hold her baby with her swollen hands. Three of the women disappeared from police custody and the Human Rights Lawyer who could not locate them for days feared for their safety. Fully armed Riot police maintained heavy presence to target WOZA protests from the 14th of February to the 5th of March. Coming against peaceful female demonstrators with arms is indicative of the militaristic nature of the Zimbabwean police force.

Zimbabwean prisons are not fit for human habitation. They are crowded, poorly resourced, with no toilets or adequate food. The prisons have gender specific implications for women as they do not provide sanitary pads and toiletries. Many women often face bleeding problems because of hormonal reactions to distress.²⁷

VERBAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

President Mugabe's character as an instigator and patron of politically motivated violence can also be discerned in his recent outbursts against Zwambila.²⁸ Commenting on the MDC's refusal to forced elections in 2011, Mugabe suddenly switches to unwarranted bodily remarks about Zwambila, a female MDC ambassador to Australia, "*Maybe because having elections will see them (MDC) ousted by the people who now see that they are naked, naked as Zwambila in Australia.*"²⁹ In the same week, and following Mugabe's style, Jabulani Sibanda uses the same sexist and misogynistic language against a woman MDC Minister, Theresa Makone. "*Who and what is Makone? Is it a girl or a boy? The problem is that most of these in MDC-T (women) are so ugly that it is difficult to recognise them.*"³⁰ Makone is MDC's Chairperson of the women's assembly and Minister of Home Affairs.

Both speeches above constitute sexual harassment, which can be defined as unlawfully subjecting one to pressure, insults or threats with intent to cause him/her to suffer anxiety, discomfort and or feelings of insecurity as a result of sexual differences. The two cannot be coincidental given the recurring patterns and the thread of hate speech running through them. They were said by men belonging to one political party, and were said against two women, also belonging to the same opposition political party. The sexism running through them is also cause for concern.

Of the 91 media articles recorded by Sokwanele's edition of the Zimbabwe Inclusive Government Watch for June only, 89% were articles about violence. Violations in the form of legal harassment of perceived opposition politicians and supporters featured most prominently in

²⁷RAU Report (2008) Treatment of Women Activists in Custody. Harare. Research and Advocacy Unit

²⁸ Zwambila is an MDT ambassador in Canberra, has had squabbles with ZANU PF junior staffers believed to be framing her for politically motivated reasons. On a sustained campaign to discredit her accused her of stripping in front of them Zwambila had become a barrier to a large scale diamond smuggling through Australia enroute to China and India through the diplomatic bag.

²⁹*DailyNews*. Harare, Zimbabwe. 21 July 2011

³⁰Ibid

the media articles logged this month, with 28 articles. This was closely followed by cases of violence, intimidation, hate speech, threats, abductions and brutality with 27 articles. Cases of violations denying or abusing freedom of speech were in third place, with 11 articles, while economic destabilisation, or efforts to entrench corrupt practices, came in fourth with only 10 articles.³¹ Of concern are not only the constantly rising cases of violence, but the degree of such violence as already highlighted in incidences above.

EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE

The effects of violence in Zimbabwe have been to instill fear in women and stop them from exercising their democratic right to participate in the political process. Most of those who have been abused have kept quiet for fear that there will be future reprisals. Also, the police who are supposed to be protecting them are part of their abusers. Women's bodies become the battlefield and the violence suffered has lifelong physical and psychological effects.

Experiences of Zimbabwean women should however not be viewed as miserable tales of passive victims. They are nuanced tales signifying high levels of brevity and courage, and are fraught with political significance, as Grace Kwinje correctly notes when commenting on the scars of violence inflicted by Mugabe's police, that all she sees each morning as she wakes up to take a bath “ ... *is the scarring inflicted by Mugabe's police. These scars are deep, physical and psychological, but their political significance is that they can be the source of our liberation. They are our badges of honour, marking us as comrades who have been on the frontline facing the enemy head on.*”³²

Their stories shall remain glaring evidence upon which the misogynists and militarists shall be tried one day.

