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## THE PERVASIVE NATURE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ZIMBABWE: THE CASE OF ELECTORAL RELATED VICTIMISATION

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### ABSTRACT

The paper highlights the position of women in Zimbabwean politics and how they are affected during elections; it explores the depth and perennial nature of violence against women. Violence against women is fundamentally a result of gender based inequalities which only becomes pervasive where gender roles are strictly defined in the society. The incidence of violence against women in Zimbabwe appears to gather momentum mostly during political campaigns, electoral process and immediately after the elections. The paper further discusses the implications of violence towards women including the disenfranchisement during elections. It concludes by putting forward suggestions for policy makers and stakeholders including NGOs and human rights organization.

*Keywords:* Gender Based Violence, women, elections

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Women have been victims, perpetrators and agents of violence throughout electoral processes in Zimbabwe. Women in Zimbabwe remain with permanent scars, some have died, and others have been injured, whilst most of them remain traumatized by past and continued incidents of violation of their fundamental rights to peaceful existence.

Gender based violence (GBV) describes "... harm perpetrated against any person-male or female-that is instigated or exacerbated by exploiting social roles ascribed to men and women" (OCHA/IRIN, 2005). This means that Gender based violence refers not only to women but also men. However at times Gender Based Violence is used to mean violence against women. In this paper GBV will be used to mean violence against women. In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the watershed Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women where violence against women was defined as "any act of gender- based violence 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 deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life." This definition show that gender based violence is against the principles of human suffrage –of freedom, equality and fraternity, the very foundation upon which democratic elections are based. An electoral process which threatens

forces and deprives a woman of any liberty facilitates gender based violence. The result will be an 'election to violate women's rights'.

Violence against women is deep rooted in attitudes and behaviours that reinforce women's subordination. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women clearly states that "Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women" (OHCHR, 2003). Gender is therefore one of the most significant factors which is responsible for the perpetuation of violence against women and girls. Class, race, poverty, ethnicity and age are other criterion used to evaluate violence against women.

Gender based electoral violence is a descriptive term that can be defined as "any act of gender based violence that is directed primarily at women as a result of their aspirations to seek political office, their link to political activities or simply their commitment to vote,"<sup>1</sup>. The United Nations General Assembly defines violence against women as "any act of gender based violence, that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in private or public life". As declared by the Beijing Platform of Action (1995) "violence against women is deemed to be a violation of universal human rights (i.e. rights and freedom to which all individuals are entitled by virtue of being human)"<sup>2</sup>. From the definitions, one can note that gender based violence takes many forms and is specifically focused on one's socially ascribed role in society. Violence against women is one of the most persistent forms of human rights abuses in the world.

Some historians believe that the history of violence against women is tied to the history of women being viewed as property and their assigned gender role that they should be subservient to men. Violence against women does not only lead to the suffering of women and girls but deprives them of their basic human rights which are fundamental to the existence of every individual. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948), Article 3 stipulates that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of a person", whilst Article 5 outlines that, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment". The UDHR explicitly outlaws the use or subjection of any person to violence of any form. This will provide the basis for the discussion in this article. Violence against women encompasses physical, sexual and psychological harm. Acts of violence experienced by women include: Sexual harassment; Rape; Domestic violence; Witch burnings; Burning of houses and property; Murders; Sexual serial killings; Intimate femicide (murder by husband or boyfriend); Forced prostitution of trafficking of women; and, Female genital mutilation.

What is silent in this trajectory of GBV is that women have also experienced this violence in the political scene- from the liberation war to *jambanja* and the crisis period which includes elections and the Marange diamond field abuses. Adding all these forms, levels and platforms of violence one can see violence, violence and violence perpetrated against women in Zimbabwe and these are women in Africa.

Violence against women goes beyond beatings, such practices causes trauma, injuries and even death. Rape is a pandemic issue that affects millions of people across the globe. Ward et al (2005) says "Organized rape can be used as a tactical device to intimidate, to punish individual women and social groups, to destabilize and demoralize communities or to drive people from their land". People may be forced at gunpoint to rape women, to intimidate and humiliate women." Gender based violence is one of the most widespread violations of human rights that exists both regionally and internationally. Morna and Walter (2009) indicates that

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<sup>1</sup> <http://unpan1.un.org/>

<sup>2</sup> ([www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan))

“Nowhere is safe from gender based violence, it can take place in the home, on the streets, in schools, the workplace, in farm fields, refugee camps, during conflicts, and crises and in the peacetime.” The above indicates that, gender based violence is perpetrated at all levels and negatively impacts on the participation of women at all levels in society.

