

Unequal access to redress for women ex-combatants in Zimbabwe: An intersectional analysis

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ABSTRACT

Women played a range of complex roles during the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe between 1961 and 1980. However, although the Zimbabwean post-independence government made attempts to promote gender equity following the liberation struggle, women ex-combatants continue to experience unequal access to redress compared to their male counterparts. Part of the reason for this is that they were not considered as a specific social group in post-independence policies. Discussions at Lancaster House in 1979 addressed redress for ex-combatants broadly but neglected to pay attention to women and their unique experiences in the struggle and in the post-independence context.

In addition to this, it is not only gender, but also issues of social class and ethnicity that have shaped the political and socio-economic position of women ex-combatants in post-independence Zimbabwe. Using an intersectional lens, this article examines the experiences of Zimbabwean women ex-combatants, taking into consideration their class, sexuality, gender and ethnicity. It argues that gender on its own is inadequate to account for unequal access to redress. Rather, other social categories such as, but not limited to, social class and ethnicity should be investigated in order to understand the struggles faced by women ex-combatants in post-conflict societies in order for all to have equal access to justice and redress.

KEYWORDS

Gender, intersectionality, Zimbabwe, ex-combatants, liberation struggle

Introduction

Women played a range of complex roles during the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe between 1961 and 1980. Although the Zimbabwean post-independence government made attempts to promote gender equity following the liberation struggle, women ex-combatants were not considered as a specific social group in post-independence policies. Discussions at Lancaster House in 1979 addressed redress for ex-combatants broadly but neglected to pay attention to women and their unique experiences in the struggle and in the post-independence context. To date, women ex-combatants have not been considered in terms of redress.

In addition to this, it is not only gender, but also issues of social class and ethnicity that have shaped the political and socio-economic position of women ex-combatants in post-independence Zimbabwe. Using an intersectional lens, this article examines the experiences of Zimbabwean women ex-combatants in Zimbabwe's transitional context, taking into consideration their class, sexuality, gender and ethnicity. It argues that gender on its own is inadequate to account for inequality. Rather, other social categories such as, but not limited to, social class and ethnicity should be investigated in order to understand the struggles faced by women ex-combatants in post-conflict societies in relation to access to redress.

This article follows Nilsson's (2005:16) definition of an ex-combatant as a former member of an armed force "...who has taken direct part in the hostilities on behalf of the warring parties. The individual must also either have been discharged from or have voluntarily left the military group he or she was serving in". The study focuses on women ex-combatants who were directly involved in the Zimbabwe War of Liberation from 1963-1979.

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with women ex-combatants from Bulawayo. Purposive sampling was used, and, due to the fact that many women ex-combatants indicated that they did not want to talk about their experiences, interviewees were selected on the basis of those who were willing to talk. Seven of the participants had been deployed in the ZAPU military camps in Zambia and three deployed in the ZANU military camps in Mozambique during the liberation struggle. Two had high ranking positions, and two were enlisted against their will. Although this article does not engage in-depth with these interviews, as this is discussed in another forum, its analysis is informed by them.

This article begins with a discussion on intersectionality and women ex-combatants to situate the findings in the context of existing literature. This is followed by a brief overview of the armed struggle in Zimbabwe (1961-1980). It then examines the position of women ex-

combatants in the National Liberation Struggle to reveal the complex roles women play in periods of conflict. We then offer an intersectional analysis of the interviews conducted with ten women ex-combatants. In conclusion, we make the argument that women did not have equal access to redress, but that gender on its own is inadequate to account for, or understand, this inequality. Rather, other social categories such as, but not limited to, social class and ethnicity should be investigated in order to address the struggles faced by women ex-combatants in post-conflict societies in order for all to have equal access to redress.**Intersectionality**

Crenshaw (1989:139) introduced the term intersectionality when she was exploring the marginalisation of African-American women by “antidiscrimination laws and ... feminist theory and antiracist politics”.Further, Crenshaw (1989; 1991) uses intersectionality to account for institutionalized structures of oppression for example through legal frameworks, she also demonstrated how feminism and antiracism can operate as platforms that produce and legitimize exclusion.

Intersectionality accounts for intersecting structural identities such as but not exclusive to gender, class, race, sex, ethnicity or age (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Collins, 1986; Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality helps recognize that although there are universal experiences shared by women, their race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation shape how they experience structures of power. Therefore, it seeks to investigate systems of privilege and underprivilege within an identity category. Crenshaw (1991:1245) maintains that intersectionality demonstrates “the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed”. In other words, intersectionality demonstrates the existence of structural differences within social groups, and how these differences can potentially result in specific type of exclusions.

