

Dimensions of Violence in Zimbabwe: Unpacking the Triggers and Effects of Machete Violence in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: This article illustrates that machete gangs in Zimbabwe are foot soldiers of the political elites with the Second Republic ventilating their dramatic proliferation. The paper interrogates the concept of state capture and the concept of natural resource curse in an endeavour to demystify the nature and scope of machete violence in Zimbabwe. The paper also noted that machete gangs are more active in mining communities like Kwekwe, Mazowe, Bubi, Mashava, Kadoma and Patchway. Machete gangs are largely connected to powerful politicians who are members of the gold cartels. Factors that trigger machete violence in Zimbabwe include but are not limited to the rapid increase in artisanal mining, climate change and escalating unemployment. The adverse effect of machete gangs is the pauperisation of the general population. The paper also examined the impact of the proliferation of machete gangs on women in the mining sector. Machete violence has aggravated an illicit economy, fuelled unjustified socio-economic deprivation and led to environmental degradation. The paper also unearthed that machete violence underpins and perpetuates the political culture of fear and repression in Zimbabwe. The study recommends a cocktail of reforms that need to be initiated to end machete violence, this includes the need to regularise and formalise the mining sector as well as comprehensive security sector reforms. The study is mainly ethnographic in scope as most of the data was collected through interaction with some members of the machete gangs and victims of machete violence. Documentary search was also used to augment ethnographies. The researcher interviewed machete gangs located in the aforementioned mining communities in Zimbabwe, in an endeavour to generalise how machete gangs are impacting the social, economic and political fabric.

Keywords: violence, machete gangs, state capture, resource curse, illicit economy, foot soldier.

I. INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe has been rocked by the phenomenon of the sprouting of machete gangs in the mining communities and this has negative ramifications on the country's goal to attain a US\$12 billion mining economy by 2023. The problem of machete gangs can be traced between 2006 and 2008 at the zenith of the Marange Diamond rush, which resulted in artisanal miners thronging the Marange area in search of diamonds (Maguwu *et al.*, 2020). In the period between 2009 and 2017, the activities of machete gangs were low apparently due to a promising economic environment ushered in by the formation of the Government of National Unity in 2009. The

ushering in of the New Dispensation in 2017 was followed by the resurgence of machete violence and this can be attributed to democratic backsliding typified by the erosion of the rule of law and entrenchment of the politics of state capture. Mkodzongi (2020) argues that machete gang violence signifies a class struggle over the control of resource-rich mining areas.

This paper contends that low economic growth and the erosion of the rule of law are the two factors that exacerbate machete violence in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has an unpleasant rule of law record. According to the *Newsday* 21 January 2022, Zimbabwe was ranked number 133 out of 139 countries. Criminal activities such as illicit mining, drug trafficking and human trafficking thrive in countries with worst rule of law records. The importance of the rule of law is illustrated by the World Justice Project Co-Director Neukom who elaborated that, it is the very foundation of justice, opportunity and peace. Machete gangs are more prevalent in the mining communities such as Kwekwe, Kadoma and Shurugwi. Machete gangs compete for claims to mine for gold and they are well protected and connected to the political elites.

Zimbabwe is conversely a paradox of plenty or a resource curse country because machete gangs are depriving the government of potential revenue and foreign currency. The paper noted that machete gangs are used by shadow actors who later smuggle the gold acquired by machete gangs to South Africa and Dubai and this is hindering revenue collection. Machete gangs used traditional weapons such as machetes, axes, Colombian knives, bows and arrows. They rape, kill and rob their victims but they continue to walk free because they are well connected to the political elites. The 2019 Zimbabwe Peace Project Report revealed that from August and October 2019, a total of 105 murder cases have been recorded in the mining areas surrounding Kadoma while 221 cases of assault have been recorded.

One of the interviewees elaborated how they are linked to former State Security Minister Owen Mudha Ncube and how he facilitates their release from prison and in return they are forced to become active members of the ZANU-PF structures. The study noted that there are four major machete gangs in Kwekwe and Kadoma which are Maketo, Maziga, Team

Barca and Die Force. Each of these four groups has a membership of more than 150 men. Some of the members of machete gangs are children as young as 13. The Zimbabwe machete war is a time bomb and there is a high possibility that these machete gangs will crystallise into warlords. Practical experiences from Sierra Leone, Angola, Colombia and Peru shows that criminal activities in the mining sector resulted in the formation of rebel groups and this is likely in Zimbabwe if the problem of machete violence continues relentlessly.

More than 80% of members of the machete gangs reveal that they are reluctant to sell gold to Fidelity Printers and Refiners and they sell it to their leaders who are key players in the smuggling of gold in Zimbabwe. The operations of machete gangs are supported by the policy inconsistency that plagued the mining sector in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe's Gold Trade Act (Chapter 21:03) and Mines and Mineral Act (Chapter 21:05) are too archaic to address the new trends of the mining sector, machete gangs thrive in a lawless environment. The action of the government to amend the acts is lackadaisical and there is a need to regularise and formalise the mining sector to mitigate machete gangs. Zimbabwe has a political culture that countenances corruption, fear and intolerance and there is the involvement of machete gangs in the political landscape to instil fear in members of the opposition. Machete gangs also play a pivotal role in the internal political process of ZANU-PF where they employ violence to canvass for the support of their patrons. The 2022 skirmishes that characterised the Midlands Provincial Coordinating Committee meeting is a testament to how machete gangs are quasi foot soldiers of ZANU-PF factional politics. The problem of machete gangs in Zimbabwe is a precursor of how democracy has been stifled in Zimbabwe resulting in the breakdown of the rule of law resulting in human rights catastrophe in the mining communities as well as denial of access to justice of the victims.