The United Nations estimates that “70% of women worldwide experience physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime.” In most cultures violence against women is not openly discussed or acknowledged, rather it is kept undercover by a tradition that “a man’s home is his castle” and what he does there is a concern of only him and his family not the community. The perpetrators of violence against women often get away with it as they take the advantage of the fact that the victims are often embarrassed or too scared to talk about the abuse in fear of being outcast. One can note that the fear that women have also stemmed from the violent nature of the system they should report to and the way such cases are dealt with that is, violence is viewed as a domestic issue and not a public issue.

The alarming statistics of violence against women are virtually universal. According to the UN reports, “in Peru, 70% of all crimes reported to the police are about women being beaten by their partners. A study in the largest slum of Bangkok found that 50% of married women are beaten regularly. In Australia 54% of all murders in 1985 were committed in the family, with women and children constituting 90% of the victims”.<sup>3</sup> The South Africa Police Service (SAPS 1997) reported that “5144 rape cases occurred per day and that a woman is raped in every 17 seconds in South Africa.” Having noted the increasing prevalence of violence against women, the Women’s Global Leadership Institute came up with the 16 Days of *Activism Against Gender Violence* which is commemorated throughout the world from the 25<sup>th</sup> of November to the 10<sup>th</sup> of December. The 16 days of activism campaign find ways that promote “peace in the home” and extend this to “peace in the world”, this is aimed to be achieved through focusing on ways in which values of nonviolence can influence attitudes about violence against women by families, friends, communities and governments from all over the world. The crucial aspect of the campaign involves listening to the stories of women worldwide and standing in solidarity with each other to end violence against women.

Domestic violence is a reality in every country of the world. This violence becomes even more dangerous when guns are present and used to threaten, injure or kill women and children. Despite the violence against women that takes place globally, women have begun to speak with one voice by telling their story. Women are not just victims but they have been actively working for change. The Asian Human Rights council cited by Gnanadason et al (1996) said in its statement to the conference on human rights in Vienna in 1993:

“Women have begun to see with new eyes. We have begun to shift the parameters of the human discourse: we have dared to call rape a crime. We have dared to call battering, the burning, and the brutalization of women as acts of female sexual slavery. We know today that the refugees are women, and that women are the poorest of the poor, and that poverty has a woman’s face.”

Women do not normally reveal being violently abused in fear of further abuse, or as a result of fear from other people’s reactions to them should they disclose being abused keep women silent. The victims of psychological violence are mostly women. Warsane (2004) argues that “The fact that most victims of psychological violence are women could be attributed to the unequal power relationship between men and women. Some men also acknowledge women experiencing violence was put by one man in Hargeisa:

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<sup>3</sup> [www.womenaid.org](http://www.womenaid.org)

Women do experience violence much more than men due to their prescribed roles and position in the society. Both men and women are socialized to understand that women are subservient to men. Men also internalize the ideology that they (men) have the right to subjugate women”.

If every abused woman spoke about it, the strength of women’s voices would force people to take notice of the seriousness of violence against women. Tichagwa (1995) says “traditionally, violence against women referred to such acts as assault and rape. Recently however, a comprehensive definition of violence against women in Zimbabwe encompasses psychological and economic violence”. Data from African countries on violence against women are sketchy. Until recently, violence against women was not even acknowledged by many governments. According to a 1994 World Bank Study,

“... more than nine million years of life are lost annually worldwide as a result of violence against women, and statistics indicate that a third to more than half of women surveyed were beaten by a partner”. Violence against women has its damaging consequences. Hence, measures must be taken to protect women from gender based violence. Campbell and McPhail (2002) indicate that “studies from diverse settings for example, in China, Peru, the USA, and Uganda have found that girls and or young women who had previously experienced sexual coercion are significantly less likely to use condoms, and more likely to experience genital tract infection symptoms, unintended pregnancy and a higher incidence of unsafe abortion.”<sup>4</sup>

Gender based violence against women and girls were experienced in Zimbabwe during and after the elections. Women got brutally tortured, raped, had their house burnt during and after the elections in 2008. In reaction to such crimes, women have also been active internationally to gain better mechanisms to protect women. A United Nations NGO, FAWCO joined other human rights groups and women’s organization in a statement to the 8<sup>th</sup> session of Human Rights convention in Geneva urgently calling for an end to political violence against women and Zimbabwe. The statement in brief says:

We are watching a silent genocide of the poor and powerless, due to politically induce murderous, criminal actions and the collapse of basic services resulting in deaths due to lack of healthcare, food, shelter for the displaced, especially after the March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008 elections. Most of the affected are women and children. This situation is an extraordinary for women and girls. Every person and institution must do everything in their power to stop the violence, restore rule of law, and allow the Zimbabweans to exercise their right to vote and live in peace.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Tichagwa (1995)

<sup>5</sup> [www.endingviolence@fawco.co.org](mailto:www.endingviolence@fawco.co.org)

Women and other civil society were concerned about the tension and political violence and targeted intimidation on women in particular. Women and girls were used as weapons of war as evidenced by rape, brutal battering of women and sexual abuse especially in the rural areas and smaller towns. Patriarchal behaviors and discriminatory attitudes results in gender based violence and increased vulnerability to HIV exposure. The UN suggests that:

“... Women have been intimidated in different ways. They have been threatened with withdrawal of family support, they have been beaten, killed, thrown out of their homes, had their voter’s card grabbed from them or destroyed. In most cases this intimidation and harassment have been done by husbands”.<sup>6</sup>

Gro Harlem Brundtland cited by OCHA/IRIN -Ward (2005) notes, “We need to voice the violence, to hear the stories of all those affected by violence... spreading the word, breaking down the taboos and exposing the violence that takes place among us ... the first step towards effective action to reduce violence in our societies.”

Violence emanating from the elections and everyday violence experienced by women and girls are components of the broad spectrum of suffering and torture throughout a woman’s lifespan. Observers noted that “political violence against women has consequences on women’s participation in politics. Women may become reluctant to participate in elections because of fear that they or their families may be violently targeted.”<sup>7</sup> Violence against women during elections in Zimbabwe was used as a tactic to scare off women from joining political movements and to vote for the preferred candidate of the perpetrators of violence. WHO (2001) reports that “violence and the fear of violence, severely limits women’s contribution to social and economic development, thereby hindering achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other national and international development goals.” Essentially therefore, violence against women hinders their participation in domestic, national and international programmes.

For women who have been raped or abused, media coverage of how other women have survived through similar experiences may provide courage for others to leave an abusive relationship, or speak out for the first time about the experience of violence of any kind. Violence against women not only affects the individuals, but the society as a whole. In addition, it is widely believed that violence against women is not only a consequence of, but also a cause for gender inequalities, and as such, it hinders development. Finally, gender-based violence is alleged to create a culture of violence where children witnessing abuses at home are likely to replicate these experiences later in their life.<sup>8</sup> Contrary to the view of the family being a haven of love and support, data from around the world suggest that “girls and women are at greater risk of violence in their homes than anywhere else.”<sup>9</sup>

Putting new laws in the books is not enough. Ms. Mary Wandia, the Africa women’s rights coordinator for the non-governmental Action Aid International highlights that “The police force is often uninterested in domestic violence.” She further observes that “Unless a woman can show physical evidence of the violence she has suffered, police and law-enforcement authorities are often unwilling to believe and assist her”.<sup>10</sup>

Such actions from law enforcement agents contributes to crimes of violence against women to pass without being reported, yet such crimes leave imprints which are difficult or

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<sup>6</sup> [www.un.org/africanrenewal](http://www.un.org/africanrenewal) also in New Vision, May 18, 1996

<sup>7</sup> [www.cwgl.rutgers.edu](http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu)

<sup>8</sup> [www.unece.org/stat/gener/vaw](http://www.unece.org/stat/gener/vaw)

<sup>9</sup> Violence Against Women: the Hidden Health Burden, World bank, 1994, [www.soulcity.org.za](http://www.soulcity.org.za)

<sup>10</sup> [www.uni.org/ecoscocdew/geninfo](http://www.uni.org/ecoscocdew/geninfo)

impossible to remove from the victims. UNIFEM reports that “in Rwanda, gender desks have been established at police stations, staffed mostly by trained women who help victims of sexual and other violence. They investigate cases and ensure that evidence is available for court proceedings. As a result, in 2006 the Rwandan police referred 1,777 rape cases to prosecutors, resulting in 803 convictions”. Other African countries need to implement such approaches as applied by Rwanda to improve crime prevention by making sure that the perpetrators of violence are brought to book through the reports from police.