Although intersectionality initially emerged to account for the erasure of African-American womens’ marginalisation in antidiscrimination law, the theory has been used to interrogate other structures of power. Others, building on this, have explored the intersections of a range of identities. Hudson (2014), for example, problematises gender and victim/perpetrator binaries, and elsewhere scholars have explored intersectionality in terms of ethnic (Floya 1998), religious (Bilge 2010) and even national/transnational (Gottfried 2008) identity categories in order to better understand and reflect the ways in which people experience their identities.

Intersectionality has been applied in different disciplines and social and political contexts. The significance of the theory lies not only in its interrogation of “the inter-locking ways in which social structures produce and entrench power and marginalization” but also “by drawing attention to the ways that existing paradigms that produce knowledge and politics often function to normalize these dynamics” (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays and Tomlinson, 2013:312).

Women ex-combatants: More than victims

Although there has been a frequent exclusion of women in post-conflict reconstruction processes in Africa, women have played a pivotal role in anti-colonial armed struggles by participating as freedom fighters, political activists and played other supporting roles. However, often times the womens’ perspective and identity concerning armed struggles is ambiguous because of their untold significance and contributions, which then leads to the invisibility of their role and experiences in such political processes. Using the representation of women ex combatants in post-apartheid South Africa as an illustration, Magadla (2015:391), postulates that “the participation of women in combat has been confined to orthodox definitions of combat that do not account for the context that structured the ways in which women participated”.

The relationship between gender and war has been historically stereotyped using the victim (women) versus perpetrator (men) approach. Thus Moser and Clark (2001:4), argue that such a qualification undermines ‘human agency’ and the capacity of “social actors”. Although there has a historical dominance of men as active combatants, research indicates that there has been an active participation of women combatants in armed conflict. The continuous classification of women as ‘victims’ has led to lack of recognition of the active role they play(ed) during armed conflict. This position does regard that women combatants are victims of gender based violence during times of armed conflict and political violence; nonetheless there is a need to recognize that women combatants are both victims and agents. Women combatants experience victimization during times of armed conflict through sexual violence and abuse; different gender identities and discrimination based on their gender (Lyons, 2004; Urdang, 1979; Cock 1991).

Regardless, they cannot be essentialised as helpless victims. Although they experience the patriarchal nature of war that perpetuates violent injustices, these women fight in environments that are highly masculine and militarised challenging the notion of women being incapable of competing in male dominated spaces. Portraying women who were active

combatants in armed struggles as merely victims neglects their contribution in such socio-political processes. As a consequence, they become invisible in post-conflict processes. Acknowledging the political agency of women combatants helps address the complex effects of armed conflict on their lives.

Using the lens of intersectionality to understand the realities of women ex-combatants will help reveal how the gender inequality that the women ex-combatants fought for in the liberation struggle intersects with other dimensions of inequality that they have experienced in the transitional context.

Although the narrative of women freedom fighters has portrayed them as heroic guerrilla fighters for participating in the national liberation struggles in Africa, this fictional representation does not capture the roles and lived realities of the women who participated in the national liberation struggle of Zimbabwe. Gender perceptions were shifted during the liberation war as some women took on combat and other significant roles that were traditionally aligned to men but on whose terms? They might not have been in combat but their role was pivotal in the success of the anti-colonial struggle and should not be overlooked.

A brief overview of the armed struggle in Zimbabwe (1961-1980)

The former Rhodesia was under British colonial rule from roughly 1890 until 1980. The declaration of independence from the United Kingdom, and subsequent establishment of a Republic by the white minority government in 1970, triggered a civil war. The two liberation movements that militarily challenged the Rhodesian regime were ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) and ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union), led by Joshua Nkomo (Moorcraft and McLaughlin 1982:14). Both movements had military wings, ZANLA (Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army) and ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army) respectively. ZANU organized the guerrilla war from camps in Mozambique and ZIPRA from camps in Zambia, however as the war continued some training camps were stationed in Tanzania and Angola (Chung, 2006; Kriger, 1992; Bhebhe and Ranger, 1995; Geisler, 2004). The Zimbabwean struggle, although started in the urban areas, was wholly executed in the rural areas (Ngwenya and Molapo, 2018:86).