II. CONCEPTUALISATION AND CONTEXTUALISATION OF MACHETE GANGS VIOLENCE

The proliferation of machete gangs in Zimbabwe can be understood better in the context of state capture and the resource curse. The post-coup epoch in Zimbabwe was marred with state capture, although Zimbabwe has a history of state capture, the foregoing become more consolidated with the demise of former and late President Robert Mugabe. The correlation between state capture and the resource curse in Zimbabwe is that the former is hindering the utilisation of natural resources for socio-economic development in Zimbabwe

1.1. State Capture

The concept of state capture become topical in Zimbabwe at the climax of factional politics between Generation-40 (G-40) and Team Lacoste. Former Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education Professor Jonathan Moyo used the term in illustrating how Team Lacoste used key state institutions to

advance its succession agenda. The problem of state capture is not unique to Zimbabwe. This was observed by Hellman *et al* (2000a) who conducted the first business environment and performance survey in 1999 on behalf of the World Bank (Mungwari, 2019). They used the term to describe the new dimension of corruption in Eastern European countries. The authors of state capture Hellman, Jones and Kaufman focus on the question to what degree private actors especially private firms could influence the transition process for their purpose (Uzelac, 2003). State capture is prevalent in the mining sector in Zimbabwe and is the major obstacle in ending machete gangs. In its broader sense, state capture can be construed as systematic political corruption in which private actors influence state decision making to their benefit. According to EISA (2018), modern usage of the term state capture is quite specific – it is about efforts by every particular private concerns, individuals, and not business in general or broad sectoral groups to shape the regulatory domain that affects their commercial operations.

The important actors of state capture are cartels, and in Zimbabwe, gold cartels have a direct and indirect influence on regulations and operation of mining. Machete gangs in Zimbabwe are linked to gold cartels that ensures that they are protected in return for gold. One of the respondents at Open Cast gold rush in Empress Kwekwe illustrated that their boss has about 40% shares in the gold they were prospecting for and the so-called boss facilitates their release from prison if they are arrested. There are also reports of police being instructed to release members of the machete gangs, in 2019 they were allegations that ZANU-PF Member of Parliament (MP) for Chegutu West and his associates were putting pressure on the police not to investigate the shooting of a miner by the police at David Whitehead waste deposit site in Chegutu. In addition, there were also reports that former ZANU-PF MP for Mbizo, Vongai Mupereri led a group of machete gang to invade the Gaika mine in Kwekwe.

Biti (2021) a member of the top echelons of the opposition Citizen Coalition for Change opined that state capture become more entrenched after the 2017 military coup and in the Second Republic the prime motive for retaining power is to continue extraction and accumulation. State capture was also pervasive in South Africa and this culminated in the resignation of former President Jacob Zuma. However, in Zimbabwe, the menace is unabated due to lack of transparency, rule of law and separation of powers. There are eight major dimensions of state capture and this paper dwell on state capture through commodities such as gold and the desire to control gold deposits. Maguwu (2020) encapsulates that, in Zimbabwe, cartels get away scot-free with looting billions of dollars in diamond and gold. The Zimbabwe state capture dichotomy is fuelling transnational organised crimes. In an interview with ANN7 on 13 November 2017, former South Africa President Zuma hinted that state capture was a fancy word used by media houses for propaganda proliferation and real state capture would include seizure of the three arms of the constitution.

The *Daily Maverick* in its report entitled ‘Cartel Power Dynamics in Zimbabwe’ (2021) illustrates that President Mnangagwa is one of the cartel bosses whose patronage and protection keeps cartel operating. It is interesting to note that Kwekwe is an epicentre of machete gangs yet it is the hometown of the President. To elucidate the above point, Midlands province is the hot spot of crimes in Zimbabwe yet there is no permanent High Court in the province. This is ostensibly a gimmick by those in power to protect their criminal allies. The establishment of a permanent high court will improve the justice delivery system. As Desic (2007) argues that by seizing laws to the advantage of corporate business via influential political links in the parliament and government, the legal system is rendered the opposite of what it should be as it serves the illegal interest in legal form.

The Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI) (2017) argues that four major state institutions that have been targeted and captured by military interests and utilised to institutionalise and dispose of military patronage networks are state media, the electoral process, the judiciary and the legislative. Individuals or business entities with an agenda to capture state institutions or people in possession of power tend to focus on the political level of elected and unelected officials as captives, state capture is also a network-based like corruption which thrives on social and political networks through clientelism and patronage. The *Daily Maverick* (2021) highlighted that illicit cross border financial transactions cost Zimbabwe up to a staggering US\$3 billion a year and billions in gold and diamonds smuggled out of the country.