During elections, homes are distrusted and women suffer the most in such actions of violence as they are left traumatized with the reality of becoming homeless with children to take care of. Laforgia (2011) says “sexual violence is used as a tactic of war to drive fear, humiliate and punish women, their family and communities. Though attention has been paid to this crime in recent years, sexual violence remains a major barrier to women’s safety as its effects are physically, psychologically and socially harmful.” The government and all stakeholders need to put policy frameworks that address pre and post electoral violence against women from the grassroots level to the top echelons of society. Efforts to raise awareness and educate the public about violence against women have been significant. Activists have been advertising on posters, television dramas and on the internet to convey the message to stop gender based violence against women. Women need to be empowered to lower the risk of violence. Campaigns to sensitize people on GBV and its effects need to be organised and the government need to strengthen women’s actions towards preventing GBV.

Ward et al (2005) supports this notion arguing that, “When women advance in five critical areas: economic participation, quality of employment, political representation, educational attainment, and health and well-being, they are better equipped to challenge unequal power relations that preserve male dominance.” SADC nations are making their own efforts to put in place a holistic approach to eliminate all forms of gender based violence through the Protocol on Gender and Development. Nyakurajara (2010) outlines that, “The protocol requires that State parties should by 2015, enact and enforce legislation prohibiting all forms of GBV. Linked to this is the obligation that all laws on GBV provide for the comprehensive testing, treatment and care of survivors of sexual offences which shall include: emergency contraception, ready access to post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) at all health facilities to reduce the risk of contracting HIV and preventing the onset of sexually transmitted infections.”

## 2. THE CONTEXT OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN ZIMBABWE

Women in Zimbabwe constitute 52% of the population. They constitute the majority of the poor people in Zimbabwe. They live on less than a dollar a day. Most women in Zimbabwe work in the informal sector and some are unemployed. They constitute the minority of the formal working class. This means that women do not have employment security. During the colonial period women mostly did menial jobs and the majority stayed at home. Women were treated as minors. They were not allowed to stay with the husbands in the Mbare flats where their husbands worked in Harare. This resulted in gender based violence as men would beat their wives if they came to Harare without warning the men. This is because they would find them in company of sex workers or other women.

After the country’s independence in 1980, the Government enacted legislations to curb violence against women. These include the Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16] prohibiting domestic violence, the Criminal Law Codification and Reform Act prohibiting sexual and physical violence and the Labour Act outlawing sexual harassment at work. However women’s literacy levels in Zimbabwe are low, particularly starting with the advent of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes which resulted in the commercialization of education and many households preferred sending the boy child to school when faced with cash shortages. The

crisis that befell the country from 2000 worsened the situation with families failing to afford to pay school fees for their children.

The predictable outcome of women’s lack of education especially when combined with other forms of discrimination means that women become excluded from the corridors of power. Table 1 below shows the percentage of women’s participation in the House of Assembly elections. Women’s representation in the House of Assembly in 1980 was 9% and now its 14.29% far below the desired 50:50. Table 2 shows the representation of women in both houses. The Senate has 33.33% women's representation, still in the minority.

Among the 50 ZANU PF women who contested for seats in the House of Assembly, 18 (36%) won. Of the 19 MDC T women who contested, 11 (58%) won. Of the 24 independent candidates that contested, none won. A total of 118 women contested for House of Assembly, 56 vied for Senate while 740 contested for council seats. However, 30 women made it into the House of Assembly and 20 into the Senate. Women’s participation in politics remains negligible. Most women in Zimbabwe can register for elections but they do not go to vote for fear of violence against them. In the 2000 elections for example, many women turned out to vote but they were beaten, arrested, their houses were destroyed, their husbands and children were murdered and injured. The 2008 election was no better for women whose rights continued to be violated.

Table 1: Women’s Participation in the House of Assembly

Year	Women's seats	Total seats	% women
2008	30	210	14.29
2005	20	120	16.67
2000*	14	150	9.33
1995*	22	150	14.67
1990*	21	150	14
1985	8	100	8
1980	9	100	9

Table note: \* Includes nominated and *ex officio* members.