Although scholars give varying accounts, they however are in agreement that the liberation struggle began during the 1960s (Kriger, 1992; Martin and Johnson, 1981; Bhebhe, 1999). ZAPU became a liberation movement on the 17th of December 1961, and its predecessor was

the National Democratic Party (NPD) whose predecessor was the Southern Rhodesian African National Congress (SRANC) (Dabengwa, 2004: 25; Mlambo, 2014:145). ZAPU was banned in 1963 by the settler regime after staging mass demonstrations in an attempt to convince the government to heed to their call for “independence and majority rule” (Dabengwa, 1995:25). Chung (2006:60) suggests that the banning of liberation movements was also as a result of violence towards “all symbols of the colonial regime”. The ZAPU ban became detrimental and caused divisions within the national movement leadership resulting in a split (Ngwenya and Molapo, 2018:77). The split led to the formation of ZANU. The disunity amongst the nationalists was structured along ethnic lines, dividing the Shona and Ndebele (Chung, 2006:59-60). Youth from both sides were engaged in violent fights against each other in townships after the split of ZAPU. The fights were characterized by bombing of houses, physical assault and restricting workers from going to work (Chung, 2006:60-61). As a result, nationalist leaders were arrested and detained, followed by the banning of both ZANU and ZAPU.

The Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from the United Kingdom adopted by the Rhodesian Front Party led by Ian Smith was a catalyst to the guerrilla war (Smith, 1997:103-105). During the armed struggle there were power and leadership struggles among the African nationalists that were occasionally detrimental to the national liberation cause. However, the outcomes that positively contributed to the armed struggle outweighed the weaknesses in the national movements. Both the nationalist movements equally contributed to the liberation war although in each phase their contributions differed. During 1964-69, ZAPU was taking lead in most of the operations against the oppressive Rhodesian regime, although ZANU was also assisting through other efforts; the movement was in its early stage of establishing structures and external connections (Chimhanda, 2003:83).

The period from 1970-1974, was marked by ZANU taking lead in the fighting while ZAPU was still recovering from their loss of their fallen trained cadres in the first phase of the war and also was also going through a restructuring process (Chimhanda, 2003:83). However, ZAPU contributed to this second phase of the struggle but not as effective as the previous. From 1975-1980, both ZANU and ZAPU had strengthened their military wings making their efforts more effective (Bhebhe, 1999:12). Although the armed struggle was essential in collapsing the Ian Smith regime, the Independence of Zimbabwe was not won through a military victory but a negotiated settlement (the Lancaster House Peace Agreement of 1979). The result was the drafting of the Zimbabwean constitution and the adoption of a cease fire agreement and Zimbabwe became independent in 1980.

To provide state benefits for war veterans, the government enacted three legislations. These included the War Victims Compensation Act of 1980 that made provisions for war disability compensation through pensions, the Statutory instruments of 1989 that calculated retirement pensions for ex-combatants that actively participated before 18 April 1980, and the War Veterans Act of 1992 that provided for those who were military trained and actively participated in the liberation struggle both in and outside of Zimbabwe between 1 January 1962 and 29 February 1980 (Kriger, 2003:323-326). Subsequently, in 1997 the government granted “all registered war veterans’ gratuities, pensions and other benefits” (Sadomba and Dzinesa, 2004:60). The war service pensions included Z\$ 2,000 monthly; then approximately £125 and an enormous lump-sum of Z\$50,000; then approximately £3,000 (Kriger, 2003: 325). Both men and women ex-combatants qualified to benefit. However, the pay-outs were not in the national budget, hence deepening the economic woes of the nation, leading to hyperinflation reducing the value of the pensions (Mazarire and Rupiya, 2000:75).

Women in the National Liberation Struggle

Women fulfilled a diversity of roles during the liberation struggle, from more supporting roles, related to cooking, nursing and child rearing to, as the conflict progressed, more active roles in combat (Lyons, 2004; Siedman, 1984; Geisler, 2004). The initial reluctance of both the liberation movements of ZANLA and ZIPRA to enlist women into combat roles perhaps reveals their trivialization of gender equality. During early recruitment days ZANLA considered women ‘physically weaker’ in comparison to their male counterparts (Mugabe, 1983:77). But other scholars reveal that those who were considered able bodied from both genders performed the same domestic duties (Davies, 1983:100; Weiss, 1986:90). ZANLA used women to deliver and hide huge quantities of weapons and ammunition needed for the maintenance of military activities usually at night (Mudeka, 2014:90; Davies, 1983:100; Lyons, 2004:109; Weiss, 1986:90).