1.2. Resource Curse

In Zimbabwe, the sprouting of machete gangs has ignited debate among scholars such as Mkodzongi (2017), Maguwu *et al* (2020) and policy makers as to whether the country can be classified as a resource curse country. The resource curse is not an issue that is unique to Zimbabwe but can be traced back to the 1950s and 1960s when it was observed that the abundance of natural resources is broadly linked to negative socio-economic growth. The idea of resource curse was also observed in the Spectator reports of 1711, which enumerated that, it is generally observed that in countries of the greatest plenty there is the poorest living. The term resource curse was coined by Auty (1993) to describe how countries rich in mineral resources were unable to boost their economies and how counter-intuitively these countries had lower economic growth than countries without an abundance of natural resources. There is now a replete of terms among scholarship and policymakers in an attempt to account for the complicated state of affairs faced by resource rich countries in the global South: resource curse, the paradox of plenty, intractable conflicts, conflict trap, resource securitisation, complex political emergencies, blood diamonds, resource wars are some of the terms used to describe the complicated state of affairs faced by resource rich countries. (Watts 2008). McNeish (2011) argues that resource conflict is one of several

destabilising phenomena commonly cited as defining many of the extractive economies of the global South.

The Zimbabwean machete gangs’ war can be construed in the resource curse context as despite the existence of a plethora of natural resources the country is a citadel of negative macro and micro-economic indicators like unemployment, shortage of foreign currency among others. The operation of machete gangs has buttressed a clandestine economy underpinned by the existence of a shadow state, this has resulted in the loss of revenue, lack of transparency and accountability. The existence of an illicit economy has triggered an existential crisis and this is likely to undermine the US\$12 billion mining sector by 2023 as well as the transition of a country from a low income to an upper middle income by 2030 (Vision 2030). This paper argues that mining in Zimbabwe has not contributed significantly to sustainable development. McNeish (2011) and Karl (1997) agree that the vast majority of conflict-prone and war-ravaged states in the global South including those recently emerging from violent conflicts are extractive economies that are endowed with strategic natural resources yet cannot avert declining into debilitating violence and war. Equally puzzling for many scholars is the observation that while these states contribute essential inputs to the global economy, they largely remain underdeveloped and politically unstable with a sizeable majority of their citizens living on less than a dollar a day (McNeish 2011).

The desire to control and exploit gold is the major trigger of machete violence in Zimbabwe. The existence of gold in Zimbabwe has prolonged machete violence and this trend was also observed in Sierra Leone 1991-2002 and Angola 1992-2002. Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association argues that the extractive sector has been the major driver of human rights violations and environmental degradation in Zimbabwe. The wanton killing of artisanal miners at Jumbo mine in Mazowe (2020) and Gaika mine in Kwekwe between 2018 and 2019 is a testament that there is blood gold in Zimbabwe. Machete gangs work in cahoots with shadow-state actors and have exacerbated the humanitarian catastrophe in Zimbabwe. There were also reported incidences of artisanal miners forced to work for machete gangs and this undergirds that gold in Zimbabwe is to some extent a curse, not a blessing. Experiences from Jumbo mine and Gaika show that the terms that can define gold mining in Zimbabwe are conflict gold and blood gold. The consensus built between the foregoing terms is that gold mining in Zimbabwe is spearheading human rights violation and used to finance the activities of machete gangs and is a result the paradox of plenty can be applicable in the Zimbabwean context.

Notwithstanding the influx of literature which shows that natural resources are linked to negative socio-economic outcome, they exist a sizeable scholarship that debunks the resource curse concept. This is undergirded by the fact that some states endowed with natural resources are succeeding and are not conflict-prone. Doro and Kufakurinani (2017) posit that the resource curse is more a reflection of

governance deficit than a resource abundance crisis. Botswana is a typical example of a country endowed with natural resources such as diamond which contributed to the resuscitation of other sectors such as transport, construction and financial services. As a result of this, Botswana Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita grew at an average of 5.9% a year. The resource curse is more prevalent in shadow states that have a low level of democratic institutionalisation, erosion of the rule of law, the capture of the three constitutional arms of the government. This paper argues that the resource curse is a corollary of state capture, the abundance of natural resources does not ignite negative socio-economic and political outcomes. The aforementioned outcomes are a result of poor natural resources governance typified by neo-patrimonialism, rent-seeking, opportunism, cronyism and policy inconsistencies.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research largely followed a qualitative research method approach, it is based on ethnographic data gathered through observations and informal personal communication. Mining sites in the vicinity of Kwekwe and Kadoma such as Open Cast, Cricket, Battlefield, Patchway, Etina were essential for naturalistic observation. Informal communication was also held in mining communities with alleged members of the machete gangs, victims of machete violence and local leadership of the aforementioned places. The study also utilised secondary sources of data such as books, journals, newspapers, internet sources to augment ethnographic data collection methods. The period of the study is between 2017 and 2021 because this is when the problem of machete violence reached its climax with the ushering in of the Second Republic. The study broadly focuses on the causes, nature and effects of machete gang violence in Zimbabwe. The author is guided by ethical considerations and international academic best practices that encourage objectivity and respect for evidence in research.