Sources: CHIRORO, B 2005, "Persistent Inequalities: Women and Electoral Politics in the Zimbabwe Elections in 2005"<sup>11</sup>

Table 2: Women Participation in 2008 Elections

Election	Total positions	Women	% Women
President	1	0	0
House of Assembly	210	30	14.29
Senate	60	20	33.33
Councils	1958	No data	-

Source: VERITAS 2008 "Women's Watch 8/2008", 15 April.

Also in VERITAS 2008b, "Bill Watch 26/2008", 29 June

<sup>11</sup> Journal of African Elections, 4(2), October 2005, 100. VERITAS 2008 "Women's Watch 8/2008", 15 April.

### 3. WHY GENDER BASED VIOLENCE DURING ELECTIONS

Women in the rural areas of Zimbabwe were supporters of ZANU PF. However there was increasing discontent as a result of poverty and increasing suffering. The 2008 March 29 elections had shown that the opposition party-MDC T had gained support in the rural areas and hence some rural constituencies were won by MDC-T. It is believed that the women in the rural areas had also voted for Morgan Tsvangirai betraying ZANU PF. They had been the major recipients of food aid from the government. It is believed that violence was unleashed to these women after the March 29 elections. '*Operation Makavhoterapapi*' which was implemented after the March 29 elections sought to intimidate those who had voted for the opposition party and candidates during the March 29 elections. In other words this defeats the whole purpose of 'your vote is your secret'. However, this operation meant that both men and women do not have voting rights. This Operation is tantamount to removing the constitutional right to participate in elections freely and fairly.

Gender based violence during the elections in Zimbabwe were perpetrated against women whose husbands and sons had fled the harassment in the rural and urban areas. Some women and children who remained behind were tortured, killed and abducted. Their villages and property were destroyed. Their cattle, grain and property were looted. Some of these women were forced to leave their homes. This means that women's livelihoods were disturbed as a result of this Gender based violence.

Violence against women was used to punish them for supporting their preferred political party. Pambazuka in (2008) reported that in Manicaland and Mashonaland Central women and girls were raped and abused by the youth militia. Women were tortured and abused in order to force them to confide where their husbands were hiding. They were raped and or physically assaulted as a way of forcing their husbands whom they suspected to be members of opposing parties to return home. Sexual violence against women was also enforced to settle scores amongst families and individuals and precipitate their expulsion from the communities they lived. This led to displacements of women because of gender based violence during elections.

Gender based violence became an issue during electoral processes in Zimbabwe because women were afraid to go and report their cases to the police who often said that such violence does not fall under their jurisdiction but it's a political issue which should be resolved at the political level. One can call this a decay of the rule of law. The problem was also elevated by the fact that the police were said to be abusing women during the crisis. Hence whilst women are protected by law on rape, this becomes ineffective when the protection cannot be implemented. Women and children should be confident and feel secure when they see a policeman. There is therefore the need to restore confidence to women that the security forces can protect women and their dignity during an electoral process.

Gender based violence during the elections has silenced women. They do not want to talk about it; they do not want their cases recorded because they feel insecure about their future. This also applies to victims of rape during the conflict period. Women prefer not to talk about their rape experiences because they are afraid of being chased away by their husbands and communities. Reporting about rape is seen as something that cannot be said openly. Women contracted HIV/AIDS from such rape cases during the election violence.

### 4. THE MANIFESTATIONS OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

All political parties in Zimbabwe are to blame for Gender based violence during electoral processes. Women suffered and experienced various forms of GBV during elections in Zimbabwe.



#### 4.1 PHYSICAL ASSAULTS AND ABDUCTIONS

Women in Zimbabwe have been subjected to physical violence before, during and after elections. This means that violence against women has been continuous. Women have been assaulted using bare hands, sticks and objects. At times their own kith and kin, their communities cheered when women were being assaulted. They were embarrassed and felt the pain of this gender based violence. Women suffer on physical violence because they are normally not violent. They have gentle bodies which easily give up to violence. They become therefore easily susceptible to pain.