Women began to demand the same military training as their male counterparts, arguing that they needed to defend themselves (Geisler, 2004: 51-54) and both the military wings of the liberation movements of ZANLA and ZIPRA embraced the idea (Siedman, 1984:426). In ZANLA the increasing importance of women became apparent in the 1970s, where women became perceived as necessary soldiers and allies (Chung, 2016). The existing attitudes towards women, as well as their self-perceptions, were challenged by the participation of women in the war (Geisler, 2004:54).

Although women received military training, the privilege to formally operate in traditionally masculine domains, though, was only given to a limited number of women (Cock, 1991; Lyons, 2004; Urdang, 1979). As a result, women were poorly represented 'in the higher military ranks' and this also affected their post-independence recognition for the roles they played during the liberation war (Sadomba and Dzinesa 2004:54).

A further reason for the reluctance to engage women in active combat was the fact that women acted as symbols to be mobilised as the 'mothers of the nation'. In order to foster the cooperation of women, the Zimbabwean African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) ascribed value to the roles of women as mothers and nurturers. They used the rhetoric of motherhood and encouraged women to perform their femininity by supporting guerrillas who were travelling, with phrases such as "forward with the cooking stick" being reinforced (Nhongo-Simbanegavi, 2000:17).

But apart from being active combatants, women were also, inevitably, targeted. Women became victims of a "masculine discourse" between the Rhodesian forces and the Nationalist liberation armies as their bodies were used as pawns to promote the war propaganda (Lyons, 2004:124). It has been suggested by Lyons (2004:126) that attacks by Rhodesian forces on women were used as a military strategy to "destroy the nationalists by undermining their ability to protect their women".

But also within the ZAPU and ZIPRA guerrilla camps women were implicated in problems of "sexual abuse, coercion and gender inequality" (Geisler, 2004:58; Chung, 2006:126). According to a former woman ex-combatant who was a former ZANLA commander, comrades in positions of leadership at the ZANLA felt entitled to "demand the services of women as a semi-servant or semi-wives at their base camp" (Weiss, 1986:95). Some senior male commanders subjected young women to rape and coerced "sex for soap" as a survival strategy (Lyons, 2004:191; Geisler, 2004:58).

Some who were in positions of leadership dismissed these allegations of harassment and sexual assault, and portrayed female cadres as prostitutes; as a result there was an introduction of party-certified marriages that was used as a mechanism to control their behaviour (Lyons, 2004:192). Some women ex-combatants revealed that some sexual relationships were used as tools for social advancement stating "Having a relationship with a *chef* meant you had access to food, clothes and other luxuries that were not available to many other girls at the camp" (Lyons, 2004:271). In other words, this highlights that some women cadres sometimes made informed decisions concerning sexual relationships. As Ranger and

Bhebe (1996:28) note, “the war time experiences of women [even combatants] were so varied and contradictory...”

Nonetheless some women suffered horrific sexual abuse forcefully. There was also an opposition to the use of contraceptives by women because they were perceived to be a stumbling block in the reproduction of the next generation of soldiers and also promoting ‘prostitution’ (Lyons, 2004:192-196).

Outside of the armed movements, gender relations in the rural areas became fluid during the liberation struggle. Most young men left rural areas and crossed the borders to Zambia and Mozambique to participate in the national liberation war. The absence of men in rural areas meant that women had to perform duties that were traditionally assigned to men (Geisler, 2004: 55). Women began to participate in the public sphere which was previously restricted to men, as a result their influence transcended beyond the domestic sphere (Kriger, 1992:190-195).

Rural women who stayed behind in the rural environment also contributed equally towards the liberation struggle through organising resources to cater for the needs of guerrilla forces (Geisler, 2004, Kriger, 1992; Nhongo-Simbanegavi, 2000; Lyons, 2004; Bhebe and Ranger, 1995). However, the question of the nature of relations between guerrillas and rural dwellers remains a matter of controversy. Mtisi, Nyakudya and Barnes (2009:154) argue that a ‘celebratory approach’ to the relations has been adopted by nationalists histories through the emphasis of how ZANLA used young girls and boys as messengers (*mujibhas* and *chimbwidos*) and how the villagers voluntarily provided food, shelter and played other supporting roles. The *chimbwidos* sometimes were transporters of supplies and performed domestic chores for guerrillas including washing (Davies, 1983:107). On the other hand, some studies have highlighted in some areas peasants were violently coerced into providing needs that sustained the guerrillas including sexual abuse of women through rape (Mtisi, Nyakudya and Barnes, 2009:154-155). Nonetheless, Lyons (2004:146) notes that although the guerrilla violations against the peasant civilian population has been circumvented in the conversation about the liberation war, literary works have uncovered them through constant reference.