IV. OBJECTIVES

IV.1. *Triggers of Machete Gangs Violence*

The sprouting of machete gangs in Zimbabwe can be classified into two waves, the first wave of machete violence started around 2006 with the diamond rush in Marange. The second wave of machete violence started between 2018 and 2019 with the ushering in of the New Dispensation in 2017. The second wave is more catastrophic and resulted in the loss of human life. During the first wave of machete violence, the authorities were able to stop machete violence and in the second wave, machete violence is unabated. In Zimbabwe, the military-executive alliance and state capture have become more established and this weakens the rule of law and surges in machete violence. The rule of law is undermined through the “catch and release” practices as the justice system is stifled by endemic corruption by public prosecutors working in cahoots with magistrates and the police. It is ironic that despite an orgy of violence unleashed by machete gangs, the

magistrates and the public prosecutors inexplicably grant bail to members of the machete gangs. There is a popular saying among members of the machete gangs that: “Ndosungisa mari yangu”, this statement can be literally translated to show how machete gangs used money to bribe the police and public prosecutors so that they can be freed .

The International Crisis Group (2020) argues that machete gangs are not a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe’s mining areas, but they have lately killed in usually large numbers, gangs originated in the late 1990s when several industrial mines closed leaving workers unemployed. The age groups for machete-wielding gangs ranges between 13 and 50 years. There is a usage of the term “Mashurugwi” in describing machete gangs in Zimbabwe. Maguwu *et al* (2020) posit that the term Mashurugwi as machete gangs are being called has become a codename describing a group of young and middle-aged men, the term was first used to refer to the violent gangs that used to rob, rape and kill people in Marange during the height of diamond rush from 2005 to 2008. The government responded by deploying the police and the army through ‘*Operation Hakudzokwi*’ and this resulted in the loss of life and the end of machete violence.

Maguwu *et al* (2020) argue that around 2006, the diamond mining sector saw a peak in gang-related violence including confrontations between machete gangs and state security forces. Amid the background of a nosediving economy, around late 2018 and early 2019, more than two million people have turned to artisanal mining for survival. Even civil servants in particular members of the state security forces have overtly and covertly joined the mining sector as a safety net. This trend led to stiff competition for gold deposits hence the formation of machete gangs firstly to counter the influence of the state security forces and secondly to outmanoeuvre other mining rivals. The promulgation of Statutory Instrument 142 of 2019 which banned the use of foreign currency and resulted in the erosion of the salaries for civil servants triggered the impoverishment of Zimbabwe, hence; everybody turned to gold mining for survival. The perennial currency menace in Zimbabwe has reinvigorated the importance of gold as a substitute currency.

This paper argues that machete violence is largely triggered by the competition to access gold deposits and this is supported by the fact that most machete violence cases are reported in mining communities such as Gaika, Jumbo, West Nicholson, Patchway, Cricket, Empress and Battlefield. There is anarchy in the mining sector, hence there is a pearl of conventional wisdom among some artisanal miners that only a violent gang can access gold deposits. In addition to the issue of competition, the proliferation of machete gangs in Zimbabwe can also be linked to the extent to which neo-patrimonial politics dominates the Zimbabwean political terrain. The mining sector in Zimbabwe is arguably a patronage economy, machete gangs are a strategic network in Zimbabwe’s patronage politics given that ZANU-PF largely survives and thrives on patronage. The patronage system

around gold mining flourishes in part because the Gold Trade Act (chapter 21.03) and the Mines and Mineral Act (chapter 21.05) are outdated and enforcement of the law is often haphazard. Maguwu *et al* (2020), the International Crisis Group (2020) and ZELA, observed that, whoever control gold, machete gangs will control and rule Zimbabwe, several ZANU-PF politicians have been implicated as patrons of machete gangs and they use the groups in both the internal and external party politics dynamics.

The resurgence of machete gangs in Zimbabwe can also be linked to climate change dynamics experienced in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is an agro-based economy as most small scale farmers depend on rainfall for food and livestock production. Successive droughts in 2018, 2019 and 2020 had triggered a drastic drop in food security and the livestock was not spared by climate change. This forced most small scale farmers to shift to artisanal mining for survival. As more and more people become involved in the mining sectors other members of the artisanal miners resort to violence to control gold deposits this culminated in the formation of machete gangs. ZELA Deputy Director, Shamiso Mtsisi argues that criminals in Zimbabwe have discovered that Artisanal Small Scale Mining is a lucrative hunting ground, climate change is disrupting production in the agricultural sector thereby pushing more and more people into artisanal mining. Maguwu *et al* (2020) argue that gold is one of the scarce commodities that can earn someone United States dollars in Zimbabwe, it is against this background that the majority of Zimbabwe have been turning to artisanal mining as it allows them to earn the greenback which gives them stronger purchasing power.

