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Post-War Reintegration Challenges Faced by Women Freedom Fighters: The Case Study of Gweru, Midlands, Zimbabwe

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Abstract: After serving in a brutal revolutionary insurgency, Zimbabwean women warriors were supposed to return to civilian life and blend in as if nothing had occurred. Everyone has the right to social acceptance. A qualitative methodology, or case study design, was used in this investigation. Two male and three female freedom fighters participated in in-depth interviews as part of the data gathering process. The research revealed that war veterans have turned to alcohol and drugs to deal with trauma-related issues, but these substances actually make matters worse by making people dependent on alcohol, impairing their judgment and mental faculties, causing issues in their relationships with friends and family, and occasionally putting them at risk for rape, suicide, violence, or accidents. Women and girls were sexually assaulted by freedom fighters at pungwes, which are nighttime gatherings when guerrillas politicize the villages. It is the government's responsibility to implement a framework for reintegration of women war veterans and victims through reconstruction, rehabilitation, empowerment and social security programmes.

Keywords: Reintegration, Freedom fighter, War veteran, Civilian, Independence

INTRODUCTION

It was difficult for female war veterans to settle down and confront the reality of life in Zimbabwe, where they were hailed as returning heroes and celebrated extensively. According to Moto (1990), military veterans who desired marriage found civilian males uninterested in marrying them. A civilian would immediately distance himself from a lady he had been interested in if he learned that she was an ex-combatant. Based on their connections during the armed conflict, female veterans found it simpler to marry men veterans with whom they had more or less comparable experiences and a shared understanding. Reintegration, according to Mhanda (2011), is the process by which former combatants obtain civilian identity and find long-term work and financial stability. In essence, reintegration is an open-ended process that mostly occurs locally in communities.

As a component of a nation's overall national duty, reintegration often calls for sustained outside support. Moto (1990) reported that female war veterans in Gweru revealed that they were all married to male war veterans, pointing out that this was a blatant indication of the overall hostility of the populace against war veterans. During Zimbabwe's independence, there were a number of genuine and imagined views regarding female combat veterans. Even if "even among civilian women there are those who are born tough," some men believed that female war veterans were too arrogant to get married after Zimbabwe gained its independence in 1980 (Moto, 1990). Due to their inability to handle the demands of such irrational lovers, most men were sometimes compelled to "ditch" their combat veteran women (Sunday Mail, 1981, 6 December).

Most women used their position as former warriors as a means of intimidation or self-defense. Others said that they lacked morality and decorum since they had lived in the jungle with males "under all sorts of circumstances." It was widely believed that they must have shared beds with several soldiers while in combat (Sunday, 1981, 6 December). While such rare incidents may have occurred, it is crucial to note that throughout the guerilla warfare, all combatants were expected to adhere to a rigorous code of behavior. Private affairs were frowned upon, and individuals accused of having them may face up to 45 strokes (Moto, 1990: 94:5). The purpose of this study was to evaluate the difficulties faced by female liberation fighters reintegrating into society in Gweru, Zimbabwe's Midlands.

Status of women freedom fighters after independence

The post-colonial administration started concealing the facts from the Zimbabwean people once the conflict ended. Rather than speaking the truth, we see that shortly after the conflict, startling posters featuring a female warrior with an AK-47 in her hands and a baby on her back surfaced (Moyo, 1985). The image represented equality between men and women, and it has since gained international recognition as an icon and rallying cry. Additionally, the women's movement in Zimbabwe often drew on the experiences of female guerrillas fighting alongside their male counterparts to advocate for women's rights, emphasizing the idea that

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the revolutionary struggle was a liberating process. The female fighter, as a revolutionary symbol, became a tool to support the liberation forces in Zimbabwe and to push for gender equality in laws. However, despite the impressive progress made by the women's party wing, women veterans of the war saw very little improvement.

It notably overlooked the problem of women ex-combatants, who were mostly peasants members, since the movement was headed by nationalist women leaders who were more middle class than the proletariat. The concerns that impacted these women individually and collectively were not addressed as such. As if women ex-warriors were never a distinct category of combatants. The bourgeoisie, or male and female elite, was really the main beneficiary of the majority of integrationist initiatives. As a consequence, women's power advances have reached a point where certain top female members of the bourgeoisie have surpassed some males in their progress up the political power ladder. Meanwhile, women who rose to political prominence and success, such Joyce Mujuru, Tenjiwe Lesabe, Florence Chitauro, Ruth Chinamano, Jane Mutasa, Oppah Muchinguri, and Edna Madzongwe, all had connections to male members of the ruling class (Moyo, 1985). The impoverished were absolutely excluded.