The use of coercion was not limited to the guerrillas. According to Mtisi, Nyakudya and Barnes (2009:157) the Rhodesian colonial forces would beat up rural dwellers who were allegedly sell-outs and witches; sometimes the punishment would be death. Similarly, Geisler (2004:56) highlights that the Rhodesian colonial forces also used coercion on women for

sexual needs. Young adolescent girls sent to deliver food the guerrilla forces were sometimes mistaken as *chimbwidos* by Rhodesian forces as a result they were abducted and, “These young girls were tied by their ankles and hung in a tree upside down under a barrel of water. They would be dipped from time to time into the water until they were prepared to talk” (Chung, 2006:140).

In terms of why women joined the liberation armies, an array of reasons have emerged. Some participated because they consciously equated the emancipation of women with national liberation (Mudeka, 2014; Geisler, 2004; White, 2007; Lyons 2004). Also, the revolutionary rhetoric of most African liberation movements that had socialist influences promoted the idea that gender equality was part of the liberation war agenda (Cock, 1991; Lyons, 2004). For most women, participating in the liberation struggle was both an act of “individual as well as national independence” (Seidman, 1984:426).

In interviews conducted by Lyons (2004:107-109), some young women stated that they had joined the liberation struggle so that they could have access to education as colonialist policies limited access of women to education, if not at all. In this regard, it can be noted that women were fighting for both gender and racial liberation. The anticipation of women was that they would acquire equality after the struggle had been won.

Some were coerced to join under the threat of violence. Some feared “being killed by soldiers” and being accused of being “a sell-out” (Lyons, 1996:12). Other women were kidnapped by guerrillas and were forcefully enlisted in the liberation struggle (Lyons, 1996:12).

The role that women played in the armed struggle, and the reasons for their participation in the armed movements, speaks directly to the issue of redress. The complex and contradictory reasons for their participation and the ways they were recruited, coupled with the assumptions about the roles women can, should and did play during the liberation struggle, all contribute to the whether women ex-combatants are perceived in the same way as men ex-combatants, and are thus perceived to deserve the same redress as their male counterparts.

How women were recruited, why they participated and what role they played were all directly shaped by their gender, ethnicity, location, class and education levels. An intersectional analysis allows us to give attention to this, and to better understand the differentiated social, economic and political realities for women ex-combatants in post-independence Zimbabwe.

Post-Independence representations of women ex-combatants

The perspective and identity of women ex-combatants in the transitional context in Zimbabwe has been ambiguous. The representation of the women who were enlisted in the Zimbabwean Liberation armies is contradictory, to say the least. On the one hand the symbol women as ‘mother of the nation’ were promoted, yet during the war they were also at times portrayed as prostitutes. At times, their positions in the struggle have been glorified, portraying their role as having been equal to men, yet gender inequality was alive and well in the armed movements (Lyons, 2004:252). Women guerrilla’s experiences of fighting alongside men were used by women’s movements as a tool to demand equal rights in the legislation post-independence, which perhaps resulted in an exaggerated narrative of the revolutionary war as an emancipating social process (Chogugudza, 2006:49). This imaginary representation and notion of equality disguised the gender-based violence that women experienced in the liberation struggle.

There was a heroic elevation of women using metaphors of the liberation struggle through posters that had the image of a woman freedom fighter carrying an AK47 gun, carrying a baby on her back (Geisler, 2004:51; Chogugudza, 2006:49). The challenge is that the emphasis on the glorious role of women cultivates a mythical notion that obliterates their lived experiences, creating “an official mythology of war” (Barnes, 1995:118). During the struggle, they had to prove that they were deserving of military training and assignments. Some women lived in fear of the threat of violence, rape, sexual assault and sexist attitudes that the national liberal movement perpetuated during the war (Geisler, 2004; Lyons, 2004). Their celebration by national leaders becomes overshadowed by images of aggression, violence and sexual availability.