4.2. Impact of Machete Violence

4.2.1. Illicit Economy

One of the adverse impacts of machete violence in Zimbabwe is the formation of an illicit economy. The rise of machete gangs in Zimbabwe has undermined financial integrity through illicit financial flows and this has resulted in the impoverishment of the country. Human security is now under incessant threats as the illicit economy fuels organised crimes, violence and trepidation in the mining areas in Zimbabwe. The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) (year?) argues that illicit financial flows include but are not limited to cross border transfers of the proceeds of tax evasion, corruption, trade in contraband goods and criminal activities such as drug trafficking and counterfeiting. The Africa Risk Consulting observed that Zimbabwe is becoming a regional hub for laundering illicit wealth that is fuelling violent conflicts. Due to the opaque nature of illicit financial flows in Zimbabwe, little is known about its exact corrosive impact. It is not clear how the illicit economy underpinned by machete violence costs Zimbabwe, but the estimations by the Africa Risk Consulting (2020) are above 25% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Illicit financial flows in Zimbabwe is spearheaded by cartels that make connections between private and political systems

which are mutually beneficial for the parties concerned (Heywood 2021). Resources and wealth in Zimbabwe are distilled in a small elite and barely reach the majority who are poor. In this paradox, this paper argues the tiny elite use machete gangs to plunder gold in Zimbabwe. The African Development Bank estimated that Zimbabwe has lost a cumulative US\$12 billion in the past three decades through illicit financial flows ranging from opaque financial deals, smuggling, tax evasion and illegal commercial activities. The International Crisis Group (2020) observed that more than US\$1.5 billion of gold is moved out of Zimbabwe illegally each year often ending in Dubai. The menace of the illicit economy was compounded by the decriminalisation of artisanal mining in 2014. Authoritarian states like Zimbabwe are more vulnerable to illicit financial flow than democratic states. The arrest of Rushwaya in October 2020 who was caught trying to smuggle about fourteen gold bars of gold weighing about 7 kilograms valued at about US\$400 000 was simply a tip of the iceberg on how top government officials smuggle gold and they work in tandem with machete gangs.

In addition, the illicit financial flows in Zimbabwe is further aggravated by a centralised gold buying scheme. The centralised buying scheme encourages the smuggling of gold since Fidelity Printers and Refiners – which is a government agent – buys gold below international prices and this forced artisanal miners to smuggle gold. The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) Monetary Policy Statement of 2014 gave RBZ through Fidelity Printers and Refiners – the monopoly in gold buying, refining and exporting. The RBZ emphasized that this arrangement is an important step for Zimbabwe to refine gold and seek readmission at the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA) to directly export gold without going through the Rand Refinery. The International Crisis Group (2020) observed that, all gold producers in Zimbabwe whether artisanal, small scale or industrial must by law sell to RBZ via its subsidiary gold buyer. Given such dynamics in the trade of gold, gold barons and their agents are the major buyers of illicit gold mined mainly courtesy of violence in Zimbabwe. South Africans, Chinese and Zimbabweans in the diaspora also buy illicit gold. It is interesting that when Fidelity Printers and Refiners buys gold from artisanal miners it does not trace the origin of the gold and this implies that it can even pay gold obtained through unorthodox ways such as violence and robbery and this promotes the trade of “blood gold” mainly mined by machete gangs.

The illicit Zimbabwean economy is also supported by forced labour in the mining sector. There are widespread reports that machete gangs forced unarmed artisanal miners to work for them in mines. The scourge was more prevalent at Sabi, Gaika and Jumbo mine. One of the respondents narrated how he was kidnapped at Mazowe mine, forced to work underground at Jumbo Mine for seven days. After seven days, he was forced to move the gold ore out of the gold shaft. This practice is one of the modus operandi of machete gangs referred to as “*Kusunga Ngavi*” (forcing weak men to work for you).

Machete gangs thoroughly beat their victims, make them work without pay.

4.2.2. *Unjustified Socio-Economic Deprivation*

The surge of machete violence in the mining areas in Zimbabwe has perpetuated an existential crisis typified by the economic deprivation of small-scale miners. Disputes about mining site ownership are pervasive and this has led to the intrusion on mining sites by machete gangs. Machete gangs adopted a modus operandi called “*kuncara*” which means robbery. They have the temerity to rob gold, gold ore and mining sites. In 2019, machete gangs invaded Good Hope mine in Kadoma and they murdered a police officer using machetes, logs, catapults, axes. The foregoing is aggravated by the obsolete mining laws in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe legal framework on mining is cumbersome and this makes small-scale miners vulnerable to invasion by machete gangs. The presence of machete gangs in the mining sites have largely deprived thousands of miners of their livelihood and this makes the mining sector unsafe. ZELA (2020) observed that machete gangs usually target gold sites with good gold grades and this is evidenced by the attack of youth miners working under tributary arrangements with Sabi Gold mine in Zvishavane.