According to Mikell (1997), this may be the reason feminism is unable to ascribe the state of all women to a common experience. According to the experiences of former Zimbabwean combatants, class and social standing act as a mediating factor in the circumstances faced by underprivileged, impoverished women. Since the upper classes were not subject to common laws, for instance, certain legal institutions, including the Deeds Registry Office, continued to function as if women were minors under the law by 1988, even after the Legal Age of Majority Act (LAMA) was approved at independence. According to Chimedza's (1998) analysis of the Zimbabwean case, Section 15 of the previous Deeds Registry Act remained to restrict women's property control until 1988. In order to prove that she was married, the Act required a married woman to have her deed certified by a registrar or a lawyer and to include her husband's name.

Unless evidence is shown to convince the registrar that she had the legal competence to execute the document without her husband's help, the husband was supposed to help her execute any deed or document that was needed or allowed to be recorded in the deeds registry. However, although legislation pertaining to the peasants took a very long time to modify, middle class women's concerns about the allocation of professional incomes were promptly addressed, and women began receiving salaries on par with men. Because resettlement licenses are still typically given to male heads of families, middle-class women were able to acquire traction while peasant women were not immediately incorporated into the cash economy. This effectively defined women as agricultural laborers rather than independent farmers. Due to their poverty, some former female combatants are not pleased to be recognized (Chimedza, 1998).

Female Ex-fighter's political representation in decision-making

Although efforts to provide women political participation in organizations that make decisions may have existed at the time of independence, there were a number of obstacles. Initially, women former freedom fighters had little influence in creating gender veterans equality policies that outlined their post-war identities and the benefits they got, since there were so few women in powerful positions (Nyathi, 1990). The requirements of the elite civil society and the needs of women former warriors were often at odds, but as middle-class women were elected to positions of power, middle-class ideals came to determine what was ultimately written into the constitution. Second, the demands of female freedom warriors were not completely expressed as they were not shown as a distinct group with particular requirements. Even when an effort was made, advancement was thwarted by a lack of funding, political will, or gender awareness.

According to political rhetoric, women in Zimbabwe had elevated themselves to the status of men due to their involvement in the war. However, firsthand accounts of these women show that, upon returning to civil society, these women former fighters faced disadvantages in addition to being denied the opportunity to live up to the ideal of a "superwoman" that the posters portrayed. For instance, studies have indicated that the majority of female ex-fighters did not really participate in front-line combat, but upon their return to civil life, they were arbitrarily labeled "killers," a term that has significant negative connotations in traditional Zimbabwean cultures. No government official attempted to teach the public not to degrade former combatants to the level of killers. According to the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA, 2009), "Most men are worried if a female combatant comes back from war and they hardly want you to come near their children." Thus, one female ex-fighter felt dissatisfied because Zimbabwean society generally looked down upon female involvement during the war.

These former combatants had played important roles in the liberation of Zimbabwe, but Zimbabweans saw them as unworthy to be moms and spouses. Because they were seen as a hybrid of heroes and "unclean women," women who had previously been combatants faced a great deal of stress in their lives. Since it is evident that this was a severe assault on their self-esteem, most of these women tried to conceal or alter their past when feminist researchers encouraged them to share their stories or to express their plight. This was because admitting their defeat would mean admitting the futility of their sacrifices and the dash of their hopes, and

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admitting their pain would mean accepting defeat (ZANLA2009). since of this, the majority have made the decision to spend their lives in quiet, wishing their suffering would go away, since they do not want to be seen as losers or failures. But among women veterans of the conflict, this disappointment has led to a great deal of anger and hatred.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a case study approach and is entirely qualitative in nature. Olson (2010) states that qualitative research is a technique that prioritizes grounded theory, inductive reasoning, descriptive analysis, and inquiry into how people interpret their experiences. A case study is an investigation of a system union, whether it takes the shape of an event or program related to a specific location, period, or connection (Patton, 2002). To gather the necessary data, the researcher interviewed the informants who willingly consented to participate in the study using a thorough (semi-structured) interviewing technique. This technique is used to help researchers investigate experiences and to help informants discuss topics pertaining to the problems and difficulties encountered by women liberation fighters reintegrating into Zimbabwean society.

Purposive sampling was the technique used by the researcher to gather informants for this investigation. The researcher chose the informants from the Zimbabwe Africa National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) Provincial Headquarters central committee. For the research, five liberation fighters in all were chosen as informants. It took the researcher five weeks to interview informants in-depth in order to gather data. Thematic analysis techniques were used to examine the data. Three steps make up data analysis, according to Santrock (2007): category formation, theory development, and descriptive assertion. Transcripts of the interviews used to gather the data for this research were full-text copies. Each subject that emerged in a box next to it was classified by the researcher after reading through all of the transcripts many times. The purpose of coding each topic is to facilitate the researcher's ability to group them into a more comprehensive theme (Patton, 2002). The thematic analysis's findings suggest that social acceptability, stigma, a lack of participation in decision-making, and rewards are the primary themes for the issue of women freedom fighters' difficulties reintegrating into society.

STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Five informants who were formerly Rhodesian liberation fighters were questioned for this investigation. Table 1 describes the informants' specifics. Five informants were questioned, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Informants demographic data

Informant (Not real Name)	Gender	Age	Marital status	Level of education
Shaft	Male	67	Divorced	Diploma
Chimbwido	Female	75	Married	Standard 6
Sudden	Male	70	Widowed	Diploma
Dlodlo	Female	71	Divorced	Certificate
Lozikeyi	Female	69	Widowed	Degree

The participants consisted of two male and three to reduce gender bias. All the informants are former freedom fighters central committee members from the ZANU PF Provincial Headquarters in Gweru the Midlands of Zimbabwe. Those who participated in this research were between the ages of 67 and 75. Of the participants, one was married, while the other two were widowed and divorced. The researcher did not specify the informants' field of study or educational background for this investigation. In addition to one participant having her standard 6 level of education, another informant is pursuing a Bachelor's degree and a Diploma Certificate in a separate degree.

On the eve of Zimbabwe's independence, the United Nations and other organizations were constantly pressuring governments to work toward gender equality. However, because this went against the social norms surrounding gender roles, most Zimbabweans felt threatened, including husbands, local authorities, and other male members. The president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, for instance, cautioned women against Western influences like feminism in a public speech after the parliament passed progressive laws. Restoring pre-colonial African customs is what he meant by freedom for women, and he encouraged them to continue being loyal toward the state and their country. Yet participant 1 said:

> *"..... it is impossible for female former fighters to return to previous modes of behaviour when their social values have been deeply affected by their experiences and this internal conflict is not just unique to Zimbabweans, but is characteristic of the situation of female soldiers all over the world".*

A lot of veterans of battle feel that they've lost time. In addition to the sense of exclusion, women veterans of war have fewer opportunities to address their own "lost time" than their male counterparts, who are free to do whatever they want to make up for this sense of lost time. As stated by participant 2:

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> *"…. the pain of war lingers on as time fails to heal the violence, the attainment of justice and the healing of pain in post-conflict situations are hard to establish if women and girls are not granted the benefit of institutional justice. As a Zimbabwean women former fighter, l see that the pain of women war veterans is further aggravated by the fact that there was no justice given. Rape has remained a national male privilege denying women closure to their nightmare. And because rape committed against women during the war went unchallenged, it normalised negative attitudes about women and rape".*

In addition to their social hardship, women in most guerrilla activities confront a significant dilemma: they find it difficult to really verify their conduct. In Zimbabwe, activities other than direct combat engagement were seen as secondary to the war effort, and war veterans' pay was contingent upon proving they had been involved in active combat. As a result, women combatants had to rely on males to validate their veteran status.

According to UNESCO (2010), males were ultimately in charge of determining women's status and military contributions. Given that males used this to get sexual favors, this put women in precarious circumstances. Therefore, it has been very difficult to determine how many women, if any, profited from the 1998 war veterans' compensation program in Zimbabwe, which compensated over 50,000 former fighters Z$50,000 + Z$2000 each month. However, studies reveal that many women had not had their positions officially recognized by 2000, which was twenty years after independence (ZANLA, 2009).

Thus, as Respondent 3 said:

> *''… today, most [combatants] … are busy surviving, making business deals, growing maize or ground nuts, or selling vegetables on street corners. Demobilization payments are long spent and they wait patiently for compensation from the government but - even if compensation were available many couldn't afford the bus fare to town centers to register or such compensation. The "symbolic payment" parades, memorials - is also long past due".*

The irony, respondent 4 further said:

> *"… is that Zimbabwe female ex-combatants cannot protest their predicament which is torn between betraying the very revolution they fought so hard for and claiming their rights. Women who attempt to establish their own participation by articulating their own agenda are quickly seen as undermining the revolution and, thus, being unpatriotic''.*

Despite the fact that women's ability to withstand revolutionary conflicts is undeniable, Moyo (2009) contends that for Zimbabwean women, this ability did not convert into gender equality in the military camps or in society after the revolution. Unfortunately, a woman's standing in Zimbabwean culture determines her post-war status as a Vietnam veteran. Determining the roles of women in the political, economic, and decision-making processes leading to their liberation depends heavily on this element. The resources that some of their male colleagues take for granted are tougher to get for Zimbabwe's female war veterans. For instance, women who served in the war often have restricted access to jobs since the majority of female government employees who fight are assigned to social service reconstruction. relatively low-paying jobs that are often seen as an extension of women's traditional home responsibilities. As a result, the gender conservatism that defined the colonial era has not been substantially questioned by women's growing involvement in the official job sector. Due to the marginalization and exclusion of female war veterans from the historical narrative, women have also expressed dissatisfaction with Zimbabwe's post-independence environment, arguing that it was gender insensitive (Mhanda, 2011).