Although women fought and supported the nationalist struggle, their role in the struggle was largely determined by traditional gender stereotypes. Despite women being “trained for guerrilla warfare” during the liberation struggle there was an “emphasis on the domestic capabilities of women, rather than their combat abilities” (Lyons, 2004:176). It is of importance to recognize the challenging nature of the position of women in the armed struggle in order to limit the exclusion of the role played by women in the liberation struggle through post-conflict reconstruction processes.

Some scholars have observed that soon after independence the Zimbabwean government embarked on a mission to advance the advancement of women in the socio-economic and political arena. It is often highlighted that after the liberation struggle a few women served in

first cabinet offices such as Joyce Mujuru, Oppah Muchinguri, Fay Chung, Florence Chitauru, Jane Mutasa, Edna Madzongwe, Ruth Chinamano and Thenjiwe Lesabe among others (Chogugudza, 2006:50). However, women who participated in the liberation struggle were either members of the elite class who were mainly mobilized from the urban areas or rural women from the rural areas. Some women who participated in the liberation struggle served in high offices increased aspirations of gender equality and equity; however the issues they were tackled by the different government ministries did not consider women ex-combatants as a specific group of women in the transitional context.

Political rhetoric during and towards the end of the liberation struggle raised women ex-combatants to the level of heroes, the post-independence government did not however ensure that rehabilitation programmes were put in place in order to prepare the civilian society for a smooth return of war veterans into civilian life. This negatively impacted the reintegration process and the mental and emotional healing from post-war trauma by ex-combatants as they experienced unnecessary social stressors.

Furthermore, among the women who participated in the struggle because of their different social classes, their experiences of the transitional context also becomes different. In this instance, an intersectional lens allows for the development of a theoretical understanding of how transitions have interlocking social categories such as class or ethnicity which intersect with other gendered forms of exclusions and inequality (Ni Aolain and Rooney, 2007:340).

An intersectional analysis of the experience of women ex-combatants intersecting identities that emerged during the interviews undertaken for this study include those of gender, ethnicity/language and social class. Some participants stressed gender as being central in itself, reflecting for example, the absence of women representatives in the Lancaster House Agreement of 1979, the peace agreement that influenced the post-independence political and socio-economic policies.

The research findings indicate that the post-independence period in Zimbabwe has unfolded differently for individual women ex-combatants, politically, economically and socially. Most women ex-combatants interviewed expressed feelings of despair in relation to their post-conflict experiences, as they perceive themselves to have suffered disadvantages. Moreover, they described being stigmatized by society in many ways because of their combatant status. This becomes an assault on their self-esteem because instead of them being confident in wearing their combatant identity and their contributions in the liberation of the country, some of them regret that phase of their life. Ex-combatant Sibongile believes that a lot of people

are angry at war veterans, and she said that “as a woman ex-combatant if I could wash away my combatant identities like dirt I would do so” (Personal Interview, 11 April, 2018, Bulawayo).

The high expectations of women combatants when the war ended emerged from multiple factors. These included the nationalist rhetoric of equating the success of the liberation struggle with the emancipation of women from both colonial and traditional patriarchy. Moreover, their notable contributions, roles and traumatic war experiences in the liberation war justified high expectations from the post-independence government. In this regard, they anticipated being on a level playing field in the platform that would determine how they would experience the post-conflict context.

After independence was declared in Zimbabwe in 1980, the work of merging three armed forces the Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF), ZANLA and ZIPRA into the Zimbabwe National Army began in a political tense environment. However, integration into the army was slow, and at the same time, those who could not be absorbed into the army needed to be reintegrated into civilian life. A Demobilisation Directorate was formed under the Ministry of Labour and Social Services, but was riddled with challenges. Ten years after this and other Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes were established, it was found that only 28% of former combatants had found employment (Lamb, 2013)

Amidst this, women ex-combatants were not treated as a separate group, and those interviewed largely reported not even attempting to engage with the DDR programmes. Most of the participants evaded interview questions that pertained to the DDR programmes without disclosing why they avoided discussing them. It could have been that they did not want to revisit the memories associated with that phase of their life. One of the women who did speak about it was ex-combatant Sibongile¹ who said that “I did not participate in the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programme; therefore I did not even receive the demobilisation funds because most of those who got the benefits were men. As a woman they would make sure they discourage you by pushing you around when you went to claim the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration benefits until you gave up and realised that you are wasting your time and energy” (Personal Interview, 11 April, 2018, Bulawayo).