Most small-scale miners in Zimbabwe have the audacity to mine without licences and machete gangs capitalise on this lawlessness that shrouded mining to rob small-scale miners. Machete gangs are wreaked havoc at Cuba Mine in Kadoma, there are widespread reports that police do not often act firstly because the gangs are pawns of powerful politicians and secondly because most of the mines invaded by machete gangs are not registered. The *Mashurugwi* machete gangs expanded their territory to all the mining communities across the country targeting disused mines (Maguwu *et al.*, 2020). The menace of machete gangs has been felt in Mazowe at Jumbo mine, Masvingo Mashava mine, Bindura, Kwekwe among others. The presence of machete gangs has crippled the delivery of gold to Fidelity Printers and Refiners, in 2018 small-scale miners delivered about 21.01 tonnes of gold to Fidelity Printer and Refiners, however in 2019 they marginally delivered 17.48 tonnes. Several factors contribute to the reduction. For examples, in 2019, machete gangs violence reached its climax and this might have affected gold delivery in the country. ZELA (2020) argues that the factors behind a plunge of small-scale gold mining performance include but are not limited to the unfavourable payments methods, severe power cuts and machete violence.

Unjustified economic deprivation has been worsened by the politicisation of the gold rush and the weaponization of machete gangs during the gold rush. This paper observed that in mining communities whenever there is a gold rush politicians manipulate the situation for their own political and economic expediency and they use machete gangs to control the gold rush. There is a conventional belief among artisanal miners that “*mabhuru*” referring to machete gangs controls all gold rush in Zimbabwe. In 2012, when gold was discovered at

Sherwood Park in Kwekwe Owen Mudha Ncube announced that ZANU-PF had taken over Sherwood and he had to convene a rally to address hundreds of gold panners who had been chased away by the police. Gold panning in Zimbabwe is largely controlled by a clique of ZANU-PF appendage who believe that gold panning is the property of the party. Partisanship mining deprives members of the opposition from reaping the gains of mining. Mawowa (2013) observed that ASGM is not just about grassroots livelihood but also entails power politics of elite accumulation and patronage which plays out in politicisation and contestation over controlling the extraction and trade of minerals. Apart from Owen Mudha Ncube, other notable top politicians such as Dexter Nduna and Vongai Mupereri also encourage artisanal miners mainly machete gangs to encroach on mines. In the case of *DGL Investments vs Vongaishe Mupereri*, the court heard that the respondent led a group of youths to invade and engage in illegal mining at the Gaika gold mine in Kwekwe thereby depriving the complaint of his/ her mining rights.

Machete gangs’ modus operandi of “*kuncara*” which can be literally translated as taking something by force is also used in targeting large-scale mining sites. International Crisis Group (ICG) (2020) argues that machete gangs encroach on industrial mining sites and this forced the government to clear them in mass arrest campaigns. The government launched operation “*chikorokoza ngachipere*”, no to illegal mining and Operation anti Machete to avert the phenomenon of machete violence. However, the operations adversely affected production in the artisanal mining sector as members of the state security agents were failing to distinguish between machete gangs and artisanal miners. Spiegel (2014) observed that national crackdowns on illegal mining had profound implications on the livelihood of both licenced and unlicensed miners. Maguwu *et al* (2020) note that machete gangs tend to establish illegal roadblocks sometimes police and military uniforms where they robbed artisanal miners and dealers of their diamond and gold. During the gold rush, machete gangs prevail at the expense of unarmed artisanal miners and weaker rival machete gangs. In 2021, there was a tremendous rise in armed robbery cases in Zimbabwe and it was alleged that machete gangs contributed to the unprecedented rise of robbery cases.

4.2.3. *Political Culture of Fear*

Machete gangs perpetuated the political culture of fear and intolerance in the Zimbabwean political discourse. Machete gangs are shadow ZANU-PF militants and they campaign for the party through intimidating people. Machete gangs are linked to Al-Shabab, which is a quasi-militia group for ZANU-PF responsible for unleashing an orgy of violence to members of the opposition in Kwekwe and this ignited polarisation. One of the respondents hinted that the modus operandi of machete gangs is “*chinhu one*” or “*murudo*” which means unity. In politics, all machete gangs are based in and around Kwekwe (Maketo, Maziga, Die Force and Team Barca) operate as Al-Shabab. The study also observed that,

that some machete gangs are remnants of the National Youth Service (Border Gezi) and *Chipangano*. On 27 February members of the Maketo gang reportedly unleashed an orgy of violence at CCC rally in Mbizo Kwekwe that resulted into the death of one CCC supporter and left seventeen CCC supporters injured. This paper notes that whoever controls machete gangs in Zimbabwe controls the youths in the mining power and political power. Zimbabwe has a history of political violence orchestrated by members of the state security service and ZANU PF militia. In the new dispensation, the military-executive alliance used shadowy characters to instil fear on members of the opposition. The Gukurahundi of the 1980s, 2002 elections and 2008 run-off elections show that violence is the colophony of the state and machete gangs are novel foot soldiers for employing force and coercion.

Machete gangs play a pivotal role in campaigning for the incumbent ZANU-PF and tend to declare their allegiance to the party while wielding machetes and other traditional weapons. With the 26 March 2022 by-elections around the corner, as well as the 2023 watershed harmonised elections, the ruling party will probably use machete gangs to campaign thereby entrenching the political culture of violence. In this regard, the violence that rocked the Citizen Coalition for Change (CCC) Kwekwe political rally on 27 February 2021 can be precursor to a wholesale package of violence awaiting the nation in the forthcoming 2023 elections. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) observed that in Zimbabwe, violence is not only a political culture, but also violence lies in the “core of statecraft” for the ZANU-PF regime. Christiansen (2010) observed that Mugabe’s assertion that he possessed “degrees in violence” has become a standard reference in describing what has been termed a political culture of violence in Zimbabwe. Violence is not only an instrument of statecraft but is also employed in containing factionalism in ZANU PF and there is agreement among scholars that whoever employs violence in intraparty politics in Zimbabwe prevails. Perhaps, the ascendancy of Mnangagwa in 2017 can also be attributed to his ability to associate with the instruments of violence such as the military and machete gangs.