In 2006, the MDC legislator for the Harare North Constituency, Mrs. Trudy Stevenson was severely assaulted allegedly by youths aligned to the rival camp led by Morgan Tsvangirai. Stevenson sustained a deep gash on the back of her head; a fractured cheek bone; a broken radius and ulna (arm bones); a broken wrist; and bruises on her back and chest. Sekai Holland, an MDC legislator and Minister was severely assaulted together with other MDC party members and supporters on March 12, 2008 in Highfield on their way to a prayer meeting. Mrs. Holland was arrested and beaten on March 12 after she had gone to a police station to inquire about her arrested colleagues. Holland said that she was set upon by 16 men and a woman. The woman reportedly jumped on Mrs. Holland, breaking three of her ribs. She also suffered a broken arm, a broken leg, a fractured knee and multiple bruises and lacerations. Holland said that on her right side they whipped her so that there were blisters which have led to the skin graft and she said she counted 81 lashes minimum. Sekai said that they asked for medical treatment on a Sunday but they were not allowed until their lawyers successfully applied to court to get them to court in the afternoon on Tuesday, which is when on Tuesday night they could seek medical attention. Sekai Holland and her Australian husband Jim said that they were initially stopped from leaving Zimbabwe to seek medical help. It was only after Australian diplomatic intervention and a court order that they were allowed to escape by air ambulance to South Africa.

Abigail Chiroto, the wife of the deputy mayor of Harare, Emmanuel Chiroto was abducted from her home in Hatcliffe, Harare and later found dead at a farm on the outskirts of the capital. Mrs Gumura of the MDC Women's Assembly in Rusape in Manicaland province and the wives of MDC officials were also victims of violence. Dadirai Chiripo had both her hands and legs chopped off, and burnt to ashes in her hut and Pamela Pasvani died of her wounds with her six year old sons perishing in a fire (Pambazuka, 2008).

Women activists were not spared by gender based violence before and after elections in Zimbabwe. Jestina Mukoko, the Executive Director of Zimbabwe Peace Project was abducted on December 3, 2008. Mukoko was allegedly abducted from her home by state security agents. She said that she was beaten, tortured and forced to confess to an alleged plot to mount a terrorist incursion from neighbouring Botswana, and subsequently imprisoned. A court granted her bail on February 27, 2009. After Mukoko appealed her arrest through the courts, the Zimbabwean Supreme Court finally ruled on September 28, 2009, that state security forces had violated her human rights to such an extent as to warrant a permanent stay of prosecution in the case against her. The effect of such arrest is to send fear and discouragement to women on the participation as activist on any political issues. Politics therefore become a men's game as women feel violated and intimidated.

On March 13, 2007 three policewomen were badly burnt in a petrol bomb attack on Marimba Police Camp in Harare at midnight. The raiders cut the wire along the northern boundary of Marimba Police Camp and threw petrol bombs and tear gas canisters at three houses, the most serious damage and all the injuries occurring in a house shared by three women constables. Constables Busani Moyo and Pretty Mushonga had their faces seriously burned while Constable Brenda Makamba escaped with less serious burns on the chest, legs and

arms. The two police officers died as a result of this lack of respect for life. The killing of these women again scares women to get involved in politics. Is politics this dirty, scaring and brutal for women in Zimbabwe? The facts that petrol bombing are acts of men, it means, it is possible for men to stop this animal behaviour, respect their mothers and children and be peaceful.

#### 4.2 SEXUAL ASSAULTS AND RAPES

In conflict situations, women and girls are often raped in Zimbabwe. Women and girls are often abducted for purposes of supplying combatants with sexual services. According to one soldier from DRC, “Our combatants don’t get paid. Therefore they can’t use prostitutes. If we politely ask women to come with us, they are not going to accept. So we have to make them obey us so we can get what we want” (OCHA/IRI, 2005). In Zimbabwe the reports show that some women were ejaculated and urinated into their mouths and sticks were forced into their vaginas. Women and girls were raped as men dealt with their frustrations with the crisis. They were raped so that men would prove a point of domination. They were forced into accepting certain thinking after being raped. Women and girls also slept with some political leaders who promised them food, shelter and some ‘life’ during the crisis.

It has been reported in the corridors that some women slept with men to get positions in the political parties. Women and Aids Support Network (WASN) said that Zimbabwe is sitting on an HIV and Aids time bomb particularly in the rural areas, where thousands of women were raped during the post-election violence in June 2008. WASN director Maria Sandasi said in an interview that there was an estimated 20 000 women that were violated and that most of them had not made a report about the violent attacks. “We are all silent about it, yet real people, who in most cases are between 14 to 49 age group experienced the violence, leaving them with sexually transmitted infections and HIV (Mapimhidze, 2010). Elinor Sisulu, who spoke at the Johannesburg launch (2010) of the 64-page report on the 2008 underscored the report’s focus on shared responsibility, “The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights obligates countries in our region to protect the lives and security of women and girls,” she said. “If victims cannot be sure that it’s safe to come forward, they will not be able to testify about the crimes they have endured. Accountability is the key to preventing the next round of rapes in Zimbabwe, and there can be no accountability without the active participation of victims.” The rape report is based on extensive interviews with 72 survivors and witnesses, and documents. The report says that there were 380 rapes committed by 241 perpetrators across Zimbabwe’s 10 provinces.