Participant 5 said:

> *"… women war veterans faced significant obstacles to qualify for integration, such as the requirement to pass aptitude tests as they were given an exam whereby they were questioned on commerce and accounting. If they failed, they went back to the assembly place as a result of this female ex combatants were beset with an environment that perpetuated gender inequality".*

Women veterans of the war were vilified by civilian males as being "too independent, rough, ill-educated, and unfeminine to be good wives," according to Barnes (1991). In addition to receiving counseling on how to behave, dress, and interact with their classmates, female war veterans also required help with stigma and the value of continuing their education and remaining with their parents. In Zimbabwe, for instance, feminist calls for legislative changes that may guarantee women's advancement are now seen as anti-African and anti-traditional by Zimbabweans, while the progress gained in emancipating women since independence has gradually slowed. According to feminist critics Alexander and Mohanty (2000), resistance is characterized by people's daily actions as they try to oppose and change the power structures that prevent gender equality in the workplace rather than by official political programs and military conflicts (ZANLA, 2009).

Women's rights are often subordinated to many other objectives after the liberation struggle is ended in most revolutions. For women who were formerly

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independence fighters, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment programs, which were implemented in 1985, and the Anglo-American sanctions that were placed on Zimbabwe in 2000 made matters worse (World Bank, 2001). The administration has had to use limited resources to combat forces that threaten its survival. The government originally enacted new legislation to address women's inequalities, but then broke its pledges on women's concerns because it believed other matters were more important. As a result, the majority of female combatants found it more challenging to fulfill their aspirations.

CONCLUSION

Although it is certain that female freedom fighters have endured unfair treatment, the conflict has had a profound impact on their lives. Since the government did not provide them with specific assistance, women who were politically active prior to the war became even more militant during the conflict, and those who returned with children whose fathers were unknown were shunned by their families and lived as misfits, finding comfort in prostitution and drug and alcohol abuse. Even less radical women combatants entered politics in ways that they would not have otherwise if they had not fought in war. As a result, Betancourt *et al.* (2008) assert that many of these women's dedication to socialist or revolutionary ideals persisted long after the conflict. Some of these ladies now stand out as powerful representations of resilience in the face of adversity and hopelessness. They continue to believe that society should be moved to allow for the equitable involvement of all of its inhabitants in the post-war age.

The majority of feminists who criticize war will always be amazed by how women who have fought for freedom inspire both themselves and everyone around them, and how they go on fighting after the war that betrayed them is done. Although women's experiences during the war were demanding, taxing, and often frightening, many feminist critics also believe that women warriors gained a feeling of bravery and enthusiasm that influenced their new, autonomous positions. The majority of female former combatants never forgot that they participated in the wartime battle for independence on an equal basis with males, according to Barnes (1991). According to feminist authors of war, this has empowered women, including Zimbabwean women who were formerly warriors, to demand their rights from governments and men in post-colonial nations.

It is crucial to remember, nevertheless, that Coulter (2008) emphasizes the need of dispelling the myth that women who belonged to armed organizations were always victims. The whole spectrum of their potential functions as social and political agents is hidden by this reification. Their options in combat were limited at best, and females were in fact more susceptible than men to sexual assault and forced labor. The victim-perpetrator dichotomy, however, does not aid in our comprehension of the circumstances, which is an important remark to keep in mind throughout all of our deliberations. According to Coulter, war also gave women some alternatives to regional norms around femininity.

Considering that all facets of the community should be included in a participatory process, the underrepresentation and exclusion of women and girls in DDR programs is a measure of participation in and of itself. The lack of a participatory approach is shown by the exclusion of members of these groups from a program or by the disregard for their needs and opinions. The issue is made worse by the fact that the exclusion occurs at the same time as a social division that has a big power component. Gender itself is at the heart of the disparity in experiences that women encounter, not just a group that encounters some kind of marginalization. This implies that we cannot examine the issue without taking into account the social structures that make up the background. In addition to "women's roles," it also examines how men's roles are defined and the forms of masculinity that are accepted in society.

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