Tendi *et al* (2021) argue that violence is an important feature in ZANU-PF’s internal struggles. Violence is a significant way in which internal competition in ZANU-PF is performed and there are continuities in this violence over the past decades. The electoral process in ZANU-PF is marred by violence. The 2021 elections for Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC) executives were also characterised by violence and there have been reported incidences of machete-wielding gangs used to unleash violence. *The Mirror* 18 January 2022 reported that Minister of State for Masvingo and ousted provincial chairperson Ezra Chadzamira allegedly hired machete-wielding thugs who assaulted newly elected provincial committee members forcing the postponement of a PCC meeting. In a related story, *Nehanda Radio* on 4 February 2022 also reported that a ZANU-PF inter-district meeting had to be abandoned at Tongogara Growth Point after

scores of machete-wielding *Mashurugwi* allegedly hired by Shurugwi North MP Robson Nyathi become rowdy and disrupted speakers. In another related situation, the *Newsday* of 11 January 2022 reported that Owen Mudha Ncube unleashed thugs on ZANU-PF members who were deliberating on the results of the recently held internal elections at the party’s provincial offices in Gweru. The dimension of violence in internal politics is not unique to ZANU-PF. Even members of the opposition dare to use the youths to contain their opponents within their respective parties. Moyo (2020) observed that since the split of the Movement for Democratic Change in 2005, the splinter particles have been morphing into an intolerant, violent and democratically deficient polity relatively analogous to ZANU PF’s narrative of violence. Such is the fate of the Zimbabwean democratic space. It is becoming increasingly difficult to sunder mainstream politics from violence.

4.2.4 Women and Children Rights

The surge of artisanal miners in Zimbabwe has been marred by the involvement of women and children in the mining sector. The involvement of women and children in the mining sector had led to gender-based violence (GBV) and exploitation of children. The mining sector in Zimbabwe is shrouded by security conundrums and this makes it difficult for gender-based violence to be unabated. The three common versions of gender-based violence that are pervasive in the mining sector are emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual exploitation (Mafongoya *et al.*, 2021). Gender-based violence is mainly perpetrated by machete gangs and is more prevalent during the gold rush. Mafongoya *et al* (2021) observed that more than 77% of the women working in the mining sector had experienced gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence in the mining sector is underpinned by negative gender norms which are influenced by masculinity and patriarchy. Machete gangs viewed women and children as weaklings in the mining sector and they relegated women and children to the periphery of mining this is evidenced by the allocation of menial duties to women and children while they allocated noble duties for them. This practice has fuelled inequality and poverty among women and children. For instance, women are given the duty of “*kuserengeta*” (gold grinding) which is less paying. Machete gangs have the temerity to use derogatory terms to describe women and other men they perceive as weak, they use terms like “*chikwari*” which means that someone is weak and this trigger emotional abuse. The current trends in the mining sector during the gold rush in which those who are strong can access goldfields is synonymous with unjustified economic deprivation on women and children, this is compounded by the culture of fear in the sector.

Commercial sex workers are also the strong victims of sexual exploitation by machete gangs. During the gold rush, commercial sex workers thronged to the goldfield in search of social nets. However, in most incidences machete-wielding men refuse to pay the commercial sex workers for services

rendered. Women and children are also exploited by machete gangs and they are forced to work without pay. Machete gangs dare to refuse to pay women and children for the menial jobs rendered. The sexual exploitation of girls had resulted in child marriages. Another dilemma of machete gangs is the recruitment of children, machete gangs recruited children as young as 13 and use them to unleash an orgy of violence.

4.2.5 Environmental Degradation

The gold extraction activities of artisanal miners mainly machete gangs has fuelled a tremendous environmental degradation in Zimbabwe. Machete gangs' operations have resulted in land degradation because they are mainly concerned with extracting gold and do not care about the sustainability of the environment. The operations of illegal miners had resulted in land degradation at Nugget Mine, Open Cast, Cricket and Patchway, the list of places that had experienced massive land degradation from illegal mining by machete gangs. The artisanal miners have little concern for the environment as their attention is focused on reaping profits from the rich minerals (*The Chronicle*, 23 January 2020). The other dimensions of environmental degradation that are aggravated by machete gangs are deforestation, inadequate quantity and quality of water resources and these forms of environmental degradation exacerbate poverty, inequality, climate change and socio-economic underdevelopment.