Those who were educated and had more economic and political mobility had a greater chance of being reintegrated either into the army or into civilian life than those who lacked those

¹ Name changed on request.

advantages. Ex-combatant Toriso² had this to say “life is so difficult we are currently dying of hunger but some people are living comfortable lives because of the lack of being accommodative to everyone” (Personal Interview, April, 2018, Bulawayo). She continued to highlight the dynamics amongst women who actively participated in the liberation struggle by conveying that “the focus of the government has been more on the party side of women and has neglected the women who were guerrillas. Even the parliament representation system opportunities are mostly given to elite women who represent the bottom power in the hierarchy of power relations, neglecting ordinary women combatants who were soldiers and guerrillas” (Personal Interview, April, 2018, Bulawayo).

This might have been why two of the ex-combatants interviewed commented that women who were members of the bourgeoisie and were affiliated with men in the ruling-class benefited most politically and socio-economically as far as the post-independence gains were concerned. In other words, there were group structural inequalities amongst women ex-combatants where gender intersected with class and position to shape the experiences of some of the women. It is against this backdrop that Chogugudza (2006:51) comments that “there was in general a fundamental mismatch between the needs of the women ex-fighters and those of the elite civil societies...it was middle class values which were used to dictate what actually came to be drafted into the constitution”.

Women ex-combatants did not experience discrimination and exclusion solely ‘as women’ and as ‘working-class people’, instead these social divisions intersected with that of ethnicity. The research findings revealed that some women ex-combatants who were former ZAPU members and ZIPRA guerrillas experienced marginalization based on their belonging to the Ndebele ethnic group. In this context, ethnicity was used as a central axis to perpetuate disadvantages between social groups. The nature of the relationship between the Shona and Ndebele ethnic groups has always been an issue of controversy. They have always had strained relations since the pre-colonial context, however the colonial era consolidated the dysfunction between the two groups (Stauffer, 2009:115). But during the liberation struggle they had to join forces to fight their common enemy whose presence had equal effects on both of them. In other words, they formed “non-ethnic based associations” (Muchemwa, 2015:78).

This phase, though, was short-lived as there was a transformation of ethnicity to ‘tribalism’ amongst nationalist leaders (Stauffer, 2009:134). Towards the end of the liberation struggle

² Name changed on request.

ethnicity which had culminated in 'tribalism' worsened. The Matebeleland region of Zimbabwe is made up of different ethnic groups which were inclusive of some Shona people and others who were assimilated into the pre-colonial Ndebele state, as such this reflects "the Ndebele nation as a pre-colonial form of a rainbow nation" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008:35). Therefore, in the context of the liberation struggle the Ndebele identity through ethnicity was defined in relation to speaking the language, that is to say "Ndebele-ness linguistically" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008:35). However, ethnicity culminated to 'tribalism' during parts of the liberation struggle and post-independence when being Ndebele became politically equated and limited to being affiliated with Joshua Nkomo, ZAPU and also being geographically-located in Matebeleland (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008:35). In this regard, ZANU became a symbol of the Shona 'tribe' and ZAPU the Ndebele 'tribe'. This resulted in exclusionary politics. As put by Abrams (2006:60) the meaning conveyed was that "ZAPU is connected with dissidents and ZAPU is Ndebele therefore the Ndebele are dissidents".

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2007:280), ethnic divisions were heightened by nationalist leaders who were in pursuit of taking over the state. Although ZANU and ZAPU presented a united front during the Lancaster House negotiations, it was just for a short moment that ended after the signing of the ceasefire agreement. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2007:870) observed that "Rather than nationalism and the armed struggle giving birth to common national identity, it became a terrain of politics of tribalism and fragmentation of the supporters of ZAPU and ZANU as though they were not of the same country". There was a short honey moon phase post-independence when ZANU won the elections and announced a policy of national reconciliation and declared an amnesty.

This moment gave hope to possibilities of ethnic cohesion, as both parties also formed the new government although ZANU was dominating with more fifty percent of the parliament seats. These hopes were soon erased as mistrust grew between the two liberation armies resulting in the deployment of Shona speaking soldiers to unleash violence in Ndebele speaking areas through operation *Gukurahundi* from approximately 1982-1987. An estimated death of more than 20 000 people has been documented, including torture and rape. The justification of this massacre was that the mission was targeted at dissidents that were a threat to the newly elected government (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011:5). Against this context, the existence of ethnic divisions between women ex-combatants is not an issue that is unique. Instead, it might be a reality that can be traced as far as during pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial contexts.