³¹ www.sokwanele.za Zimbabwe Inclusive Government Watch June 2011

³² Kwinje in *The Woman in me: Grace Kwinje's personal experiences under the blows and batons of Robert Mugabe's men*. Pambazuka News 2007

CEDAW³³ EXPLORED

In violating women's rights, President Mugabe and ZANU PF are in constant violation of the CEDAW and various other International protocols to which Zimbabwe is a signatory in the following manner:

Detention of Human Rights Defenders including mothers with small babies: (Article 7c and 12)

Cynthia Manjoro has been in detention for a month at the time of writing this report. She has been separated from her 2 year old baby, casting the care burden on the already distressed Cynthia's mother. A WOZA activist arrested with a lactating baby could not hold or feed her 2 month old baby because of swollen hands resulting from torture by the prison guards and police whilst in prison cells. The woman could not leave her baby at home because of the age factor, and also because she had no one to leave the baby with. *The UN Bangkok rules on treatment of women prisoners require prison officials to allow women caring for children to make arrangements for their care, and that non-custodial sentences for pregnant women and women with dependent children shall be preferred where appropriate.*³⁴ The total disregard of this fact by the Zimbabwe Republic Police results in violations of women's human rights and child protection laws.

Denial of Treatment for Women Activists in Detention (Article 12)

Cynthia Manjoro has a swollen knee that is long overdue of a biopsy. Her counterpart Yvonne Musarurwa has a fracture arm and a wound that has been bleeding for more than 30 days. The two can hardly walk. They have been denied both bail and access to medical treatment. The 11 ISO activists who were arrested for watching a Tunisia and Egypt uprising movies were HIV positive and on anti-retroviral therapy. They were denied treatment and drugs for the whole period they were in prison. The WOZA woman whose hand was swollen from beatings whilst in prison was also denied medical treatment.

Discrimination, Sexuality Baiting, Discriminatory Stereotyping of Women Human Rights Defenders (Articles 2 (D), 7(C))

³³ (CEDAW) document defines gender-based violence as, "Any act..... that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in private or public life... violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, the community, including battery, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence, violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, and violence against women perpetrated and condoned by the state."

³⁴Amnesty International Report (2011) Zimbabwe: Briefing to the Pre-Session Working Group of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. 51st Session. Amnesty International Publications, UK

Women have faced gender specific violations of their rights aimed at humiliating them, and delegitimising their human rights concerns and activism.³⁵ Cynthia Manjoro and 4 other MDC activists have been moved from a female prison cell to a male one specially designed for criminals. This is done to ensure that they experience maximum torture and pain, as the conditions they will face there merit high calibre criminals. This is also done as psychological torture, to ensure that in future they will stay away from politics. This is also in violation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325³⁶ which requires that the playing field be levelled for men and women to equally participate in politics, and also calls for the removal of all barriers to political activism based on gender. Placing female prisoners in a male cell is also exposing them to the risk of rape by the prison guards, police and other male prison inmates.

Examples above have also shown how Zwambila and Makhone, MDC Ambassador to Italy and Minister of Home Affairs respectively, have been subjected to sexist verbal attacks by the president and Jabulani Sibanda, the war veterans' leader. Such attacks are aimed at undermining the integrity of female activists and discrediting their activities.

Cynthia Manjoro and four others have been denied bail to isolate them totally from the rest of the human rights movement.

Violation of Women's rights to Freedom of Expression, Association and Peaceful Protest (Article 2 and 7 (C))

Both WOZA members and ISO activists were violated as regards their right to association, expression and peaceful protest. Zimbabwe prisons have a record for lack of food, toiletries, sanitary pads and toilets. These women have been subjected to all these, in violation of their rights.

CONCLUSION

This paper strongly recommends constitutional reforms, security sector reforms and functional national healing efforts as pre-requisites to ending violence against women in Zimbabwe. Attempting to address violence against women in isolation from the above will be the same as calling for elections before addressing the causes of polarisation and fragmentation of the Zimbabwean political space.

³⁵Ibid

³⁶United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

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