Many mining pits are left uncovered after the Gold rush and this exposes livestock, land degradation also affects crop production and this will result in food insecurity. Amid impunity enjoyed by machete gangs in Zimbabwe, they dare to extract gold at tarred roads and other protected areas. Machete gangs extract gold at Patchway along Kadoma, Gokwe Nembudziya road and Venice along the Empress-Gokwe road, state security apparatus' response to the situation was tardy. Machete gangs also unleash violence to unarmed authorities that try to refrain them from digging the road. In Concession Mazowe, machete gangs invaded a farming area near Zanadu disrupting farming activities with their operations. Machete gangs flourish in environmental degradation because they are well protected by their respective patrons that wield state power. In addition, the cumbersome legal and regulatory system also provide fertile grounds for machete gangs' operation.

Environmental degradation is further aggravated by machete gangs who incline to extract gold at river beds, at Munyati river in Empress Kwekwe and Ngondoma river in Gokwe, river bed mining by artisanal miners and machete gangs had resulted in riverbank collapse, deepening of river beds, biodiversity loss and coastal erosion. *The Herald* of 2 February 2021 reported that Manangazi farm and Glenbrook farm are the most affected, with dams on those two farms now giving in to siltation as a result of mining within their vicinity. The siltation of the Ngondoma river had affected crop production at the Ngondoma irrigation scheme. Environmental degradation is also compounded by the use of dangerous chemicals such as cyanide and mercury to process

gold. The government banned mining in protected areas in 2020, yet there are reported incidence where machete gangs extract gold at protected areas. ZELA (year?) observed that mining in protected areas is increasingly becoming a usual occurrence from both large scale and artisanal miners within the protected areas. Protected areas are rich in gold and this make them vulnerable to machete-wielding gangs searching for gold. Artisanal miners and machete gangs dig gold using little mechanism and frequently without a licence and they target protected areas such as tarred roads, national parks, farms, schools, colleges and riverbanks *inter alia*.

V. CONCLUSION

Machete violence in Zimbabwe is fuelled by state capture that became firmly established with the ushering in of the New Dispensation in 2017. The flourishing of machete gangs can be attributed to the fact that the new dispensation is marred by shadow actors who had nefarious agendas and negative influence on governance. The paper demystified that there are more than six versions of state capture that are plaguing socio-economic development. The other version of state capture which is commodities such as gold and diamond state capture led to the stupendous rise of machete violence. The triggers of machete violence in Zimbabwe are government deficit on natural resource governance, greed and grievances among government officials, shadow actors and artisanal miners.

The study encapsulates that, the rapid increase in artisanal mining in Zimbabwe in 2019 due to incessant poverty aggravated competition in the artisanal mining sector and this led some actors to resort to violence in an endeavour to control goldfields and this led to the sprouting of machete violence. The prodigious unemployment and marginalisation of the youths, climate change and erosion of the rule of law also provide fertile grounds to machete violence.

Machete violence in Zimbabwe have had corrosive ramifications on socio-economic development in Zimbabwe, machete violence is largely linked to the environmental degradation experienced in the mining communities, this environmental degradation includes land degradation, siltation of rivers and the adverse socio-economic impact of machete gangs aggravated the pauperisation of the general population in Zimbabwe. Machete violence also augment an illicit economy in Zimbabwe, which is underpinned by gold smuggling, money laundering and forced labour. This research also observed that the accretion of machete violence in Zimbabwe had heightened unjustified economic deprivation in the mining sector and this is buttressed by a surge in robbery cases in the mining sector. Machete gangs also undergirds a political culture of fear and repression as the foregoing is active in both the internal and external party dynamics of ZANU-PF. Women and children are also the victims of machete violence with reported cases of sexual exploitation, gender-based violence, forced labour and economic exploitation in the mining sector.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The mining landscape in Zimbabwe is plagued by a typical Hobbesian nightmare security conundrum that is underpinned by machete gangs that are linked to powerful politicians who pose a threat to the country's natural resource governance. There is a danger that if the situation continues unabated, it will degenerate into a civil war. Evidently, machete violence has caused despondency and trepidation among the generality of the Zimbabwean populace in mining towns such as Kwekwe and the greater part of the Midlands province. Therefore, this paper makes the following recommendations:

- 1 Designing legal frameworks for regulating mining are archaic and the government should expedite the amendments of the law so that they can be aligned with the new trends in the mining sector.
- 2 Fostering good governance of natural resources in Zimbabwe to prevent illicit financial flows through gold smuggling
- 3 Crafting artisanal mining policy that improves the safety of artisanal small scale miners.
- 4 Expediting economic development through the creation of employment and opportunities for youths.
- 5 Appointing commission to investigate cases of machete violence. Such a commission can be supported by the resuscitation of the investigation of the parliamentary committee on mines and mining development on machete violence that was halted in 2020 due to the outbreak of COVID-19
- 6 Investigations should be thoroughly followed by bringing all the perpetrators of violence to book, imposing tough sentences on those found guilty of machete violence.
- 7 The establishment of a permanent high court in all ten provinces in the country especially hotspots of machete violence, this will ensure fast and efficient justice delivery (it is interesting to note that most machete gangs commit murder and magistrates courts do not have jurisdiction over murder cases, the high court sits permanently in Harare, Bulawayo, Chinhoyi, Masvingo and judges of the high court go on circuit three times a year to Mutare, Gweru and Hwange)

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