Jane Ngwenya the former National Secretary for Women's Affairs for the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), revealed that "ZAPU was excluded on tribal basis post-independence" (Personal Interview, 15 April, 2018, Bulawayo). Another ex-combatant, Thandiwe³, observed that the differential treatment in terms of the distribution of political power and redress in the form of compensation that some comrades experienced post-conflict is because "the history of the liberation struggle has been narrated to the public using tribalism as it seems the narrative represents ZANLA as the only liberation army that effectively contributed to the war, erasing the role played by ZIPRA" (Personal Interview, 19 April, 2018, Bulawayo). The responses from the interview participants are an illustration that they regarded the intersection of ethnicity and political affiliation to have been a contributing factor in the structuring of their discrimination.

Apart from financial compensation, ex-combatant Toriso⁴ who is fortunate enough to be a recipient of the war veterans' pension fund said that one of the most important things to her in the transitional context is visibility through recognition. She stated that: "We were never given recognition. It should be known that there are women who were the first to train for the liberation war outside Zimbabwe and to fight within the country" (Personal Interview, 29 April, 2018, Bulawayo). Moreover, Toriso wants to be honoured as a woman ex-combatant: "They should acknowledge us even during Heroes Day, we should be included in the list of heroes that should be remembered in the history of the liberation struggle. When I attend such functions they should honour me as a woman ex-combatant to show that they are aware of my contribution" (Personal Interview, 11 April, 2018, Bulawayo).

It is therefore critical especially for post-conflict societies that are deeply divided, to apply an intersectional analysis when understanding the social and economic conditions of women ex-combatants post-independence. Post-conflict legislations and policies tend to fall into the trap of homogenizing social groups which perpetuates the assumption that they have uniform experiences. As Yuval-Davis - (2006:199) has noted, it is significant to analyse the categorical attributes of people belonging to the same social category because these "are often used for the construction of inclusionary/ exclusionary boundaries that differentiate self and other, determining what is 'normal' and what is not, who is entitled to certain resources and who is not". When the different structural identities of gender, class, ethnicity and others interlock they "tend to create, in specific historical situations, hierarchies of differential access to a variety of resources- economic, political and cultural" (Yuval-Davis, 2006:199).

³ Name changed on request.

⁴ Name changed on request.

Societies in transition are no exception; the research has illustrated a need to conceptualize the interdependence of gender, class, ethnicity and other social categories in understanding individual experiences.

Conclusion

The research study has shown that women have played a pivotal role in the anti-colonial armed struggle in Zimbabwe. Their participation was significant in the success of the liberation war. Through the literature on the lived realities of women who participated as combatants, the article has shown how gender structured the experiences of women in armed conflict. Their participation in the liberation war challenged the notion that women were incapable of engaging in masculine and military spaces, yet this did not abolish patriarchal gender relations. Patriarchy as a system has been documented to have existed in Zimbabwe during the pre-conflict, armed conflict and post-conflict context (Walker, 1991; Kriger, 1992; Geisler, 2004).

The study has shown that although the state put in place gender equality legislations and policies, these were not effective in responding to the day-to-day realities of women ex-combatants post-independence because they did not address their needs as a specific group. The state treated all women as a homogenous group, neglecting the reality that their direct participation in the liberation struggle meant that their experiences differed from those of civilian women, although they all contributed to the success of the liberation struggle in different ways. In this context, their post-conflict needs and their notion of equality might not be the same, and to effectively address this difference, women ex-combatants should be included as stakeholders in the processes that formulate and implement legislations and policies concerning their transitioning back into civilian life.

Through the lens of intersectionality, the study has revealed that the failure by the post-independent government to address deep-seated structural inequalities has led to the complex experiences of women ex-combatants. The theoretical lens of intersectionality has been used to illustrate how the discrimination and exclusion of women ex-combatants was an individual experience for each woman framed by the identity categories of gender, social class and ethnicity. Gender was central in consolidating inequalities between men and women ex-combatants during the Lancaster House peace negotiations and in the designing and implementation of the transitional justice framework, and also in determining the political and socio-economic position of women ex-combatants.

The article has established that in order for women to effectively have equal access to redress, an intersectional analysis of the power relations that entrench structural inequalities between women in the post-conflict context is needed. Gender on its own is inadequate to account for inequality. Rather, other social categories such as, but not limited to, social class and ethnicity should be investigated in order to address the struggles faced by women ex-combatants in post-conflict societies in order for all to have equal access to redress.

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