What is important is to allow all women and girls who were raped to open up and get counselling services and treatment. They need the healing of the body and soul. Respective institutions have to accept the problem that women encountered and make provisions to give them space to talk, to heal and progress. The society should however come up with mechanisms to put an end to gender based violence during elections and all the time.

#### 4.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA

Some women in Zimbabwe were forced to support political parties that they did not want. They lived in fear every day fearing abductions, rape and torture. When you ask women about violence during elections, they want to whisper because they are afraid of the topic. One woman had posters placed at her gate by MDC supporters, when the posters were removed she was tormented by MDC for removing the posters. Women were forced to sing songs for parties they did not support. This is the psychological trauma women suffered. Some women were scared as they stayed alone in their homes when their husband fled for safety. One woman was abducted when they failed to find the husband whom they wanted to take. In some high density suburbs curfews meant that it was not safe for a woman to walk outside after 7p.m. The

constitutional right of freedom of movement was therefore taken away especially in the post-election period. Women shiver and cry when they narrate their experiences during the election period. Some women suffer from mental health due to the traumatic effects of the violence.

#### 4.4 DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY

Historically women in Zimbabwe were regarded as second class citizens on access to council and state property. However, as a result of pressures from Women's movements this has been since reversed. Unfortunately elections since 2000 have seen the destruction of family properties. If the youths and men who were sought by some gangsters were not found in homes, household property was at times destroyed and burnt: television sets, stoves, fridges and tables. Sometimes the huts were set on fire and houses petrol bombed. This caused psychological trauma as women and children were left homeless. Women lost their goats, chickens, cows as they were forced to flee their homes. They sought refuge in other villages or urban homes but mostly at Harvest House in Harare, Freedom House in South Africa and church organizations and other non-governmental organization. Some women and children stayed in the mountains in fear for their lives. For most women who had seen the liberation struggle before 1980, the election violence was a reminder of the brutality against blacks. From the year 2000, it has been a war about a black person fighting another black person. Racial connotations were however indirectly implied in the current crisis. These displacements led to fear, anxiety, terror and hopelessness. Thousands of Zimbabweans were displaced throughout the country.

#### 5. PUBLIC INTERVENTIONS

Women did not receive medical treatment on time during the election violence. This also applied to men, youth and children. Most women and girls who were raped did not have access to post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). They did not have access to information, treatment, drugs and counselling services. Women contracted sexually transmitted diseases and they never got treatment. They were therefore traumatized by such diseases whilst they could not seek treatment. The Counselling Services Unit, Zimbabwe Doctors for Human Rights, private medical centres and mission hospitals helped victims of violence with medical assistance. Some women's organizations helped women victims with shelter, food and medical assistance. The fact that women were failing to report their cases to the police, it means they had difficulty in accessing medical treatment.

#### 6. CONCLUSION

Whilst there have been significant steps to fight against domestic violence in Zimbabwe through the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act, gender based violence still manifest itself in Zimbabwean society particularly in the election and post-election period. The state should effectively prevent, investigate and prosecute violence against women. In the current set up, women are at risk of political violence. There should be institutional reforms which ensure that the prohibition against women's violence is guaranteed and any legislation will be applied effectively. 'One stop' centres which are being established by the Ministry of Gender and Women's Affairs should also cover women as victims of political violence.

It is also important to have data on the scope, causes and implications of gender based violence during elections in Zimbabwe in order to design and monitor both prevention and response strategies; informing advocacy and awareness campaigns and advancing legislative reforms. Opening up media spaces should help in the campaign against gender based violence during elections in Zimbabwe. There should be educational campaigns to redefine masculinity

as non-violent by providing an alternative construction of male identity. Women's economic empowerment reduces the risk of violence since it helps to promote financial independence, a sense of social value and improved self-esteem. Women in Zimbabwe should continue to fight for their spaces so that they can make a significant contribution to development in Zimbabwe and for the future generations. Zimbabwean people should preserve their *ubuntuism* and maintain the dignity and integrity of women.

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